COVID-19 Guidance for Child Care Settings

The following recommendations are intended to help child care operators and staff (including home care providers) working in both licensed child care centres and home child care to reduce the spread of COVID-19. The recommendations and guidance provided in this document must be used to develop infection prevention and control (IPAC) policies and procedures. Child care operators must ensure that appropriate IPAC measures are implemented and maintained in order to provide safe and healthy child care services.

This document must be used in addition to Toronto Public Health’s Infection Prevention and Control in Child Care Centres Requirements and Best Practices Document. In the event of any differences between the guidance in this document and the Toronto Public Health Infection Prevention and Control in Child Care Requirements and Best Practices document, the recommendations in this document will take precedence.

More information about COVID-19 can be found in the Toronto Public Health COVID-19 Fact Sheet.

Recommendations for Child Care Operators and Staff to Reduce the Spread of COVID-19:

Before Re-Opening

Develop/update IPAC policies and procedures

- Develop and/or update administrative and IPAC policies and procedures to include mitigation measures to help reduce the spread of COVID-19.

- COVID-19-related policies and procedures must address the following topics:
  - Screening
  - Attendance reporting
  - Cohorting staff and children
  - Physical distancing
  - Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette
  - Food safety practices
  - Enhanced environmental cleaning and disinfection
  - Requirements for the use of toys, equipment and other materials
  - Use of personal protective equipment
  - Isolation/exclusion of ill children and child care staff
  - Management of cases and outbreaks of COVID-19
  - Communication with families/guardians and other stakeholders
  - Occupational health and safety.
Train staff and early childhood education students

- All child care staff/students must be aware of the signs and symptoms of COVID-19.
- Train staff/students to ensure they are aware of and can implement the revised IPAC policies and procedures.
- Train staff/students on proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE). Refer to Public Health Ontario resources.
- All child care staff/students must review training modules developed by Toronto Children Services, in collaboration with Toronto Public Health (TPH), prior to opening. If a child care centre has already opened, these training modules must be reviewed as soon as possible.
- Operators must ensure training is completed as often as necessary (i.e. when IPAC requirements are updated/revised).
- Operators must keep an up-to-date record of staff/students that have reviewed these training modules, policies and procedures (i.e. ask staff to sign and acknowledge that they have reviewed applicable training modules and COVID-19 related policies and procedures).
- Encourage staff to download the COVID Alert app so they can be notified directly if they have been in close contact with someone who was contagious with COVID-19.

Prepare the physical space

- Designate drop-off and pick-up locations outside, near the main area of child care centre/program area.
  - If this is not feasible for child care centres/home child care operators, arrange to use an area or space where physical distancing of two metres/six feet can be maintained.
- Designate an area outside, near the main entrance of the child care centre/program area as a screening station for in-person screening.
  - The area should be clearly identifiable as the screening station.
  - Post signs in a visible location clearly explaining the screening process and the rules and conditions for entry (e.g. Posters for Entrances).
  - The area must allow for a minimum of two metres/six feet distance between staff conducting in-person screening and the individual being screened. Alternatively, a protective barrier (e.g. plexiglass) may be equipped around the screening station.
  - Use visual markers/cues spaced two metres/six feet apart (e.g. tape on the floor, pylons, signs) to assist children and parents/guardians to maintain a two metre/six foot distance from each other if waiting to be screened.
- Provide alcohol based hand sanitizer (70%-90% alcohol) in rooms/program areas. Dispensers should not be in locations that can be accessed by children.
- Download, print and post signs in a visible location at the designated screening station to raise awareness about health and safety measures that can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 such as:
  - Physical Distancing
  - Protect Yourself
**Information about COVID-19**

- **Wash your Hands**
- **Cover your Cough**
- **Poster for Entrances**

If possible, increase space between seating and play areas so that children and staff can practice physical distancing (i.e. two metres/six feet):

- Remove extra chairs, tables and furniture to increase space to allow children to spread out.
- Place tape, signs or other visual markers on floors, tables, seats and in play areas.

Use visual markers/cues (e.g. tape on floors) to demarcate walkways, play areas or other to define programming areas to encourage children and staff to maintain physical distancing.

