

Guidance for Early Childhood Education Providers Requirements and Best Practices

Updates:

10/27/22

- Revised to align with the updated LAC DPH Health Officer Order regarding indoor masking. For most individuals in the ECE setting, masking may be based on individual preference. Exceptions are individuals who have returned before completing 10 days of isolation after a confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis and individuals who are within 10 days of close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19. Those persons continue to be required to mask indoors around others. Also, individuals who are more vulnerable to developing severe COVID-19 disease are strongly recommended to wear a highly protective mask in crowded, indoor settings with poor ventilation.
- Reporting of individual cases of COVID-19 in the ECE setting is no longer required. Moving forward, any clusters of 3 or more linked cases within a 14-day period must be reported to Public Health immediately and no later than 1 business day.

Welcome

A layered approach using multiple preventive strategies is the best way to help slow the spread of COVID-19. Examples include staying [up to date](#) with COVID-19 vaccines, opening windows in your home or center to improve the flow of fresh air, and making sure that anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 illness stay home.

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** – such as 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 [help](#) lower the risk of [spreading](#) COVID-19 in ECE settings. In addition to this information, please remember:

- ECE providers must comply with applicable [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Emergency Temporary Standards](#) (Cal/OSHA ETS) and the LA County [Health Officer Order](#). [The stricter requirements must be followed in situations where LA County Public Health orders are different from Cal/OSHA ETS.](#)
- 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](#).

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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 and in the Community](#) states that in most businesses and public settings, individuals may wear a mask based on individual preference. This applies to children 24 months and older, employees, staff, volunteers, parents, and visitors. The Health Officer Order also states that no one can be prevented from wearing a mask in a business or public setting. For persons who prefer to wear a mask indoors around others, guidance on how to choose and wear a highly protective mask in order to best protect themselves and others around them is available at the LAC DPH webpage on [Masks](#). Some exceptions to the masking policy 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:** All visitors, including parents and caregivers, regardless of vaccination status, may bring and wear masks when they are indoors at the facility. Consider making masks available to those who choose to wear them but arrive without them. See the LA County DPH [masks](#) page for more information.
- **Children:** All children 24 months and older may bring and wear masks when they are indoors at the facility. 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 masking in indoor public settings (including ECE), for example, when someone is exposed to a person with COVID-19 and are required to wear a mask for 10 days after exposure, individuals may be exempt from wearing a mask for the following reasons:
 - Children younger than 24 months. Anyone younger than 24 months should never wear a mask due to risk of suffocation.
 - Persons who are deaf or hard of hearing or when communicating with a person who is deaf or hard of hearing where it is important to see the mouth to communicate well.
 - Persons with a medical, mental health, or other condition, for whom a medical provider has determined that it is unsafe for them to wear a mask. A letter from a state licensed health care provider attesting that the person has a condition that prevents them from wearing a mask safely must be provided. The following licensed health care professionals may provide exemption letters:
 - Medical providers including physician (MD or DO), nurse practitioner (NP), or physician assistant (PA) practicing under the authority of a licensed physician.
 - Licensed mental and behavioral health practitioners. These include clinical social worker (LCSW), clinical psychologist (Psy.D., Ph.D.) professional clinical counselor (LPCC), or marriage and family therapist (LMFT).

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When wearing a mask would be required based on current health officer orders, persons 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. Programs may choose to put in place alternative protective strategies to accommodate these individuals. Examples include:

- Regular (weekly) screening testing of unmasked children and staff,
 - Strategies to improve ventilation in indoor spaces that accommodate unmasked children and staff, and
 - Offering students and staff who share indoor air spaces with unmasked persons 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. These close contacts must also test at least once 3-5 days after exposure if they wish to avoid quarantine at home. Close contacts who are 24 months of age and older 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.**

Persons 24 months of age and older who do not meet these requirements and cannot wear a mask after exposure will need to remain at home for ten days after last exposure.

- LA County DPH outbreak investigators may use different temporary strategies if an outbreak occurs at a site. Children, staff, and administrators at ECE programs must follow their instructions. For example, children who are unable to mask may be instructed to stay home during an active outbreak. This is for the safety of those 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 being exposed to someone with COVID-19.
 - Please refer to the [COVID-19 Exposure Management Plan Guidance in Early Care and Education Sites](#) for more information on masking policy after an exposure.
- **Employees: Requirement to provide respirators and masks to ECE employees*:** All ECE employees who work indoors or in vehicles around others must be offered **at no cost** surgical-grade masks (also **called** medical procedure masks) and higher-level respirators (e.g., KN95, KF94, or N95 respirator masks) for voluntary use. Note that Cal/OSHA also requires employers to provide respirators upon request for voluntary use to any employee, regardless of vaccination status, who is working indoors or in vehicles with more than one person along with instructions on how to ensure the mask fits appropriately. See [mask rules for employees](#) for more details.
 - Employers must ensure that no person is prevented from wearing a mask as a condition of participation in an activity or entry into the ECE site unless wearing a mask would pose a safety hazard.

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- 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](#) 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.
 - 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](#).
 - Employees who have COVID-19 symptoms, test positive, or are exposed are required to follow [Cal/OSHA ETS return to work guidance](#).
 - Similar screening is recommended, but not currently required, for children and visitors before entering the ECE facility. The same options [may be used that are recommended](#) for employees.
- Post [signage](#) to remind people NOT to enter if they have a fever or other symptoms of COVID-19 and/or a positive COVID-19 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 in 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 and CCLD staff of [any clusters of 3 or more linked cases within a 14-day period immediately and no later than 1 business day](#). Follow the [COVID-19 Exposure Management Plan Guidance in Early Care and Education Sites](#).
 - 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 LA County 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

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of staff and children together each day. Try to **keep** 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, **like** tape on the floor or pictures, to remind children to maintain distance from others.**
- **Make meals safer:**
 - For employees, staff, and volunteers, maintain an outdoor break area. For **people** who must eat indoors in a shared room, **make sure** that the area has good air flow. 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. **Consider** staggering break times so fewer workers are using lunch or breakrooms at the same time.
 - For children, consider having meals outdoors if space and weather permit. When eating indoors, **make sure** that the area **has good air flow** 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.

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- The [Healthy Schools Act](#) requires anyone using disinfectants at child care 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](#). They are an important tool to help prevent COVID-19 outbreaks in the workplace and in the community. Although vaccinated people may still [get COVID-19](#), the vaccines [lower the risk of severe illness and death](#). COVID-19 vaccines are free and [widely available](#) in [LA County](#). Appointments are not needed in many locations, and you will not be asked about your immigration status. Visit ph.lacounty.gov/howtogetvaccinated or call the DPH Vaccine Call Center at 1-833-540-0473 for more information.
- Provide paid time off for workers to get their primary and booster doses.
- Consider offering a [vaccination clinic](#) at your [workplace](#) to make it [easier and more](#) convenient for employees and families to get vaccinated. Consider opportunities to incentivize employees to get vaccinated, such as additional paid time off or cash bonuses. [Finally, consider creating](#) 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

- [ECE sites are encouraged to post signage noting that face masks are effective at preventing transmission of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses, and the proper use of face masks for visitors, employees, and children over 24 months who choose to wear them.](#)
- Update your parent manual and share any new policies with parents.
- Post your COVID-19 safety policies on your website.

Coping with stress

[The COVID-19 pandemic has caused many people to face challenges that are 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.

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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.

