Welcome
Given the ongoing community transmission of COVID-19, a layered set of strategies is essential to slowing the spread of the virus. This includes the strong recommendation to mask when indoors (regardless of vaccination status), be up to date with your COVID-19 vaccinations, and have good ventilation in all the rooms in your home or center.

Factors that increase the risk of spreading COVID-19:
- Enclosed spaces with poor air flow - where particles containing the COVID-19 virus can build up
- Crowded places with many people nearby
- Situations where people are breathing heavily and releasing a lot of respiratory fluids - for example when exercising, shouting, or singing.
- Being in any of these situations for a long time.

Below is a summary of requirements and best practices for early care and education (ECE) providers to lower the risk of COVID-19 transmission in ECE settings. In addition to this information, please remember:
- ECE providers must comply with applicable Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Emergency Temporary Standards (ETS) and LA County Health Officer Order. In instances where LA County Public Health orders and Cal/OSHA ETS are not in full alignment, the more stringent requirements must be adhered to.
- ECE providers should review and follow the general guidance for businesses. The best practices for ECE described here are intended to supplement this general guidance.
- ECE providers must follow the requirements in the Exposure Management Plan Guidance for Early Care and Education Sites.
Follow mask rules for employees, children, and visitors

Masks must be worn indoors in some settings and situations, including when there has been exposure to COVID-19. For more details on masking and other requirements for individuals with COVID-19 and close contacts see the COVID-19 Exposure Management Plan Guidance in Early Care and Education Sites and ECE Actions for Isolation and Close Contacts Flow Chart.

The current Los Angeles County Health Officer Order - Responding Together at Work in the Community strongly recommends that all individuals, regardless of vaccination status, wear a mask in indoor public settings. This recommendation applies to children ages 24 months and older, employees, staff, volunteers, parents, and visitors. Some exceptions to the masking recommendations apply, as noted below. Individual ECE providers, programs, and facilities may choose to have more restrictive policies than those described in the current health officer order:

- **Visitors**: It is strongly recommended that all visitors, including parents and caregivers, regardless of vaccination status, bring and wear masks when they are indoors at the facility. Make masks available to those who arrive without them. See the LA County DPH masks page for more information.

- **Children**: It is strongly recommended that all children ages 24 months and older wear a highly protective mask (which means it fits well and provides good filtration) when they are indoors at the facility. A good fit means the mask covers the mouth and nose and fits snugly against the sides of the face and nose. Good filtration means the mask has multiple layers, including a layer or filter made of synthetic non-woven material. While all masks provide some level of protection, well-fitting respirators (e.g., KN95/KF94, and N95 for older children) and double masking (wearing a snug cloth mask over medical mask) provide the best protection. ECE sites are not required to provide masks to enrolled children. Masks should be removed during nap time or when children are eating and drinking. For more information, see ph.lacounty.gov/masks and Masking Tips for Children.

- **Mask Exemption Policy**: At times when the Health Officer Order requires universal masking in indoor public settings including ECE, or someone has been exposed to a person infected with COVID-19 and is required to wear a mask for 10 days after exposure, alternative protective strategies may be adopted to accommodate students who are on Individualized Education Plans or Individualized Family Service Plans and cannot tolerate masks or in situations where use of masks is challenging due to student safety, or an existing disability. Individuals may be exempt from wearing a mask for the following reasons:
  - Persons younger than 24 months should never wear a mask.
  - Persons who are hearing impaired, or communicating with a person who is hearing impaired, where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication.
  - Persons with a medical condition, mental health condition, or disability or whose medical provider has determined that it is unsafe for them to wear a mask. A certification from a state licensed health care provider attesting that the student has a condition or disability that precludes them from wearing a mask safely will be accepted as proof of exemption.

The following licensed health care professionals may provide such attestations: Medical providers including physician (MD or DO), nurse practitioner (NP), or physician assistant (PA) practicing under the authority of a licensed physician; and licensed mental and behavioral health practitioners including Clinical Social Worker (LCSW), clinical psychologist (Psy.D.) Professional Clinical Counselor (LPCC), or Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT). At times when the Health Officer Order may require universal indoor masking, children 24 months of age and older who are exempt from wearing a mask should wear a face shield with a drape at the bottom, as long as their condition allows it.
Guidance for ECE Providers

Programs may choose to implement alternative protective strategies when accommodating these children. Alternative strategies for consideration include: regular (weekly) screening testing of unmasked children; strategies to improve ventilation in indoor spaces that accommodate unmasked children; and offering students and staff who share indoor air spaces with unmasked students upgraded respirator masks (e.g., N95, KN95, KF94).