**During Active Operation**

**Conduct daily screening prior to entry/drop-off**

- Remind staff/students and parents/guardians of children attending the child care centre/home that they must not attend the child care program when they are ill, and that they should report any symptoms associated with COVID-19 to the child care operator.
- Actively screen (i.e. in-person, virtually or by reviewing an electronic submission) of children, child care staff and any other individual prior to entry/arrival to the child care centre/home child care setting.
- Where possible daily screening may be completed and submitted electronically (e.g. via online form, survey, or e-mail) prior to arrival at the child care centre/home.
  - In-person screening may not be feasible for home child care operators, screening may be conducted prior to arrival over the telephone or by using video conferencing. These arrangements may be made in advance with the child’s parent/guardian.
  - Prior to receiving children into care each day, home child care operators must also conduct daily screening of other people residing in the home, regardless of whether they participate in home child care activities. Individuals demonstrating symptoms of illness should be referred for COVID-19.
- Screen all children, child care staff/students and any other individuals prior to entry by asking about the following:
  - Do you/does the child have any of the following symptoms: fever/feverish, new onset or worsening of cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat, difficulty swallowing, decrease or loss of sense of taste or smell, chills, headaches, unexplained fatigue/malaise/muscle aches, nausea/vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, pink eye (conjunctivitis), runny nose/nasal congestion without other known cause?
  - Have you/has the child tested positive for COVID-19 or had close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 without wearing appropriate PPE?
  - Have you/has the child travelled outside of Canada, including the United States, within the last 14 days?
• Record screening results daily.
  o Operators may use and/or adapt the [health screening questionnaire](#) as a screening tool, and to record individual screening results.
  o Keep all screening records available onsite. Records must be kept for 12 months.
• Make hand sanitizer (70-90% alcohol concentration) available at the screening stations for individuals who have answered NO to all questions for use prior to entry.
• Individuals who answer YES to any of the questions must not be permitted to enter the child care centre/home.
  o If any person living in the home of a home child care answers YES to any of the questions, the home cannot receive children into care.
  o Refer these individuals to visit our website to learn about [assessment centres and testing](#).
• Staff must escort children into the child care center/home after screening.
• Parents/guardians should not go past the screening area or enter the child care centre/home unless there is a specific need to do so and the parent/guardian passes the screening.
• Refer to the section on before and after school programs for information about screening for children.

**Enhance attendance reporting practices**

• Maintain daily attendance records of all individuals entering the child care centre/home. This includes, but is not limited to, staff, student, children, maintenance workers, cleaning/environmental staff, food service workers and government agency employees (e.g. public health inspectors, program advisors, fire inspectors).
• Records should include the following information: name, company, contact information, date, time of arrival/departure, reason for visit, rooms/areas visited and screening results.
• Records must be updated when a child, child care provider or staff or student is absent.
• Child care operators should follow-up with all individuals to determine the reason for any unplanned absences, and if the absence is due to illness to note any symptoms (e.g. fever, sore throat, cough).
• Encourage parents/guardians of ill children and child care staff who are ill to seek COVID-19 testing at [assessment centres](#). They can also contact [Telehealth](#) at 1-866-797-0000 or their primary care provider to determine if further care is required.
• Non-essential visitors must not be permitted to enter the child care centre/home.
• Monitor attendance records for patterns or trends (e.g. children and child care staff in the same group or cohort absent at the same time or over the course of a few days).
• Attendance records must be available on-site at all times.
Assign staff and children into cohorts

