



Coronavirus COVID-19

BC Centre for Disease Control

Public Health Guidance for Child Care Settings

Updated: March 18, 2022

Introduction

This document provides guidance for child care providers to maintain a safe and healthy environment for children and staff. It identifies key infection prevention and exposure control practices to implement in child care settings.

COVID-19 will continue to circulate in our population. However, with high immunization rates in B.C., as well as emerging treatment options for people at higher risk of serious disease, we can transition to managing COVID-19 as we do other serious respiratory infections in the community. Public health continues to review emerging evidence and monitor cases and transmission trends of COVID-19 to determine if actions should be taken to prevent COVID-19. Guidance will continue to be modified as needed as we transition from emergency response to the pandemic to the recovery and readiness phases in the next few months.

First Nations have the authority to make decisions about child care operations, vaccines and COVID-19 response plans in the best interests of children and families in their communities. Child care programs operating in First Nation communities should follow the requirements and processes set out by their First Nation leadership and/or emergency response committee.

Child care operators are responsible for implementing their own health and safety policies as independent organizations. Child care operators are encouraged to take the time needed to adjust their policies to best suit the needs of staff, children, and families.

The B.C. Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) is the primary source of information about COVID-19 in B.C. Resources on the [BCCDC website](#) can be used to support learning and to respond to questions from families and child care providers.

Child Care Setting

Child care programs are important for children's social, emotional, behavioral, and early learning development, and are vital for working parents. These guidelines aim to support child care service providers to manage respiratory infections, including COVID-19.



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If you have fever, a new cough, or are having difficulty breathing, call 8-1-1.



Child care programs can be delivered in different settings and with different age mixes. There are also unique challenges facing families and child care providers in different urban, rural and remote communities. Given the differences in settings and situations, child care operators may adapt this guidance as appropriate.

Recommendations for Individuals

Vaccines

Vaccines are important tools to protect against many serious communicable diseases. **Vaccination protects individuals from serious illness due to COVID-19** and is the most effective way to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on our communities. It is strongly recommended that adults interacting with children be fully vaccinated. All COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Canada protect against serious complications, including from the omicron variant. It is important to get all vaccine doses in the vaccine series, including booster doses of vaccine, to get the most effective protection against serious cases of COVID-19 and provide longer-lasting protection. More information about COVID-19 vaccines are available from the [BCCDC](#) website. Staff and families are also encouraged to ensure they are up to date on [all recommended vaccines for other communicable diseases](#).

COVID-19 vaccines are part of B.C.'s immunization program. Licensed child care operators should have a current record of the vaccinations their staff have received, including COVID-19 vaccines, as per the [Child Care Licensing Regulation](#). As independent organizations, child care facility operators may choose to implement their own staff vaccination policies. More information on COVID-19 vaccination and the workplace is available on the [Work Safe B.C.](#) website.

Evidence-based immunization information and tools for B.C. residents are available from [BCCDC](#) and [ImmunizeBC](#) websites.

Health Awareness

Staff and parents should regularly check to ensure that they (or their child) are not experiencing any symptoms of illness (including but not limited to COVID-19 [symptoms](#)) before coming to child care to prevent spread of communicable diseases, such as COVID-19, within the child care settings.

What to Do When Sick

The management of COVID-19 in the community is now more aligned with the management of other respiratory infections.

Staff, children, or other persons in the child care setting who are exhibiting symptoms of illness (including but not limited to COVID-19 [symptoms](#)) should stay home until they are well enough to participate in regular activities. Staff, children, or other persons can attend child care if their symptoms are consistent with a previously diagnosed health condition (e.g., seasonal allergies) or symptoms have improved enough to where you feel well enough to return to regular activities and their fever has resolved without the use of fever-reducing medication (e.g. acetaminophen, ibuprofen). The [When to Get Tested for COVID-19](#) resource or the [B.C. Self-Assessment Tool](#) provides more information on whether you should get a test for COVID-19. If you are unsure or concerned about your symptoms, connect with your health care provider or call 8-1-1.



Staff, children, or other persons in the child care setting who test positive for COVID-19 should follow the guidance on the [BCCDC](#) website as to how long they should self-isolate. They can return to child care when they no longer need to self-isolate.

What to do if Exposed to COVID-19

In the context of COVID-19 circulation in the community, contact tracing is no longer an effective strategy for the prevention of COVID-19. For this reason, public health does not require people who have been exposed to COVID-19 to self-isolate provided they do not have [symptoms](#) of COVID-19.

People who have been exposed to COVID-19, including staff or children in child care, should monitor for symptoms of COVID-19. As long as they do not have any symptoms, they are not required to stay home and may continue to attend child care. If they develop symptoms of COVID-19 or test positive for COVID-19, follow the directions in [What to do When sick](#).

Hand Hygiene

Hand washing with plain soap and water or using an [effective hand sanitizer](#) reduces the spread of illness. Provide regular opportunities for staff and children to wash hands with plain soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand rub containing at least 60% alcohol. Soap and water are preferred when hands are visibly dirty; otherwise, use a hand wipe followed by alcohol-based hand rub. It is particularly important for hand hygiene to be practiced immediately before eating and immediately after using the toilet.

To learn more about how to perform hand hygiene, please refer to the BCCDC's [hand washing poster](#). Children should be supervised or assisted in using hand sanitizer. Hand sanitizer should not be used on infants. Some hand sanitizers should not be used on children, so labels should be read carefully. More information on the proper use of hand sanitizers is available on the [BCCDC](#) website.