• **Mask exemption for close contacts:** Regardless of universal indoor masking policy, the LA County Blanket Quarantine Order currently requires close contacts to a case who remain asymptomatic to wear a highly protective mask for 10 days after last exposure when around others while indoors, and to test at least once 3-5 days after exposure, if they wish to avoid quarantine at home. Children who are 24 months of age or older and who are identified as close contacts with a valid mask exemption and who wish to continue attending the program immediately after an exposure must remain asymptomatic, monitor for symptoms for 10 days after last exposure, and **test negative for COVID-19 at least once 3-5 days after exposure AND once 6-9 days after exposure.** Students 24 months of age and older who are not able to meet these requirements and cannot wear a mask after exposure will need to remain at home for ten days after last exposure.

• Children, staff, and administrators at ECE programs must cooperate with instructions from LA County DPH outbreak investigators who may implement temporary strategies that differ from these protocols if an outbreak occurs at the site. For example, children who are unable to mask may be instructed to stay home during an active outbreak for the safety of those children and all others who attend or work at the facility.

• For employees who are unable to wear a mask, refer to **Cal/OSHA ETS for return-to-work requirements after an exposure event.**

• Please refer to the [COVID-19 Exposure Management Plan Guidance in Early Care and Education Sites](https://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov) for more information on masking policy after an exposure event.

• **Employees: Requirement to provide respirators and masks to ECE employees:** All ECE employees who work indoors or in vehicles around others must be offered surgical-grade masks (also known as medical procedure masks) and higher-level respirators (e.g., KN95, KF94, or N95 respirator masks) for voluntary use. **Follow mask rules for employees** for more details.

  o Consider also offering gloves for tasks such as serving food, diapering, handling trash, or using cleaning and disinfectant products.

  *Some independent contractors are considered employees under the State Labor Code. For more details, check the California Department of Industrial Relations’ [Independent contractor versus employee](https://www.dol.ca.gov) webpage.*

**Screen and respond to cases**

• **The ECE site is required by Cal-OSHA to have a process for screening employees for COVID-19 symptoms.**

  o Options include having employees evaluate their own symptoms before coming to work, using signage at the entrance of the workplace, or completing daily on-site screening. Temperature-taking is not required but is allowed. See [Entry Screening](https://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov).

  o Employees who have COVID-19 symptoms, test positive, or are exposed are required to follow [return to work guidance](https://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov).
Guidance for ECE Providers

- Similar screening is recommended for children and visitors before entry to the ECE facility, although not currently required by regulations or health officer orders. The same options are available as for employees.
- Post signage to remind people to NOT enter if they have a fever or other symptoms of COVID-19 and/or a positive test.
- Exclude any person or isolate any child or staff showing symptoms of a contagious disease or illness until they can be transported home, as required by CDSS Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) and pursuant to Title 22, CCR sections 101216(h), 101226.1(a)(1) and 102417(e).
  - Ensure that isolated children continue to receive adequate supervision and that their health is continually observed throughout the day according to licensing requirements.
  - Follow public health instructions for close contacts (ph.lacounty.gov/covidcontacts) or isolation (ph.lacounty.gov/covidisolation) if an individual who lives in a family childcare home is exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19.
- ECE providers must notify LA County DPH officials, CCLD staff, and families of any confirmed case of COVID-19. Follow the COVID-19 Exposure Management Plan Guidance in Early Care and Education Sites.
  - Individual cases (1 case) should be reported within 1 business day.
  - Clusters of 3 or more cases occurring within a 14-day period should be reported immediately to DPH and to the CDSS Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) through their local Regional Office as required pursuant to Title 22, CCR section 101212(d).
  - Family child care homes must report a communicable disease outbreak, when determined by DPH, to CCLD through their local Regional Office pursuant to Title 22, CCR section 102416.2(c)(3).
- Refer to the ECE COVID-19 Toolkit (ph.lacounty.gov/EducationToolkitECE) for additional information on reporting and managing infections and exposures in the workplace.

Consider maintaining physical distancing and stable groups

Although physical distancing is no longer required at ECE sites, it can help to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Consider implementing the following measures:

- Maintain well defined cohorts. ECE settings typically have a stable group model with the same groups of staff and children together each day. Try to maintain a clear separation between groups throughout the day.
- Stagger drop-off and pick-up times to reduce crowding. Consider making it easier for parents and guardians to drop children off at the beginning and end of day to stagger how many children arrive and leave at the same time and prevent crowding at the entryway.
- Use visual aids to remind children to maintain distance from others such as tape on the floor or pictures.
- Make meals safer:
  - For employees, staff, and volunteers, maintain an outdoor break area. For those who must eat indoors in a shared room, ensure that the area is well-ventilated and encourage physical distancing by at least six feet (about 2 arms lengths) while eating/drinking. This can be facilitated by strategic placement of tables and chairs. Stagger break times so fewer workers are using lunch or breakrooms at the same time.
Guidance for ECE Providers

- For children, consider having meals outdoors if space and weather permit. When eating indoors, ensure that the area is well ventilated and encourage physical distancing. Consider moving tables to spread children out or use tape and pictures to indicate where they can sit for adequate spacing between children.

