

# Supporting Child Wellness:

## Public Health Guidance for Communicable Disease (including COVID-19) Management in Child Care Settings

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August 25, 2022

### Introduction

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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 reduce the risk of and manage infections, including COVID-19.

COVID-19 continues to circulate in our population. As long as cases occur within our communities, children and adults in child care settings will continue to be affected. 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 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.

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.

## Recommendations for Families and Child Care Staff

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### 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. All COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Canada protect against serious complications. 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. People 6 months and older are eligible for COVID-19 vaccines. More information about COVID-19 vaccines, including information about COVID-19 vaccines for children, is 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](#). Evidence-based immunization information and tools for B.C. residents are available from [BCCDC](#) and [ImmunizeBC](#) websites.

### Health Awareness

Child care operators should ensure that staff, parents, caregivers, other adults entering the facility, and children are aware that they should not come to child care if they are sick and unable to participate fully in routine activities. Child care operators should support this practice by communicating the importance of everyone doing a health check.

A health check means a person regularly checking to ensure they (or their child) are not experiencing symptoms of illness (including but not limited to [COVID-19 symptoms](#)) that would limit their ability to participate fully in regular activities before coming to child care or child care to prevent spread of communicable diseases, such as COVID-19, within the child care settings. Child care facilities do not need to monitor children or staff for symptoms of illness beyond routine practices.

### What to Do When Sick

The management of COVID-19 in the community is 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 as long as symptoms have improved and they are well enough to participate in regular activities. Child care facilities should not require a health care provider note (i.e. a doctor's note) to confirm the health status of any individual, beyond those required to support medical accommodation as per usual practice.

If a staff member, child, or other person develops symptoms of illness at child care 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 the child care premises, 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 unless they are under two years old. 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.

## Hand Hygiene

Hand washing with plain soap and water or using an [effective hand sanitizer](#) reduces the spread of illness. Everyone should practice diligent hand hygiene and child care facilities should facilitate regular opportunities for staff and children to wash their hands. 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”).

## 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.

The decision to wear a mask beyond when it is recommended by public health is a personal one, based on individual preference. Some children over two years old and staff may choose to continue to wear a non-medical mask or face covering based on personal or family choice. The choice of staff, families, or children to choose whether they practice additional personal prevention measures should be supported and treated with respect. 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. 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 who are in close proximity to a child should follow routine infection control practices and care plans for the child, if applicable.

## Recommendations for Child Care Operators

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### 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.

## Visitors

Child care centres can follow normal practices for welcoming visitors. Families and visitors may enter and participate in child care activities and may be welcomed into the child care program. Parents may and are welcome to enter child care centres for drop off and pick up.

## Communicable Disease Management

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Most communicable diseases experienced by children and staff within child care settings may be managed by the individual/family and through routine preventive measures, such as staying home from child care until well enough to participate in regular activities. Resources are available to support management of routine communicable diseases, including [HealthLinkBC](#), the [BCCDC Guide to Common Childhood Diseases](#) and [Sneezes and Diseases](#) website.

Public health may become directly involved if certain reportable diseases, such as measles, are identified where there are effective interventions available to prevent further spread and protect against severe disease. Additional time-limited public health measures may also be implemented at the discretion of the Medical Health Officer or Provincial Health Officer in response to broader risk of communicable disease transmission in the community.

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](#).