- Refer to Ontario Regulation 137/15: General under the Child Care Early Years Act, 2014 to determine the maximum number of children allowable in a cohort or group.
  - Child care center operators should assess the available space in program areas in relation to group sizes and programming activities to ensure that physical distancing can still be practiced as best as possible.
  - There are no changes to the maximum group size for home child care, which allows for a maximum of six children, not including the home child care operator’s own children aged four years or older.
- Child care staff, students and children must be assigned to designated cohorts or groups.
- Cohorts must be designated to a specific "home room" or area.
- Child care staff and students are not included in the maximum cohort size, however, they are still considered a member of their assigned cohort or group.
- Staff to child ratios must comply with the Ontario Regulation 137/15 under the Child Care Early Years Act.
- Programming must be planned in a manner that limits cohorts from mixing throughout the day and over the course of the child care program/session.
- Stagger/alternate scheduling for the following:
  - Shared washroom facilities. If washrooms are shared, only one cohort must access the washroom at a time.
  - Drop-off and pick-up times to prevent parents/guardians from gathering or grouping together.
  - Snack times and lunch/meal times.
  - Outdoor playgrounds and play spaces (dedicated to the child care) by different cohorts.
- Where different cohorts are using the same indoor area (e.g., gymnasium) child care staff must ensure that physical distancing is maintained between the cohorts and that the groups do not mix.
  - If physical distancing cannot be maintained, consider using temporary physical barriers to prevent mixing of groups. The height of the barrier should take into account the tallest user and should consider the users breathing zone.
  - The breathing zone is defined as a pocket of air from which a person draws breath and generally extends 30 centimeters or 12 inches around (and above) the mid-point of a person’s face.

Staffing

- Staffing should be sufficient to have multiple staff assigned to one room consistently over the course of the day, and not need to move to other rooms.
  - Child care operators/supervisors should arrange staffing assignments to limit the number of staff entering or working in different rooms/areas as best as possible (e.g. routine cover-offs should be supported by the same staff).
- Child care staff should work at only one location. Operators should not reassign child care staff to different centres, if possible.
Child care staff may be assigned to two cohorts/groups of children in a nursery program only when required to ensure operation/delivery (e.g., the same staff for the AM and PM nursery programs, ensuring cleaning and disinfecting between cohorts/groups).

Child care staffing agencies that assign supply/replacement staff to support child care centres should schedule staff to work at a single designated child care centre, if possible.

- Supply/replacement staff that are assigned to a child care centre will be considered part of the cohort they are assigned to.
- Reassigning supply/replacement staff to a different cohort/group within the same child care centre should be avoided as best as possible to prevent mixing of cohorts.

Practice physical distancing

- Practice physical distancing (i.e. a two metre/six feet distance) as best as possible between children during activities while still permitting interaction and socializing to occur.
- Physical distancing must not compromise supervision or a child’s safety, emotional or psychological well-being.
- Maintain physical distancing as best as possible between cohorts in common areas:
  - Use visual markers/cues spaced two metres/six feet apart (e.g. tape on the floor, pylons, signs) in common areas such as entrances and corridors.
- Encourage children to greet each other using non-physical gestures (e.g. wave or nod or a verbal “Hello”) and to avoid close greetings (e.g. hugs, handshakes).
- Regularly remind children to keep "hands to yourself”.
- Reinforce "no sharing" policies and procedures. This includes the current practice of not sharing food, water bottles or other personal items.
- Limit the number and types of personal items that can be brought into the child care setting, and provide individual cubbies or bins for each child’s belongings.
- Personal items must be clearly labelled with the child’s name to prevent accidental sharing.
- Plan activities and games that increase spacing between children while promoting social interaction.
- Avoid activities that involve shared objects or toys.
- Avoid activities involving singing, shouting, or speaking loudly indoors.
- Increase the distance between cots/resting mats and cribs. If space is limited, place children toe-to-toe.

Practice good hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette

- Clean your hands thoroughly with soap and water or use hand sanitizer (70-90% alcohol concentration) provided hands are not visibly soiled.
- Avoid touching your face, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with your elbow or a tissue. Immediately throw the tissue in the garbage and wash your hands.
• Provide additional hand sanitizer (70-90% alcohol concentration) stations (e.g. wall mounted hand sanitizer dispensers) in supervised areas where children cannot access it independently.

• Child care staff must ensure that proper hand hygiene is practiced often and when necessary (e.g. before and after eating, after using the bathroom, after covering a cough or sneeze). This includes supervising and/or assisting children with hand hygiene.

• Child care operators must monitor hand hygiene supplies to ensure adequate amounts of liquid soap, paper towel, hand sanitizer, tissues, and waste receptacles lined with plastic bags.

