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August 27, 2021

Early Childhood Division
Child Care and COVID
Fall 2021 Program Updates

Since March 2020, child care programs operating in North Dakota have been working diligently to adhere to best practice health and safety guidelines, as per guidance from public health and early childhood health specialists. This has made it possible for families in communities across the state to have access to child care for their children.

Today, the reality of continued and increasing community transmission of COVID-19 requires that the child care sector maintain its vigilant posture. Because we are still operating in a time of pandemic -- a disease event that is widespread and affects a large number of people – child care programs are strongly encouraged to adhere not only to required practices, but also to follow guidance and best practice to minimize the risk of infections.

- **Follow** minimum **sanitation** and **safety requirements**[1] and your program's policies regarding exclusion and return[2] as per ND Administrative Code.

- **Utilize** enhanced health and safety guidelines and infection control procedures as outlined in CDC Guidance for Child Care settings, as well as **guidance offered** by the ND Department of Health.

- Be proactive! **Open** and **honest communication** will give each family the information they need to be able to make decisions as they need to for their own family.

  - Share information with parents about practices being followed in your setting.

  - Notify parents when there are active infections in your program, telling them of your decisions regarding exclusion and quarantine and the decisions you have made in response

- Practice the CDC's **layered prevention strategies** at your child care.

  - Experience has shown that continued commitment to using **screening questions** for people who enter the child care setting, especially when used along with CDC's recommended layered prevention strategies can shorten the duration of program closures, and often can help ensure that programs can avoid receiving advice to close altogether.

See table on the following page for COVID-19 considerations.

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[1] NDAC 75-03-10-18 (1) – (28).
[2] NDAC 75-03-10-26(9). "Establish and implement practices in accordance with guidance obtained through consultation with local or state department of health authorities implemented regarding the exclusion and return of children with infectious or communicable conditions. The program may obtain this guidance directly or through current published materials regarding exclusion and return to the child care center."

Summary Table of Early Childhood Services (ECS) COVID-19 related considerations

	Center ECS	Family ECS	Group ECS	Preschool ECS	School Age ECS
Follow minimum sanitation and safety requirements as outlined in ND Administrative Code for Early Childhood Services**.**	**Required**	**Required**	**Required**	**Required**	**Required**
***Follow enhanced health and safety guidelines and infection control procedures as outlined in** CDC Guidance for Child Care settings**, as well as guidance offered by the ND Department of Health.**	Recommend	Recommend	Recommend	Recommend	Recommend
Establish and implement practices related to exclusion and return to settings for children with infectious or communicable diseases.	**Required**	**Required**	**Required**	**Required**	**Required**
***Follow advice given by the ND Department of Health related to quarantine and closure recommendations to limit and control COVID-19 outbreaks amongst children and staff.**	Recommend	Recommend	Recommend	Recommend	Recommend
Work with your licensing specialist and child care coaches to problem-solve issues as unique needs arise.	Recommend	Recommend	Recommend	Recommend	Recommend
Be proactive - Share information with parents about practices being followed in your setting.	Recommend	Recommend	Recommend	Recommend	Recommend
Be proactive - Notify parents when there are active infections in your program, telling them of your decisions regarding exclusion and quarantine and the decisions you have made in response.	Recommend	Recommend	Recommend	Recommend	Recommend
Utilize screening questions for everyone who enters your program's space [See page 7 of the Child Care FAQ**]**	Recommend	Recommend	Recommend	Recommend	Recommend

* This item's status changes from "recommended" to "required" if child care program applies for and accepts any ARPA or CRRSA funded child care grant (described briefly below).

Quarantine Procedures

If a child care provider learns of a positive COVID-19 case in their program, they should:

1. Contact the ND Department of Health at dohcovidchildcare@nd.gov or call the hotline at 1-866-207-2880.

2. Call your licensing specialist and report any need to quarantine or program closure due to COVID.

3. Notify affected families. Since DoH is NOT initiating contact tracing at this time, it is the provider's responsibility to contact their families to let them know of the exposure. ND DoH staff will provide a letter for providers to share with families.

The Department of Health has published a Q&A document specifically for child care providers, with a goal of explaining a variety of scenarios that providers and families may encounter. www.health.nd.gov/sites/www/files/documents/Files/MSS/coronavirus/Child_Care_Q_and_A.pdf

Coming Soon! New Child Care Program Grants Will Support Pandemic Operations

To help child care programs and workers continue to navigate the ups and downs of operating during a pandemic, DHS will be making a series of grants available, with more information to come by early September.

These grants are not competitive, which means if a child care program submits a complete application, is eligible, and agrees to abide by the grant program terms, they will receive funding, as long as there is funding available.

Applications will open on approximately September 20, 2021, and will be available through a new grant management module in the Growing Futures registry.

Please **make sure** that **your** registry **account is up to date** or, if you don't yet have an account, to establish one. This will help ensure you are ready to apply. For help, visit: www.ndgrowingfutures.org/help-center.

Parents Lead Toolkit – Supporting parenting during a pandemic

Even though babies and toddlers may not know what is going on, they may pick up a parent's worry and anxiety with their "sixth sense." The department's behavioral health division's Parent's Lead Toolkit provides information and insights into parenting during a pandemic and is a valuable resource with conversation guides for parents to use with children of all age groups, including early childhood and preschool. It's available online at www.parentslead.org/COVID-19.