

July 2021

**Toronto Children's Services**  
**EarlyON In-Person (Indoor and Outdoor) and Virtual Programming**  
**Questions and Answers**

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## **EarlyON In-Person (Indoor and Outdoor) Services**

### **Indoor and Outdoor Space Preparation**

#### **Q1. What are the capacity limits for in-person indoor and outdoor programs?**

EarlyON programs must be provided in accordance with the *Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020* and Ontario Regulation 364/20. EarlyON has been classified as Businesses or Facilities Open to the Public.

Outdoor programs can now accommodate up to 100 participants, provided there is adequate space to maintain a distance of two metres/six feet between participants. However, we would strongly encourage you to establish smaller group sizes to give staff and participants time to become familiar with the new IPAC measures and modified programming.

EarlyON Service Providers will need to determine the maximum capacity for each indoor program based on available square footage. You should consider how many participants can reasonably fit within your Centre given the requirement to maintain a distance of two metres/six feet between participants.

#### **Q.2 What if our indoor EarlyON space is shared with another organization that is still closed to the public?**

You are strongly encouraged to reach out to your respective partners/landlords to identify when you are able to access your Centres to prepare your space, to identify reopening dates, and to determine any relevant space-sharing arrangements in alignment with the infection prevention and control (IPAC) measures outlined in the guidelines. We recognize that not all EarlyON Centres will be able to open immediately, particularly if your program space is shared with an organization that is still closed to the public.

#### **Q.3 Where can EarlyON outdoor programming be offered?**

EarlyON Service Providers can offer outdoor programming on private or public land, and are required to have the appropriate permits or approvals in place.

All requests to offer outdoor programming in City of Toronto parks should be submitted to Toronto Children's Services. The Parks, Forestry and Recreation permit office will contact you to confirm that your permit has been secured and to finalize payment. Please wait until you have secured a permit before offering outdoor programming.

TDSB school yard space is available for EarlyON usage for a minimum fee during the summer months (<https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Community/Permits/Permit-Categories-and->

[Fees](#)). Non-profit organizations are categorized as “A1” organizations within the fee structure. Applications for permits can be made online at: <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Community/Permits/Applications>

**Q.4 Are EarlyON Centres permitted to operate in schools?**

The Ministry of Education has confirmed that EarlyON Centres located within schools are permitted to open. However, local school boards are responsible for determining when and where individual Centres can reopen based on local conditions. We encourage you to reach out to your regular school board partners to confirm when your Centre can reopen.

**Q.5 If outdoor programming is offered in a public space, how can we prevent people from coming into the EarlyON space?**

We recommend the use of barriers/structures to enclose the outdoor program space and manage capacity and participant traffic flow. Potential barriers include rope, pylons, tables, etc. This requirement does not apply to mobile programming (e.g., organized walks).

The barriers/structures can also be used to display information about what EarlyON programs are available and how to access them.

**Q.6 Our EarlyON is co-located with a Child Care Centre. Are we able to use the playground at the same time?**

Yes, different groups can use the playground at a child care centre. However, it is highly recommended that EarlyON participants do not use the playground at the same time as children attending the child care centre. Masks are required while playing on a playground for children ages two and older, as it is difficult for children to maintain physical distancing on play structures.

**Q.7 Are we able to close for a few days to prepare for reopening?**

Toronto Children's Services recognizes that EarlyON Service Providers need time to prepare for reopening. If needed, you can consider closing for a day or two to prepare your space (indoor or outdoor) and train staff. Please submit a request in writing to your EarlyON Consultant.

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**Service Hours****Q.8 How many hours of service are EarlyON Service Providers expected to provide?**

EarlyON Service Providers must provide at least 80% of the total approved service hours from their 2021 EarlyON budget submission. The remaining 20% of time can be allocated to implementing infection and prevention control (IPAC) measures, planning and preparation activities. This requirement can be met through the delivery of in-person programming (indoor or outdoor), virtual programming or a combination of both.

Organizations are encouraged to expand their current services to offer as much direct support to families as possible. Please do not hesitate to reach out to your EarlyON Consultant if you would like ideas and advice on how to expand your current service offerings.

**Q.9 Can we change our days and/or hours of service?**

Organizations are encouraged to consult with their community to determine what days and hours would meet their needs during the COVID-19 response period. If changes are necessary, organizations should submit their requests by updating their EarlyON Service Plan template and submitting it to their EarlyON Consultant for approval.

