

Best Practice COVID-19 Workplace Safety: Early Childhood Education and Care Services

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This information provides best practice guidance to help early childhood education and care services manage COVID-19, influenza and other respiratory viruses, safely.

Please use this information alongside other Tasmanian Public Health guidance including *Best Practice COVID-19 Safety for Employers*.

Public Health recommends all workplaces comply with work health and safety requirements and:

- undertake a COVID-19 risk assessment
- develop and maintain policies and procedures to minimise the chances of COVID-19 and other infectious illnesses spreading within the workplace
- use best practice guidance to inform those policies and procedures.

COVID-19 requirements

Under the *Public Health Act 1997*:

- people who test positive to COVID-19 must:
 - isolate for at least seven days from the date of their positive test result; this includes people living in disability residential settings
 - inform Public Health of their positive result if they used a rapid antigen test (RAT)
- close contacts of people who test positive to COVID-19 must:
 - inform their employer that they are a close contact
 - test for COVID-19 every day they leave their home, for seven days from becoming a close contact
 - wear a face mask (unless exempt) in indoor settings outside the home
 - isolate and test immediately if they have any symptoms.

People with symptoms

Public Health strongly recommends anyone with acute (or new) respiratory symptoms including fever, cough, sore throat and/or runny nose, to stay at home, even if those symptoms are mild, and get tested for COVID-19. Testing can be by PCR laboratory test or RAT.

If the result is negative and the person still has acute symptoms, they should stay at home and repeat the test in the next 24-48 hours.

If the result is negative the second time and they still have acute symptoms, they should stay at home until

the symptoms resolve completely or there is significant improvement. There are other respiratory viruses, including influenza viruses, that can cause serious illness in some people, and spread easily from person to person.

Anyone with a fever, who feels (or for infants, seems) unwell or has any increase in symptoms should stay home even if they test negative for COVID-19.

If symptoms have resolved or mostly gone, they can return to work/care. If some mild symptoms remain, Public Health recommends they wear a face mask when away from home.

If the person has any concerns, or is unsure if their symptoms are improving, Public Health recommends they seek medical advice.

Best practice COVID-19 control measures for early childhood education and care services

1. Planning

- Maintain and use your COVID-19 safety plan.
- Maintain your COVID-19 outbreak management plan and consider including influenza within its scope. See the *Case and Outbreak Management Framework for Tasmanian Settings* and related tools.
- Stay informed about the level of risk in the local community and control measures in place or recommended.

2. Vaccination

COVID-19 vaccines are recommended for people aged five years and older, including for pregnant women.

Influenza vaccine is recommended for everyone aged six months and older, including for pregnant women. See *Best Practice Guidance for Workplaces: Vaccination*.

- Recommend workers and families be up to date with vaccination against COVID-19 and influenza.

3. Workers and children with symptoms

- Advise workers and parents/carers that those with symptoms of COVID-19 (including fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose) should get tested for COVID-19.
- Advise workers and parents/carers that those with symptoms who return an initial COVID-19 negative test result should get tested again the next day.
- Advise workers and parents/carers that staff and children with mild symptoms can return to work/the service if they have tested negative for COVID-19 two days in a row

and feel (or for infants, seem) well despite their mild symptoms. If they feel (or seem) unwell or have a fever, they should stay at home.

Advise workers that, if they have mild symptoms and are at work, they must wear a face mask.

- Recommend staff and children with persistent or ongoing respiratory symptoms to see their general practitioner or healthcare provider about controlling their symptoms.
- Maintain policies and procedures to manage children who develop symptoms of COVID-19 while at the service. This includes requesting that parents/carers collect children with symptoms as soon as practicable.

While children with symptoms await collection:

- support them to distance from other children where possible
- minimise the number of workers caring for or supervising them, where possible.

4. Workers and students who test positive for COVID-19 or are close contacts of someone who has COVID-19

- Remind staff and parents/carers that, under the Public Health Act 1997:
 - people who test positive to COVID-19 must isolate for at least seven days from the positive test result
 - close contacts may leave their home (and attend early childhood education and care services) if they have no symptoms AND have a negative COVID-19 test before leaving their place of residence each day for seven days.
- Remind staff that they are obliged to inform their employer if they are a close contact of a person who has tested positive to COVID-19. Employers may permit close contacts to work in high-risk settings, with risk controls according to the workplace risk assessment.

5. Face masks

See *Best Practice Guidance for Workplaces: Face masks*.

- Maintain a supply of single-use surgical face masks for workers use.
- Support use of face masks by anyone who chooses to wear a mask or who is at risk of severe illness.
- Recommend workers wear a face mask if they are caring for a child with acute respiratory symptoms (while they await collection from the facility).

6. Ventilation

See *Best Practice Guidance for Workplaces: Ventilation*.

- Spend time outside and open doors and windows, as safe and practicable.
- Maintain and use air conditioners, heaters and other mechanical ventilation devices, as safe and appropriate.

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7. Ventilation

Those at risk of severe illness includes people who are not up to date with vaccination, people with specific underlying medical conditions, people with compromised immune systems and pregnant women.

- Identify employees at risk of severe illness from COVID-19 and strategies to minimise their risk of exposure to the virus.
- Record and take account of medical advice for any child at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

8. Physical distancing, hygiene and cleaning

See *Best Practice Guidance for Workplaces: Physical Distancing* and *Best Practice Guidance for Workplaces: Hygiene and Cleaning*.

- Remind adults in the setting to physically distance from each other when feasible. In a children's learning and care environment, physical distancing is most important between adults.
- Discourage gathering of parents at indoor arrival and departure points.
- Have processes in place to ensure hygiene practices are in line with the National Health and Medical Research Council guidance: *Staying Healthy: Preventing Infectious Diseases in Early Childhood Education and Care Services*
- Ensure alcohol-based hand gel is readily available for workers and at entrances to the facility.
- Support children to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue then put the tissue in the rubbish; or to cover coughs and sneezes with the inside of their elbow rather than their hands.
- Teach and support children to wash their hands effectively with soap and running water on arrival, before/after meals and after toileting, blowing their nose, coughing, sneezing and using shared equipment.
- Keep tissues and rubbish bins readily available.
- Ensure appropriate cleaning and disinfection, with a focus on frequently touched surfaces. Cleaning and disinfection of toys and equipment is not required after every use.

Further information

- www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au
- Public Health:
 - email: public.health@health.tas.gov.au
 - phone: 1800 671 738

The management of COVID-19 continues to evolve, and as evidence accumulates, advice may be revised. Updates are available at www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au. If any information in this factsheet is inconsistent with information on that website, please use the information online.