Modify food safety practices for snacks and meals
• Child care operators must modify meal practices to ensure that there is no self-serving or sharing of food at meal times.
• Meals must be served in individual portions to the children.
• Utensils must be used to serve food.
• Do not provide shared utensils or items (e.g. serving spoons, condiments).
• Children must not be allowed to prepare nor provide food that will be shared with others.
• There must be no food provided by the family/outside of the regular meal provision of the program (except where required and special precautions for handling and serving the food are put into place, for example, expressed breast milk).
• Lunches and snacks can be provided by families for children as long as it is part of the regular meal provision for the program (e.g. bagged lunches for school aged programs), and there are policies and procedures that address the handling of this food (e.g. containers are sent home for washing, food sharing is prohibited, food is packed in way that does not require handling by staff).
• Ensure proper hand hygiene is practiced when staff are preparing food, and for all individuals before and after eating.

Enhance cleaning and disinfecting practices
• Review Public Health Ontario’s Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Settings fact sheet.
• Refer to Health Canada’s lists of hard surface disinfectants for use against coronavirus (COVID-19) for information on disinfectants:
  o Disinfectants must have a Drug Identification Number (DIN). A DIN is an 8-digit number given by Health Canada that confirms it is approved for use in Canada.
  o Check the expiry dates of products and always follow the manufacturer’s instructions.
• Chlorine bleach solutions may also be used for disinfection if appropriate for the surface.
• Prepare chlorine bleach solutions according to the instructions on the label or in a ratio of:
  o 1 teaspoon (5 mL) bleach per cup (250 mL) of water, or
  o 4 teaspoons (20 mL) bleach per litre (1000 mL) of water.
  o Ensure a minimum of two minutes contact time and allow to air dry.
  o Prepare fresh bleach solutions daily.
• Educate staff on how to use cleaning agents and disinfectants:
Required disinfectant contact times (i.e. amount of time that the product will need to remain wet on a surface to achieve disinfection).
- Safety precautions and required personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Directions for where and how to securely store cleaning and disinfectant supplies.

- It is strongly recommended that operators assign or designate staff to conduct environmental cleaning and disinfecting throughout the day.
- Clean and disinfect all high-touch surfaces and objects (e.g. doorknobs, light switches, toilet handles, sink faucets and tabletops) at least twice a day or when visibly dirty.
- High-touch surfaces (i.e. faucets, toilet handles) must be cleaned and disinfected in shared washrooms between cohorts.
- Clean and disinfect individual items that may be handled by more than one individual such as electronic devices, toys and balls between users.
- Cots and cribs must be cleaned and disinfected after each use.
- Blankets/sheets must be assigned to an individual child, stored separately to prevent accidental sharing and in manner that prevents contamination. Launder blankets/sheets weekly and as often as necessary (i.e. when soiled).
- Maintain logs to track cleaning and disinfecting activities for each room/area, individual/play items and sleeping equipment such as cots and cribs.
- If the child care program is located in a shared space (e.g. a school) make arrangements with other users/stakeholders to ensure enhanced cleaning and disinfecting practices can be maintained (i.e. frequency of cleaning appropriate disinfecting agents are used).

Requirements for toys, equipment/other materials and outdoor play

- Provide toys and equipment that are made of materials that can be cleaned and disinfected.
- Do not use plush toys.
- Assign specific toys and play structures to one cohort if possible:
  - Consider using identification systems to prevent the sharing of items between cohorts (e.g. colour coding).
- Large play structures must only be used by one cohort at a time.
- Play equipment and large play structures (e.g. indoor play structures, playhouses, climbers) must be cleaned and disinfected between cohorts.
- Shared outdoor spaces may be used provided that physical distancing can be maintained between groups and other individuals outside of the group at all times.
  - If it is difficult to maintain physical distancing, schedule activities in outdoor spaces at times when the area is not occupied by other cohorts/groups.
- Licensees and home child care providers may consider using alternate outdoor arrangements (i.e. playgrounds) where there are challenges securing outdoor play space:
  - For community outdoor playgrounds, refer to TPH COVID-19 Guidance for Outdoor Playgrounds and Fitness Equipment.
- Toys must be cleaned and disinfected between users.
• Mouthed toys must be separated, cleaned and disinfected immediately after the child has finished using it.
• Clean and disinfect toys in a three compartment sink. Toys must be washed and rinsed prior to disinfection. Using two sinks is acceptable if washing and rinsing are done in the first sink.
• Alternatively, toys can be cleaned and disinfected in a mechanical dishwasher provided that the rinse cycle reaches a minimum of 82 degrees Celsius. Only use the dishwasher in the kitchen when it is not being used for any other purposes (i.e. washing dishes, food preparation).
• Ensure required disinfectant contact times are achieved or alternatively allow toys to air dry.
• Dry toys in a designated area that is separate from bathrooms, change tables and protected from sources of contamination.
• Suspend group sensory play activities.
• Items that cannot be readily cleaned and disinfected (e.g. books) should be batched. Batched items can be rotated on a weekly basis.
  o Items should be taken out of rotation after use, placed in a sealed container and set aside for seven days before reusing.
• Consider providing individualized bins or packs for art materials and supplies for each child. Label these bins to prevent accidental sharing.

