

Guidance for Early Childhood Education Providers Requirements and Best Practices

Welcome

On July 17 and 22, the Los Angeles (LA) County Health Officer issued a revised [Health Officer Order](#) requiring the use of face masks in all indoor public settings, including public and private businesses. Given the sustained and substantial community transmission of COVID-19 and the increasing presence of the more easily spread Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus, masking indoors, regardless of vaccination status, is essential to slowing the spread of COVID-19 in the community. The Delta variant spreads more easily than strains of the virus that circulated in LA County in the past.

As the COVID-19 virus continues to spread, the risk is greatest for those who are not fully vaccinated. Based on the unique risk to children under 12, who are not yet eligible for vaccination, and teens, of whom only a minority are fully vaccinated, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has made masking a requirement for everyone indoors, regardless of vaccination status, in childcare, K–12 schools, camps, and other youth settings. This state rule aligns with the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH)'s continued requirement for masking in indoor public spaces.

Below is a summary of requirements and best practices for early care and education (ECE) providers to enhance safety and lower the risk of COVID-19 transmission within their ECE settings as they transition to full operations. In addition to this information, please remember:

- ECE providers must comply with applicable [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Emergency Temporary Standards](#) (ETS) and the LA County Health Officer Order. Please note that the directives in the LA County Health Officer Order must be followed when they are stricter than the 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 the general guidance.

Follow mask rules for employees, children, and visitors

The current Los Angeles County [Health Officer Order](#), requires all individuals to, regardless of vaccination status, wear a mask in all indoor public settings and businesses. This order, and the state's requirement for masking at child-serving sites, applies to children 2 years (24 months) and older, employees, staff, volunteers, parents and all visitors. Some exceptions to the masking requirement still apply as noted below. Based on these rules, ECE providers and sites must:

- **Visitors:** Require all visitors, including parents and caregivers, regardless of vaccination status, to [bring and wear masks](#) when they are indoors at their facility. Make masks available to those who arrive without them.
- **Children:** Require all children ages 24 months and older to wear a face mask. Masks may be removed during nap time or when children are eating and drinking.
- **Employees*:** Require all employees, regardless of vaccination status, to wear masks when working indoors and in shared vehicles. Masks need not be worn indoors if the employee is alone



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in a room or actively eating or drinking at a seated or stationary location. Public Health recommends that all employees who are eating or drinking indoors be spaced at least 6 feet from other persons.

- Employees who work in a setting where they are in close contact with people who may not be or are not fully vaccinated (for example, children younger than 12), should be encouraged to wear a higher level of protection “[double-masking](#)” (wearing a cloth face mask OVER a surgical mask) or a respirator (e.g., N95 or KN95). This is particularly important if the employee is not fully vaccinated and is working in an indoor, in a crowded outdoor setting, or in a shared vehicle.
- Consider also offering gloves for tasks such as serving food, diapering, handling trash, or using cleaning and disinfectant products.

*Some independent contractors are considered as employees under the State Labor Code. For more details, check the California Department of Industrial Relations’ [Independent contractor versus employee](#) webpage.

- See [Los Angeles County Health Officer Order](#) page, and the [Cal/OSHA Emergency Temporary Standards](#) page for more information about mask requirements. Please note that the directives in the LA County Health Officer Order must be followed when they are more stringent than the Cal/OSHA ETS.

Screen and respond to cases

- Post [signage](#) to remind everyone who enters your establishment that they should NOT enter if they have symptoms of COVID-19 or if they are under isolation or quarantine orders.
- 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\(e\)](#).
 - Isolate children who begin to have COVID-19 symptoms while in care, from other children and staff.
 - Ensure that isolated children continue to receive adequate supervision and that the health of the child is continually observed throughout the day according to licensing requirements.
- Follow public health guidelines for [quarantine](#) or [isolation](#) if an individual who resides 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](#) for reporting COVID-19 cases to DPH.
 - Individual cases (1 case) should be reported within 1 business day.

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- Clusters of 3 or more cases occurring within 14 days should be reported immediately to DPH. Report outbreaks to the CDSS Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) through their local Regional Office as required pursuant to [Title 22, CCR section 101212\(d\)](#).
- Family childcare homes must report a communicable disease outbreak, when determined by the local health authority, to CCLD through their local Regional Office pursuant to [Title 22, CCR section 102416.2\(c\)\(3\)](#).
- Refer to the [ECE COVID-19 Toolkit](#) 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 is an additional tool for infection control that can be used at ECE sites to reduce the spread of COVID-19. If possible, consider implementing the following measures:

- **Maintain well defined cohorts.** Early care and education settings typically have a stable group model with the same groups of staff and children together each day. ECE providers should consider steps to maintain a clear separation between groups throughout the day. If feasible, this can help reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread if a child or staff person comes to the site infected.
- **Take steps to make meals safer:**
 - For employees, staff, and volunteers, maintain an outdoor break area where employees can take their breaks. For indoor break areas, keep tables 6 feet apart and post occupancy limits to reduce the risk of crowding.
 - For children, consider having meals outdoors if space and weather permit. When eating indoors, consider moving tables to spread children out or use name cards to provide adequate spacing between children.
- **Consider [use of barriers](#)** and partitions between cubicles to protect staff who are not fully vaccinated and have frequent close contact with other employees or visitors.

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, increase fresh outdoor air by opening windows and doors. Consider using child-safe fans to increase the effectiveness of open windows; always position window fans to blow air outward, not inward.
- Decrease occupancy in areas where outdoor airflow cannot be increased.
- If your business utilizes 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.

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- 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

Cleaning and disinfecting surfaces can reduce the risk of infection. Train and monitor staff to follow 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 and 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 that anyone using disinfectants at child care centers complete annual California Department of Pesticide Regulation-approved training. Online training can be found by going to the [California School & Child Care Integrated Pest Management](#) website. Note: This does not apply to family child care 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. COVID-19 vaccine is [widely available](#) in every community.

- Provide paid time off for vaccination. Employers with 26 or more employees must provide covered employees paid time off to attend vaccine appointments or if they are unable to work or telework due to vaccine-related symptoms. For more information, see the [2021 COVID-19 Supplemental Paid Sick Leave](#) webpage.
- Consider offering a [vaccination clinic](#) at your workplace to make it more convenient for your employees to get vaccinated. Consider opportunities to incentivize your employees to get vaccinated or to make it easier to get vaccinated. This might include offering rewards such as additional paid time off or cash bonus payments, and/or policies that are more relaxed for employees who are [fully vaccinated](#) against COVID-19.

Support handwashing

- Place handwashing stations or 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 under the age of 6 when they use hand sanitizer to prevent swallowing alcohol or contact with eyes.
- Encourage frequent handwashing among children and staff.

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- See the CDC guidance, [When and How to Wash your Hands](#).

Communicate

- Post [signage](#) so that visitors who are entering your building are aware of policies, including the requirement 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.
- Use your online platforms to communicate your COVID-19 safety policies to the public.

Coping with stress

As the world continues to combat COVID-19, many are facing challenges that can be stressful for both adults and children. Many of us and many of the families we serve may feel more concerned, worried, and fearful for our own health and the health of our loved ones. 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 as well as free access Headspace Plus – for mindfulness and meditation resources.

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, and 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 hotline: 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.