**Q.10 Do we have to offer the same number of hours for each type of in-person and virtual service?**

Organizations do not have to offer the same number of hours by type of service. Each organization, in response to the identified needs of their community, can determine how many hours are allocated to each service. Organizations do not need to provide services in every category, but they are required to continue to meet the mandatory EarlyON core service requirements (engaging children, support parents/caregivers, connecting families to community services/supports).

**Q.11 How should we track the number of hours staff are working?**

Staff are expected to continue to work the same number of hours as outlined in the organization's 2021 budget submission. Organizations are responsible for implementing their own human resource policies to support the delivery of virtual and remote services. At this point in time, TCS does not intend to collect data on the number of hours worked by individual staff.

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**In-Person Program Delivery and Content****Q.12 What are the rules around cancelling outdoor programming due to weather conditions?**

It is up to each organization to determine what their policies and processes are around offering outdoor programming under different weather conditions, including:

- rules around when outdoor programming should be cancelled,
- how pre-registered families would be informed of the cancellation, and
- processes to offer alternate EarlyON services (such as virtual programs).

If there are changes to your Service Plan after its submission, including outdoor program cancellations, please inform your EarlyON Consultant.

**Q.13 Can EarlyON Service Providers offer organized walks?**

Organizations can deliver outdoor programming in a designated outdoor space or can offer mobile programming (e.g. organized walks). If organizations choose to offer mobile programming, EarlyON staff must designate a starting point for the walk. Prior to the start of the walk, participants must have pre-registered and be screened. During the walk, staff and participants must maintain a minimum of two metres/six feet distance. Having your route planned and knowing where accessible public washrooms are available will be helpful to participants wanting to know what to expect when participating in an organized walk.

**Q.14 Can there be singing at in-person programs?**

Singing and speaking loudly is not encouraged. When activities pose a higher risk of droplets being spread in the air, staff and participants are encouraged to wear personal protective equipment to reduce the risk of virus spreading. Singing can take place in outdoor programs when participants and staff are able to maintain a 2 metre or 6 feet distance. Playing music, humming and individual instruments is encouraged to be used instead of singing.

**Q.15 Are families able to bring older siblings to the EarlyON program, when space is limited due to COVID protocols?**

Yes, older siblings of children 0-6 years of age are to be allowed to participate in EarlyON in-person programs and must follow participant IPAC protocols.

**Q.16 Can we lend books and toys to families during the COVID period?**

Toy and book lending is discouraged at this time.

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**Pre-registration and Screening****Q.17 If an in-person EarlyON program has sufficient space, can a parent/caregiver and their children join the EarlyON program without pre-registering?**

Pre-registration is encouraged by the Ministry of Education but it is understood that this may not always be possible or feasible.

If an individual would like to join an EarlyON program that they have not pre-registered for, they could join if the following requirements are met:

- The EarlyON in-person group size, including staff, has sufficient capacity to accommodate additional participants.
- They have been informed of the EarlyON program expectations (e.g., physical distancing, hand hygiene, no-sharing policy).
- They have completed the required screening and have answered "no" to each question.
- They provide their information as required for contact tracing purposes.

If the parent/caregiver and children are not able to meet the requirements in the In-Person EarlyON Program Guidelines, EarlyON staff are encouraged to have information available they can share about their in-person programming and how they can join another day.

**Q.18 Can screening be done online?**

Yes, EarlyON Service Providers can implement different screening tool formats, including an online screening tool. Organizations are encouraged to provide different formats for parents/caregivers to complete the screening process for them and their children to limit barriers to access services. For example, organizations can offer an online screening tool for parents/caregivers to complete the day of their program and have hard-copy screening tools available for parents/caregivers to complete on the spot.

Parents/caregivers should be informed of what the screening questions are ahead of time and should be instructed to attend EarlyON in-person programming if they know all the answers to the screening questions are "no".

Updated screening forms can be found in the following link: [child checklist](#) and [staff/adult checklist](#)

Prior to joining an in-person EarlyON program, EarlyON staff must verify that each staff and attendee has completed a screening form the day of the program and must confirm that all answers to the questions were "no". EarlyON staff are not required to take attendees' temperature.

A record of daily screening results must be kept for 12 months. Please ensure screening results are being collected and stored safely for security and privacy reasons.

**Q.19 Does a screening tool need to be completed for each child?**

Yes, the screening process must be completed for each attendee, even if they are part of the same family or joining the program with the same caregiver. For contact tracing purposes, if multiple children from different families attend, the contact information for the caregiver is sufficient.