Use of masks and personal protective equipment
• Child care operators must provide personal protective equipment (PPE) for use by staff when necessary.
  o It is strongly recommended that operators maintain a one to two week supply of PPE at all times.
• All adults in a child care setting (i.e. child care staff, home child care providers, home child care visitors, and students) are required to wear a surgical/procedure mask (i.e. medical mask) and eye protection (e.g. face shields, safety glasses and goggles) while inside in the child care premises, including in hallways.
  o The use of masks and eye protection is not required for staff/students, home child care providers or children when outdoors if physical distancing can be maintained.
  o Exceptions to wearing a mask and eye protection indoors may include medical conditions that make it difficult to wear a mask or eye protection (e.g. difficulty breathing, low vision), a cognitive condition or disability that prevents wearing a mask, and hearing impairments or when communicating with a person who is hearing impaired and where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication.
• Gloves must be worn when it is anticipated that hands will come into contact with mucous membranes, broken skin, tissue, blood, bodily fluids, secretions, excretions, contaminated equipment or environmental surfaces.
• Children in grades four and above are required to wear a non-medical mask or face covering while indoors at the child care centre.
• Although they are not required to, school-aged children (kindergarten to grade three) should be encouraged to wear a non-medical mask or face covering while indoors at the child care centre.

Before and after school programs
• Children that are received into care are only required to be screened once daily (i.e. screened in the morning). Children are not required to be screened again when returning to the after school program. This applies to children that only attend after school programming (e.g. parents/guardians may submit screening results to the child care centre in the morning prior to the child attending care in the afternoon).
• Child care centres operating before and after school care may adjust cohorting/grouping requirements where operationally required (e.g. combining groups/cohorts when walking children to school to ensure adequate supervision).
• School age children who attend different schools or from different classrooms may be accepted into care at a child care centre location. Child care centre supervisors should try to prioritize grouping based on their core-school program if possible.
• Child care operators/supervisors should try to implement scheduling to prevent mixing between before and after school groups/cohorts and full day groups/cohorts whose child attendees do not attend a core-school program.
• Before and after school programs operating in shared spaces located in schools should collaborate with stakeholders to ensure cleaning and disinfecting of high touch surfaces in the program areas (i.e. classroom) is completed after the core day program ends and the before and after school program begins. Refer to the Ministry of Education's Before and After School Programs Kindergarten-Grade 6: Policies and Guidelines for School Boards for the 2020-2021 School Year.
• Before and after school programs operating in shared spaces (e.g. in a school or community centre) should also consider storing items, materials and other resources separately to avoid accidental sharing.
• Child care centres operating before and after school programs are encouraged to enhance communication with school boards and consider the following strategies such as:
  o Assigning a dedicated liaison person
  o Maintain a communication or issues log
  o Scheduling regular meetings (e.g. virtual meetings, telephone conferences).

