

COVID-19: Guidance for Childcare Programs

The Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) is monitoring closely the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak. Current information suggests that person-to-person spread will continue to occur and more cases might be identified in the United States, including in Chicago. Based on what we've seen in China and in other countries, most cases of COVID-19 cause a mild illness. To date, children also seem to be less likely to become ill. However, stopping transmission of the virus through everyday practices is the best way to keep our city, schools, and homes safe. The following interim guidance is intended for childcare programs and may help administrators prevent exposures to all acute respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19. The guidance also provides planning considerations if there are more widespread, community outbreaks of COVID-19.

Recommended Strategies for Childcare Programs to Use Now

- **Actively encourage sick children and employees to stay home:**
 - Children and staff who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness are recommended to stay home and not come to daycare until they are free of fever (100.4°) for at least 24 hours.
 - Ensure that your sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are aware of these policies.
 - Talk with companies that provide contract services about the importance of sick employees staying home and encourage them to develop non-punitive leave policies.
 - Maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member.
- **Separate sick children and employees and send them home immediately.**
 - Sick children and employees should cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
 - Young children may not be able to communicate when something is wrong. Develop a plan for identifying children who get sick during the school day.
 - Offer staff a “refresher” training on how to recognize respiratory illness signs and symptoms in children.
- **Emphasize staying home when sick, respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene by all children and employees:**
 - Place posters that encourage [staying home when sick](#), [cough and sneeze etiquette](#), and [hand hygiene](#) at the entrance to your daycare and in other areas where they are likely to be seen.
 - Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles.
 - Instruct children and employees to clean their hands often with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60-95% alcohol, or wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Soap and water should be used preferentially if hands are visibly dirty.
 - Provide soap and water and alcohol-based hand rubs in the school. Note: Small children should only use hand sanitizers under adult supervision. Use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers has raised concerns about eye contamination, skin reactions, alcohol poisoning, and flammability.
 - Ensure that adequate supplies are maintained. Place hand rubs for employees in multiple locations to encourage hand hygiene.
- **Perform routine environmental cleaning:**
 - Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the daycare. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label.
 - No additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is recommended at this time.
 - Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks, toys) can be wiped down before each use.

- **Advise parents and employees before traveling to check** the [CDC's Traveler's Health Notices](#) for the latest guidance and recommendations. CDPH strongly recommends avoiding travel to countries with level 3 travel notices, including layovers at airports. Children and adults returning from countries with a [Travel Alert Level 3](#) may face some limitations on their movement and activity. Please follow instructions during this time. For more information see CDPH's latest movement guidance at www.chicago.gov/coronavirus.

Planning for a Possible COVID-19 Outbreak in Chicago

Update your existing emergency operations plan:

- **Meet with your emergency operations coordinator or planning team to develop or update your emergency operations plan.** Review all aspects of your childcare facility, such as personnel, systems, services, and other resources. Make preparations for key prevention strategies.
- **Establish relationships with key community partners and stakeholders.** Clearly define each partner's role, responsibilities, and decision-making authority.

Update your emergency communication plan for distributing timely and accurate information. Identify everyone in your chain of communication (for example, staff, clients, suppliers, and key community partners and stakeholders) and establish systems for sharing information with them. Maintain up-to-date contact information for everyone in the communication chain. Identify platforms, such as a hotline, automated text messaging, and a website to help disseminate information to those inside and outside your childcare facility.

Identify and address potential language, cultural, and disability barriers associated with communicating information to staff, parents, and children.

Promote the daily practice of *everyday preventive actions* at all times. Use health messages and materials developed by credible public health sources, such as your local public health department or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Provide respiratory illness prevention supplies in your daycare. Have supplies on hand for staff and children, such as soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, tissues, and trash baskets.

- *Note: Keep hand sanitizers out of reach of small children. Use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers has raised concerns about eye contamination, skin reactions, alcohol poisoning, and flammability. Small children should only use hand sanitizers under adult supervision.*

Plan for staff absences. Develop flexible attendance and sick-leave policies. Staff may need to stay home when they are sick, caring for a sick household member, or caring for their children in the event of school dismissals. Identify critical job functions and positions, and plan for alternative coverage by cross-training staff (similar to planning for holiday staffing).

Identify space that can be used to separate sick people (if possible). Designate a space for sick staff and children who cannot leave your childcare facility immediately. If possible, designate a nearby separate bathroom just for sick people. Develop a plan for cleaning the room daily.

Fight stigma and fear by supporting people who may be coming back to the facility after traveling internationally or completing a quarantine or isolation period for COVID-19.

- People who have been cleared by the health department to return to school or work do not pose a risk of spreading COVID-19.
- Healthy people who returned more than 14 days ago from areas where COVID-19 is active do not pose a risk of spreading COVID-19

Let people know that being of Asian descent does not increase the chance of getting or spreading COVID-19.

- Viruses cannot target people from specific populations, ethnicities, or racial backgrounds.
- People of Asian descent, including Chinese Americans, are not more likely to get coronavirus than anyone else.

For more information on **how to prepare and respond to COVID-19**, see CDC's [Interim Guidance for Administrators of US Childcare Programs and K-12 Schools](#).

For more information on **Chicago's COVID-19 response**, please visit www.chicago.gov/coronavirus, email coronavirus@chicago.gov, or call **312-746-4835**.