**Q.20 What screening information needs to be kept as a record? Can answers to screening questions be provided verbally and a written confirmation of all answers being "no" be kept as a record?**

EarlyON Service Providers must maintain a record of all participants and confirmation that they answered "no" to each screening question. They must also record if an individual failed the screening and what their reason was for failing (e.g. which symptoms were present, if they had travelled in the past 14 days). Screening results can be provided verbally, provided that a written record of their participation and answers are kept.

**Q.21 Will it be mandatory to have a COVID-19 vaccine to working in EarlyON in-person services?**

The Ministry of Education has not made COVID-19 vaccinations mandatory for EarlyON settings at this time. Employers can support employees to get a vaccine through relevant education and resources. As an employer the Board of Directors should consult with a legal advisor to determine the organizations position. As providers, policies related to the guidance and operation of the EarlyON should also include expectations of participants, students and visitors. These policies should be developed with legal advice and the board. COVID-19 vaccination resources can be found [here](#).

**Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Requirements**

**Q.22 Are staff and participants expected to wear masks at all times?**

Indoor programming requires staff wear a medical mask and a face shield or goggles at all times.

Outdoor programming requires staff and participants to wear a mask if a 2 metre or 6 ft distance cannot be maintained. Staff must also wear a medical mask in the following situations:

- Staff must wear a medical mask and eye protection (e.g. goggles, face shield):

- in the screening area, when screening prior to entering the EarlyON outdoor space;
  - when cleaning and disinfecting blood or bodily fluid spills if there is a risk of splashing of droplets; and
  - when caring for a participating adult and/or child showing symptoms of illness.
- Staff and participants must wear a mask or face covering when it is difficult to maintain physical distancing.
- Staff and participants must wear a mask or face covering if they need to enter a building to access washrooms.

Children under the age of two are not required to wear a mask at any time.

**Q.23 Can EarlyON staff use re-usable masks?**

No, when a mask or face covering must be used, EarlyON staff must use a medical mask or a face shield. Clear plastic washable masks can be used by staff when needed to support visual facial recognition. This clear mask option is for task specific purposes when communication is required for someone who needs to read lips and can't be worn for extended periods as a medical mask replacement. Face shields and googles are re-usable provided they are cleaned after every use.

**Q.24 Children are unlikely to maintain physical distancing on a playground. Is this okay, provided the children are wearing masks?**

Yes, children ages two and older are required to wear masks outdoors whenever physical distancing cannot be maintained – including on playgrounds.

**Q.25 What if participants refuse to wear a mask while participating in EarlyON in-person programming?**

Each organization must determine its own policies and practices regarding the enforcement of mask requirements. Organizations can consider the following factors when requiring and promoting mask usage during in-person programs:

- Participants should be made aware of mask requirements when registering for programs.
- Should a participant present at the entrance without a mask/face covering, staff can be encouraged to offer a free disposable mask unless there is a medical reason why they cannot wear a mask.
- If a participant advises that they cannot tolerate a mask or face covering for medical reasons, an honour system is recommended.



- A script/handout could be developed to provide to individuals who arrive without a mask.

**Q.26 What are the exemptions for not wearing a mask?**

- Children under the age of two. Very young children must not wear a face covering because of the risk of suffocation.
- Individuals with a medical condition that makes it difficult to wear a mask. This can include but is not limited to:
  - Medical condition, mental health condition, cognitive condition or disability that prevents wearing a mask or face covering
  - Medical condition that makes it difficult to breathe or someone who is unconscious or incapacitated
  - People who are hearing impaired, or are communicating with a person who is hearing impaired, and where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication
  - Individuals, who are unable to put on or remove a mask without assistance

**Responding to Suspected or Positive COVID-19 Cases****Q.27 What should we do if an individual answers "YES" to any questions in the screening questionnaire?**

Individuals who answer "YES" to any of the questions must not be permitted to participate in in-person programming. Organizations should refer these individuals to the [Toronto Public Health](#) website to learn about next steps and [COVID-19 testing at assessment centres](#).

**Q.28 What should we do if participants or staff become ill?**

It is recommended that [staff and participants with symptoms](#) of COVID-19 attend an assessment centre for testing as soon as possible and self-isolate at home until their result is available. They may return to the EarlyON program if their test comes back negative and their symptoms are improving.

If a child and/or parent/caregiver becomes ill with symptoms while at an in-person EarlyON program, immediately separate them from the rest of their group, send them home and refer them to a COVID-19 assessment centre and Toronto Public Health's COVID-19 information.