Improve ventilation

- Make sure your building’s HVAC system is in good, working order.
- Consider installing portable high-efficiency air cleaners, upgrading the building’s air filters to the highest efficiency possible, and making other modifications to increase the quantity of outside air and ventilation in all working areas.
- Consider how to safely bring fresh air into the facility. When weather and working conditions allow, open windows and doors if it is safe to do so. Consider using child-safe fans to increase the effectiveness of open windows; always position window fans to blow air outward, not inward.
- When opening windows is not possible, layering of other infection control measures becomes even more important to reduce risk of spread, like recommended masking and physical distancing.
- If you use transport vehicles, such as buses or vans, it is recommended to open windows to increase outdoor airflow when it is safe to do so and weather permitting.
- See CDPH Interim guidance for Ventilation, Filtration, and Air Quality in Indoor Environments and CDC Ventilation in Schools and Child Care Programs page.

Clean and disinfect

Train and monitor staff to follow basic infection control practices related to requirements for cleaning and disinfection, housekeeping and sanitation principles listed below:

- Follow cleaning and disinfection requirements as laid out in CCR sections 101216(e)(2), 102416(c), 101238(a) and 102417(b).
- Laundry, such as clothing and bedding, should be washed using the appropriate hot water setting. Allow items to dry completely. If handling dirty laundry from a person who is sick, wear gloves and a mask.
- When choosing cleaning products, consider using those approved for use against COVID-19 on the EPA-approved list “N” and follow product instructions for use.
- The Healthy Schools Act requires anyone using disinfectants at childcare centers to complete annual California Department of Pesticide Regulation-approved online training at the California School & Child Care Integrated Pest Management website. This does not apply to family childcare homes.
- For more information about cleaning and disinfection, see CDC guidance on Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility.

Encourage vaccination

- COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective and are the best way to prevent COVID-19 outbreaks in the workplace and in the community. Although vaccinated people may still become infected, the vaccines show their greatest effectiveness at limiting severity of illness and preventing hospitalization and the most dire consequences of infection, including death. COVID-19 vaccines are free and widely available in every community. Appointments are not needed in many locations, and you will not be asked about your immigration status when you get a vaccine. Visit ph.lacounty.gov/howtogetvaccinated or call the DPH Vaccine Call Center at 833-540-0473 for more information.
Guidance for ECE Providers

- Provide paid time off for workers to get their primary and booster doses.
- Consider offering a vaccination clinic at your ECE center to make it convenient for employees and families to get vaccinated. Consider opportunities to incentivize or make it easier for employees to get vaccinated. This might include offering rewards such as additional paid time off or cash bonuses, and policies that require employees to be up to date against COVID-19.

Support handwashing

- Place hand sanitizer at entry and outside communal bathrooms with signage promoting use. Be sure that hand sanitizer is out of the reach of children. Supervise children when they use hand sanitizer to prevent swallowing alcohol or contact with eyes.
- Encourage frequent handwashing among children and staff.
- See the CDC guidance When and How to Wash Your Hands.

Communicate

- Post signage so that visitors are aware of policies, including requiring masking indoors for close contacts and the strong recommendation (or requirement for those facilities that maintain such a policy) for all visitors, employees, and children over 24 months to wear a face mask while indoors.
- Update your parent manual and share any new policies with parents.
- Post your COVID-19 safety policies on your website.

Coping with stress

Throughout this long-lasting COVID-19 pandemic, many are facing challenges that can be stressful for both adults and children. It is natural to feel stress, anxiety, grief, and worry during the COVID-19 pandemic. If you, a family you serve or someone else you know is having a hard time coping, help is available 24/7 by calling the LA County Department of Mental Health’s Helpline 1-800-854-7771. Help is also available via a text that says “LA” to 741741 or simply by calling the family physician of the person in need of support. The webpage http://dmh.lacounty.gov/resources includes tips to help manage stress and improve your emotional health.

Below are a few resources and recommendations to help in dealing with stress:

- California’s playbook on Stress Relief during COVID-19 provides guidance on how to notice stress in kids and outlines tools and strategies on how to reduce stress for children and adults.
- Promote healthy nutrition, sleep, physical activity habits and self-care.
- Discuss and share stress reduction strategies with colleagues and families.
- Encourage staff and children to talk with people they trust about their concerns and feelings.
- Communicate openly and often with staff, children, and families about mental health support services available in the community, including if mental health consultation is available to the program.
- Consider posting signage for CalHOPE and the National Distress H: 1-800-985-5990, or text “TalkWithUs” to 66746.
- Encourage staff to call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255), 1-888-628-9454 for Spanish, or Lifeline Crisis Chat if they are feeling overwhelmed with emotions such as sadness, depression, or anxiety; or call 911 if they feel like they want to harm themselves or others.