Isolate children and staff/students that become ill
• It is recommended that child care staff and children with symptoms of COVID-19 go to an assessment centre for testing as soon as possible, and to self-isolate at home until their result is available.
• If a child becomes ill with symptoms while in care, immediately separate them from the rest of their group in a designated room (or space in a home child care setting), and supervise the child until they are picked-up.
- Notify parents/guardians or emergency contacts to pick up the ill child as soon as possible.
- The designated room/space must have a handwashing sink or hand sanitizer (70-90% alcohol concentration) available.
- Provide tissues to the ill child to help support respiratory etiquette.
- Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the area if it can be done so safely.
- Children older than two years should wear a medical mask (if tolerated) and they are able to use it properly (e.g. donning and doffing carefully, avoiding touching while on).
- Child care staff supervising the ill child should maintain physical distancing as best as possible, and wear PPE, including a surgical/procedure mask (i.e. medical mask) and eye protection (e.g. face shield, safety glasses and goggles).
- Clean and disinfect the area immediately after the child with symptoms has been picked-up. Items that cannot be cleaned and disinfected (e.g. paper, books, cardboard puzzles) should be removed from the program and stored in a sealed container for a minimum of seven days.

**Exposure to someone with COVID-19**
- Child care staff/students and children exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19 must be excluded from the child care setting for 14 days:
  - These individuals must self-isolate at home and monitor for symptoms for the next 14 days.
  - Individuals who have been exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19 should get tested as soon as any symptoms develop.
  - If asymptomatic, individuals who have been exposed to a case should also be encouraged to get tested within 14 days of the potential exposure. They will need to continue to self-isolate for 14 days even if the test is negative.

**Return to child care centre**
- If an ill child/staff has tested for COVID-19 and their test result is negative, they can return to the centre after being symptom free for 24 hours and they pass the screening.
- Child care staff and children who have been exposed to an individual who became ill with symptoms (i.e. suspect COVID-19 case) must continue to be grouped together (i.e. cohorted), and monitored for signs and symptoms of illness:
  - Child care staff/students must not be assigned to other groups/cohorts or work in other child care settings. They must also be advised to avoid being in contact with vulnerable person or settings where there are vulnerable people.
  - Child care staff must ensure that mixing of children is prevented.
  - Supervisors must inform parents/guardians of children who were exposed to the ill child, and advise that they should monitor their child for symptoms.
  - Supervisors/home child care providers may consult with Toronto Public Health as necessary.
- Child care staff and children who are being managed by TPH (i.e. confirmed or probable cases of COVID-19, close contacts of cases) must follow TPH instructions to determine when to return to the child care centre/home.
Staff must also report to their occupational health and safety department prior to return to work when applicable.

Clearance tests are not required for staff or children to return to the child care centre.

Report cases and outbreaks to Toronto Public Health
- A single symptomatic lab confirmed case of COVID-19 in a child care centre staff member, home child care provider or child would be considered a confirmed COVID-19 outbreak, in consultation with TPH.
- Child care centre supervisors/home child care providers must immediately report the following to TPH at 416-338-7600 during work hours (8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday) or 3-1-1 after hours:
  - Cases of COVID-19 among staff or child attendees that are laboratory-confirmed.
  - Probable cases of COVID-19 (i.e. symptoms occurring among a staff or child who has been exposed to a person with confirmed COVID-19).
  - Clusters of suspected cases (i.e. two or more children or staff with COVID-19 symptoms within a 48-hour period).

Communicate with families/guardians and other stakeholders
- Develop and implement communication platforms to provide program information and protocols on health and safety measures (e.g. screening practices, physical distancing, staying home if you’re sick). Communication platforms may include the websites, email, or social media accounts.
- Use telephone or video conferencing when possible for meetings between child care staff and with parents/guardians.
- Post signs at all entrances instructing participants and their families not to enter if they are sick.
- Communicate with stakeholders such as building owners/property managers (e.g. child care programs that operate in shared spaces in schools or apartment buildings) on a routine basis to provide updates about policies and procedures and to align any gaps or concerns regarding IPAC practices.
- Toronto Public Health will provide further advice about information that should be shared with other staff, parents/guardians and other stakeholders (e.g. school boards) in the event there is a case or outbreak of COVID-19 in the setting.

Worker health and safety
- Employers must provide written measures and procedures for staff safety, including for IPAC.
- The provincial government has general information on COVID-19 and workplace health and safety on employers’ responsibilities and how to protect workers at work.
- Workers can also get information about health and safety protections at the workplace.
- Additional health and safety guidance for employers of child care centres is available from the Public Services Health & Safety Association website.
More information
For more information, visit our website at www.toronto.ca/COVID19 or call us at 416-338-7600.

References