Clean and disinfect the area immediately after the children and parents/caregivers with symptoms have been sent home, and wear personal protective equipment while doing so.

Please note, organizations must report a serious occurrence to Toronto Children's Services when an EarlyON staff person or participant has two or more symptoms and is tested, or if a staff person or a participant has a confirmed case of COVID-19.

**Q.29 What should we do if participants or staff have been exposed to a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19?**

EarlyON staff, children and adult participants that have a confirmed case of COVID-19 must self-isolate at home **for 10 days** from the day their symptoms first appeared.

- They may return to the EarlyON program after 10 days if they do not have a fever (without use of medication) and their symptoms have been improving for 24 hours or longer.
- EarlyON staff, children and adult participants who are being managed by TPH must follow TPH instructions to determine when to return to the EarlyON program.

EarlyON staff, children and adult participants exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19 must be excluded from attending any EarlyON program **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 are also encouraged to get tested any time within 14 days of the potential exposure.

EarlyON staff and participants who are being managed by Toronto Public Health (TPH) (e.g. confirmed or probable cases of COVID-19, close contacts of cases) must follow TPH instructions to determine when to return to the EarlyON program. Negative test results are not required for staff or participants to return to EarlyON programs.

Staff must also report to their occupational health and safety department prior to return to work, where applicable.

Please note, organizations must report a serious occurrence to TCS when an EarlyON staff person or participant has two or more symptoms and is tested, or if a staff person or a participant has a confirmed case of COVID-19.

**Q.30 Our program staff are required to self-isolate and we had to make a decision to stop delivering in-person EarlyON programs. How will this affect our organization?**

Please advise your EarlyON Consultant in the event of any program closures and if you would like to make any changes to your EarlyON Service Plan. EarlyON Service Providers

may choose to offer virtual services in lieu of in-person programming, or make schedule modifications.

EarlyON staff and participants who are being managed by Toronto Public Health (TPH) (e.g. confirmed or probable cases of COVID-19, close contacts of cases) must follow TPH instructions to determine when to return to the EarlyON Program. Staff must also report to their occupational health and safety department prior to return to work where applicable.

**Q.31 What should we do if a program participant or staff have symptoms that are chronic or related to other known causes or conditions?**

When assessing for symptoms, including during the screening process, EarlyON staff should focus on evaluating if they are new, worsening or different from a person's baseline health status or usual state. Symptoms associated with known chronic health conditions or related to other known causes/conditions (e.g. asthma, allergies) should not be considered unless new, different or worsening.

**Q.32 Are negative test results required before an employee or participant can rejoin outdoor EarlyON programs?**

No, negative test results are not required for staff or participants to return to the EarlyON programs.

**Training and Information Sharing**

**Q.33 Is online training available to train staff?**

Online mandatory training is available for organizations interested in delivering in-person programming. All staff are required to complete the training before offering in-person programming and organizations must keep records identifying which staff have completed the training and when it was completed.

The training consists of three components: Infection Prevention and Control, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Reopening Considerations and are available on [TCS' training and resource page](#).

TCS also facilitated EarlyON Community of Practice sessions for Managers and Staff in July 2021 to support the sharing of information and best practices across the sector.

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**Virtual and Remote Services****Q.34 What is the definition for EarlyON virtual and remote services?**

The EarlyON Virtual and Remote Services Guidelines contain definitions for virtual and remote services to enable organizations to respond to the unique needs of children and families during the COVID-19 response period. Virtual and remote services are grouped into three categories: Group Services, Individualized Support Services and Remote COVID-19 Response Services. These services are provided virtually, online, over the telephone or contactless, and they align with the EarlyON core service requirements.

**Q.35 Can organizations set restrictions on who can attend virtual sessions?**

EarlyON services must be free of charge and services do not need to be restricted based on geographical boundaries. If desired, EarlyON Service Providers may choose to offer targeted virtual programming for specific communities, in languages other than English and French, for children with extra support needs, and for children of a certain age to provide developmentally responsive programs.

**Funding****Q.36 Can we use the Safe Restart funding to help to safely offer in-person programming?**

EarlyON Service Providers are encouraged to use their remaining Safe Restart Funding to prepare for the delivery of in-person programming. As a reminder, Safe Restart Funding must be spent by December 31, 2021 and cannot be carried over into 2022. Please refer to previous communications regarding eligible expense categories, and reach out to your EarlyON Consultant if you have any questions.