

# Covid-19 Guidance for Childcare Providers and the Early Learning Community

Last Updated March 18, 2020



Whatcom County  
**HEALTH**  
Department



Currently, both the Washington State Governor's Office and the Whatcom County Health Department are not recommending that childcare facilities close. We urge parents to keep their children home if they are able to do so. We also recognize that childcare is an essential and valuable service that allows parents to keep working and children to have safe and enriching spaces to spend their days.

## **Some of the reasons that we are recommending child care facilities stay open are:**

- Childcare plays an essential role for parents who don't have work flexibility, including those who work in healthcare, critical infrastructure, grocery stores, pharmacies, and other services we all need.
- Children should not be cared for by grandparents, who are more at risk for COVID-19, or home alone.
- The data we have about COVID-19 so far show that children have mild COVID-19 illness.
- Childcare staff is well trained on the steps to prevent infections in childcare centers.
- Childcare group sizes are smaller than school class sizes.

## **Strategies to Decrease Risk of Infection**

**Wash hands frequently for at least 20 seconds with soap and water.**

### **Screen for illness at entry and exclude sick children.**

When people arrive each day, screen staff and children for sore throat, cough, difficulty breathing or fever  $\geq 100.4$  F. Exclude staff and children with any of these symptoms. Also exclude anyone who has been in contact with a person with COVID-19.

- If any of these symptoms develop during the day, place sick staff or child in a private room away from others until able to go home.
- If the person is not diagnosed with COVID-19 and has no known exposure to COVID-19, they may come back to work/attend childcare 72 hours (3 days) after their symptoms have ended.
- Monitor and plan for absenteeism.
- Allow for staff in a high risk category to not work and have them consult with their health care provider.
- People at an increased risk of COVID-19 should not provide childcare or visit a childcare facility. This include persons who are older, pregnant, or who have underlying health conditions, including those with compromised immune systems or respiratory conditions like severe asthma, are at higher risk to develop complications from this virus.
- Encourage parents of children who are immunocompromised or who have chronic health conditions to consult their primary care provider and make a plan.

### **Plan activities that allow for social distancing.**

We know that social distancing and excellent personal hygiene habits are harder to practice when working with young children. Reduce group sizes to no larger than 10 people total, including children and adults (e.g., one adult and nine children, two adults and eight children, etc). Keep groups together throughout the day, do not combine groups (e.g., at opening and closing). To the degree possible, maintain the same groups from day to day.

- Choose activities that allow for the most social distancing, aiming for at least 3-6 feet between children.
- Allow for more outdoor activities.
- Stagger the number of children at any one area at a time, inside or outside.
- Temporarily remove toys that are hard to clean and rotate toys out so that they can be adequately cleaned and sanitized.
- Always wash hands immediately after outdoor playtime.

### **Take precautions during meals.**

- No family style meals.
- No food sharing.
- Consider staggering meal times so that fewer children share meals at one time.
- Incorporate social distancing at tables.
- Okay to discontinue toothbrushing during this outbreak period.

### **Clean properly and often.**

- Perform routine environmental cleaning. Increase the cleaning and disinfection frequency of your high-touch surfaces.
- Follow the CDC guidelines. If not using bleach, assure that your disinfectant is EPA registered and has the "emerging pathogen" claim.
- Concentrate bleach properly. Disinfect using 1000ppm. This 4 tsp of bleach per 1 quart of water.
- Increase fresh air by either opening windows or adjusting your HVAC system.

### **Check for regularly updated resources. Share them with parents and caregivers.**

- WCHD [www.whatcomcounty.us/covid](http://www.whatcomcounty.us/covid)
- DOH [www.doh.wa.gov/coronavirus](http://www.doh.wa.gov/coronavirus)
- DCYF <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/coronavirus-covid-19>

### **What if there is a confirmed or suspected case associated with the child care?**

Consult with the Whatcom County Health Department. Contact our Liaison Officer at (360) 778-6100 or [health-LOFR@co.whatcom.wa.us](mailto:health-LOFR@co.whatcom.wa.us).

## References

- Snohomish County Health District COVID-19 Guidance for Child Care Providers and Early Learning Community <https://www.snohd.org/DocumentCenter/View/3413/Guidance-for-Child-Care-Providers-and-the-Early-Learning-Community?bidId=>
- King County Public Health Recommendations for Child Care <https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/communicable-diseases/disease-control/novel-coronavirus/childcare.aspx>
- CDC Schools and Child Care <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html>
- Note that the CDC advises a 1000ppm bleach solution for disinfecting. (5 TB bleach per gallon or 4 tsp bleach per quart of water)
- Snohomish Child Care Outreach program <https://www.snohd.org/DocumentCenter/View/3413/Guidance-for-Child-Care-Providers-and-the-Early-Learning-Community?bidId>
- Public Health Guidance for Childcares <https://publichealthinsider.com/2020/03/13/public-health-guidance-for-childcares/>