

Guidance for California Child Care Providers

During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Updated 7/30/2021

The following guidelines provide information and procedures on how child care programs and providers can safely provide care during the COVID-19 pandemic in California. This guidance does not supersede applicable federal, state, and local laws and policies for child care programs.

Staying Home if Sick and Daily Health Screening

Children and staff should stay home if they have fever or chills; cough; difficulty breathing; fatigue; muscle or body aches; headache; new loss of taste or smell; sore throat; congestion or runny nose; nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea; or have tested positive for COVID-19. Contact your local public health department if you are aware of confirmed COVID-19 cases among staff, children, or families.

Conduct a health check on each child, each day, before their parent leaves. Ask about symptoms of COVID-19. Consider each child's individual health status. For example, a child with a diagnosis of allergies from their health care provider does not need to stay home for allergy symptoms. Anyone with signs of COVID-19 must consult their health care provider before returning to child care. Children or staff who meet usual exclusion criteria for illnesses other than COVID-19 should also stay home.

If a child becomes ill during the day with signs of COVID-19, isolate them and notify their family to pick them up right away. Always supervise an ill child and wear a mask around people with COVID-19 symptoms. If symptoms persist or worsen, call the child's health care provider for further guidance. Ill staff members should go home as soon as they notice COVID-19 symptoms.

Drop-off and Pick-up Procedures and Visitors

Consider moving the sign-in station outside the facility. Provide hand sanitizer or handwashing facilities to use before and after families sign in and out. Limit outside visitors, but continue to allow service providers for children with Individual Education Plans (IEP) or Individual Family Service Plans (IFSP). Allow breastfeeding people to enter. Licensing program analysts have resumed their in-person visits to child care programs.

Handwashing

Have children and staff wash their hands upon entering the facility and frequently thereafter. Follow strict hand hygiene procedures at all times. Display proper handwashing guidelines/posters for staff and children in bathrooms and near sinks. (See the CCHP poster [When to Wash Hands](#) based on the CFOC Standard 3.2.2.1 and the CCHP poster [Wash Your Hands Properly](#) based on the CFOC standard 3.2.2.2.) Use hand sanitizer (with 60% or more alcohol) when soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly dirty. Keep hand sanitizer out of children's reach.

Wearing a Face Mask

The [Centers for Disease Control](#) and the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) recommend that adults and children age 2 years and older wear a face mask as long as they can breathe safely and remove it without assistance. Children under 2 years old should not wear a face mask because of the danger of suffocation. Check with your [local public health department](#) for guidance for your county.

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California Childcare Health Program <https://ccph.ucsf.edu>

Small, Stable Groups (Cohorts)

Smaller, stable groups reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 and protect staff and children by limiting the number of exposed people if someone becomes ill. Children and staff should not change groups or mix groups, and each cohort should have its own classrooms, if possible.

Meals and Naps

Serve food on individual plates for each child. Do not pass food in common bowls or share serving utensils. Seat children at the table with more distance between them than usual or seat children on one side of the table facing the same direction. If possible, serve meals and snacks outside.

Arrange indoor furniture to give children more space. Place cots and cribs a good distance apart (at least 3 feet, if possible) with children facing head to toe at naptime. Remove face masks for meals and naps.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

Clean surfaces regularly. Disinfect high-touch surfaces, for example, door handles, light switches, cabinet handles, and hand rails, at least daily. See [Cleaning and Disinfecting Guidelines](#) from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) for child care and other facilities.

Posters for child care providers on step-by-step cleaning and disinfecting can be found on the California Childcare Health Program (CCHP) website: [Step-by-Step Cleaning for Child Care Programs](#), [Step-by-Step Disinfecting for Child Care Programs](#), and [Reminders for Using Disinfectants](#) can be found on the Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) website.

Healthy Air

Provide proper ventilation indoors by safely opening windows and doors for fresh air. Encourage outdoor play to maximize fresh air and promote physical activity for children. Talk to your facilities manager or a ventilation consultant to learn about maintaining and/or servicing your heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system. Maintain your HVAC system, including changing filters, according to manufacturer's instructions. If you don't have an HVAC system or your HVAC system does not work properly, consider using a portable air filtering device with a HEPA filter.

Getting Vaccinated

Vaccination is one of the most effective risk reduction strategies to reduce the rate of COVID-19. Since children under 12 years old are not eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine yet, the best way to protect them is for the adults who spend time with them to be vaccinated. The vaccine protects people in the highest risk groups, including people with chronic health problems, those who work closely with others, people living in large households, and those who cannot be vaccinated. The COVID-19 vaccine can reduce the number of lives lost to COVID-19. Vaccine appointments are available on [Myturn.ca.gov](https://myturn.ca.gov). You can also contact your local public health department or check with your health care provider for information on how to get vaccinated.

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