Respiratory Etiquette

Children and staff should practice routine respiratory etiquette:

- Cough or sneeze into their elbow sleeve or a tissue.
- Throw away used tissues and immediately perform hand hygiene (“Cover your coughs”).
- Not touch their eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands (“Hands below your shoulders”).

Personal Items and Books

Personal items (e.g., blankets, reusable food and drink containers) can be brought into the child care setting from home for individual use. Parents and caregivers should label these items and wash these items at the end of the day.

There is no evidence that COVID-19 is transmitted by books or paper. There is no need to limit the use of books and paper-based materials.

Non-Medical Masks & Face Coverings (Masks)

Personal protective equipment (including masks) can provide an individual with an additional layer of protection. The term “mask” in this document means a non-medical mask or face covering.



Face coverings are no longer required by public health. Adults (including staff, practicum students, volunteers and visitors) and children over two years old in child care settings may wear a mask based on personal or family choice. Child care staff should supervise and support children to ensure safe and proper use of masks if a child or their family chooses to wear a mask. The choice of staff, families, or children to choose whether they practice additional personal prevention measures should be supported and treated with respect. Information on non-medical masks is available from [BCCDC](#).

Infants under two years of age should not wear masks as it may make it difficult for them to breathe and may become a choking hazard.

Staff and those providing services to children with medical complexity, immune suppression, receiving delegated care, or with disabilities and diverse abilities that require them to be in close proximity to a child should follow routine infection control practices needed for general communicable disease prevention.

Recommendations for Child Care Operators

Ventilation and Air Exchange

Continue to ensure all mechanical heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems are designed, operated, and maintained as per standards and specifications for ongoing comfort of workers ([Part 4 of OHS Regulation](#)), and that they are working properly. For more information, see WorkSafeBC guidance on [general ventilation and air circulation](#).

Cleaning and Disinfection

Regular cleaning and disinfection can help prevent the spread of communicable diseases. Cleaning of frequently touched surfaces should occur in line with regular practices and when visibly dirty.

Sensory activities (e.g. activities with water) and use of sensory objects (e.g. playdough) can continue. If possible, sensory objects should be cleaned according to regular practices.

Transportation

Buses and vans used for transporting children can return to normal seating and onloading/offloading practices. Buses and vans should be cleaned and disinfected according to routine cleaning practices.

Food and Beverages

[FOODSAFE](#) Level 1 covers important food safety and worker safety information including foodborne illness, receiving, and storing food, preparing food, serving food, and cleaning and sanitizing. It is a helpful resource for those seeking education and training on food safety practices.

Child care centres can resume regular food programs and activities. For food contact surfaces, ensure any sanitizers or disinfectants used are approved for use in a food service application. Child care centres can continue to accept food donations to support learning and the delivery of meal programs, breakfast clubs and other food access initiatives.

Health Awareness

Child care administrators should ensure:

- Staff and other adults entering the setting are aware they should not come if they are sick and unable to participate fully in routine activities or are required to self-isolate.



- Parents and caregivers are aware that their child should not go to child care if they are sick or are required to self-isolate.

Child care administrators can support this practice by communicating the importance of everyone regularly checking to ensure they (or their child) are not experiencing any symptoms of illness (including but not limited to COVID-19 [symptoms](#)) before coming to child care to prevent spread of communicable diseases, such as COVID-19, within the child care settings.

Child care administrators do not need to confirm a health check has been done or monitor children and staff for symptoms of illness.

Managing Illness in Child Care Settings

If a staff member, child, or other person develops symptoms of illness in a child care setting and is unable to participate in regular activities, they should be supported to go home until their symptoms have improved.

Appropriate infection control precautions should be taken while the person is preparing to leave child care, including use of appropriate hand hygiene and cleaning/disinfection of surfaces soiled with bodily fluids. They may use a mask if they are experiencing respiratory symptoms.

Some children or staff may not be able to be picked up immediately. Consider having a space available where the child or staff member can wait comfortably, which is safe and is separated from others. This can include being in the same room as others, as long as the person experiencing illness is at least two metres away from others and wears a mask if they're able to. Provide supervision for younger children.

Do not require a health care provider note (i.e., a note from a doctor or nurse practitioner) to confirm the health status of any individual, beyond those required to support medical accommodation as per usual practices.

Child care facilities are not required to close unless directed to do so by public health. Operators can use their discretion to close if they have operational or business reasons. For instance, facilities experiencing illness amongst staff may need to close for operational reasons if they are unable to maintain staff to child ratios as required under the [Child Care Licensing Regulation](#).

While not required by public health, child care operators may ask individuals who recently attended or worked in their program to notify them if they test/ed positive for COVID-19. Child care operators may notify people who may have been exposed to COVID-19 without breaching individual privacy. The following language is recommended to share with parents and caregivers if a person in child care recently tested positive for COVID-19:

This notice is to inform you that a person in our child care in the [program] has tested positive for COVID-19. They last attended child care on [date] and began showing symptoms on [date]. You should monitor your child for symptoms of COVID-19. If your child is not experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, your child can continue to attend child care, unless advised by public health to stay home.

Visitors

Child care centres can transition back to their normal practices for welcoming visitors.

