

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) MANAGEMENT POLICY (Victoria)

(Effective from 20 November 2021)

Introduction

COVID-19 is a new strain of coronavirus that was originally identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China in December 2019. The World Health Organization (WHO), has declared that COVID-19 outbreak as a 'pandemic' - a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (effective 11 March 2020). This is mainly due to the speed and scale of transmission of the virus in countries around the world, including Australia. COVID-19 is transmitted from someone who is infected with the virus to others in close contact through contaminated droplets spread by coughing or sneezing or by contact with contaminated hands or surfaces. According to Department of Health, the time of exposure to the virus and when symptoms first occur is anywhere from 2-14 days.

Symptoms can range from a mild illness, similar to a cold or flu, to pneumonia. People with COVID-19 may experience:

- o fever
- o flu-like symptoms such as coughing, sore throat and fatigue
- o shortness of breath

The [Australian Government](#) is constantly updating the current status of COVID-19 including health recommendations, travel restrictions, and a vast collection of resources and information to help people make informed decisions.

As this information is changing rapidly, our Service is monitoring health alerts and implementing measures suggested by key health experts to minimise the transmission of COVID-19.

Our Service has a range of comprehensive policies in place to guide best practice in relation to health and safety, dealing with infectious diseases and maintaining a child safe environment. Our duty of care and responsibilities to children, parents, families and all staff to provide a safe environment is of utmost importance.

The evolving nature of COVID-19 and the unprecedented steps required to protect our community as

recommended by the Australian Government, has resulted in the development of a specific policy to assist our Service manage this pandemic.

This policy will change as required to ensure the protective measures against COVID-19 as advised by our government are implemented by our Service. [COVID-19 information for the early childhood education and care sector](#)

see: [Current COVID Safe Setting early childhood education and care services](#) for Victorian Services.

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD (NQS)

QUALITY AREA 2: CHILDREN’S HEALTH AND SAFETY		
2.1.1	Wellbeing and comfort	Each child’s wellbeing and comfort is provided for, including appropriate opportunities to meet each child’s needs for sleep, rest and relaxation.
2.1.2	Health practices and procedures	Effective illness and injury management and hygiene practices are promoted and implemented.
2.2	Safety	Each child is protected.

EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES NATIONAL REGULATIONS	
77	Health, hygiene and safe food practices
85	Incident, injury, trauma and illness policies and procedures
86	Notification to parents of incident, injury, trauma and illness
87	Incident, injury, trauma and illness record
88	Infectious diseases
90	Medical conditions policy
93	Administration of medication
110	Ventilation and natural light
162	Health information to be kept in enrolment record
168	Education and care service must have policies and procedures
173 (2)(g)	Prescribed information to be displayed- centre based service and family day care service, a notice stating that there has been an occurrence of an infectious disease at the premises or venue

RELATED POLICIES

Control of Infectious Diseases Policy Family Communication Policy Hand Washing Policy Health and Safety Policy Immunisation Policy Incident, Injury, Trauma and Illness Policy Interactions with Children, Families and Staff Policy	Medical Conditions Policy Nappy Change and Toileting Policy Payment of Fees Policy Privacy and Confidentiality Policy Physical Environment Policy Sick Children Policy Work Health and Safety Policy
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PURPOSE

Our Service will minimise our staff and children’s exposure to COVID-19 by adhering to all recommended guidelines from the Australian Government- Department of Health and Department of Health to slow the spread of the virus. From November 1 2021, the [COVIDSafe ECEC Settings Guide](#) will be the main source of accurate practice guidance for early childhood education and care services in Victoria to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission within the ECEC environment. Management will ensure this policy is guided by current information from this guide.

We will implement practices that help to reduce the transmission of the virus including the exclusion of any person (child, educator, staff, parent, visitor, or volunteer) who has tested positive to having COVID-19. Our Service will implement effective hygiene practices as per our existing policies and procedures and increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting high touch areas as per SafeWork Australia recommendations.

Our Service will provide up-to-date information and advice to parents, families and educators sourced from the Department of Education and Training, Victorian Chief Health Officer about COVID-19 as it becomes available. Recommendations and health measures mandated by the Federal Government Department of Health will be strictly adhered to at all times.

Our Service has implemented a [COVIDSafe Plan](#) as mandated by the Victorian Government. This plan will be revised regularly to reflect any changes in requirements by the Government to protect our workplace and all employees, children and visitors.



SCOPE

This policy applies to children, families, staff, management, and visitors of the Service.

IMPLEMENTATION

Our Service is committed to minimise the spread of the COVID-19 virus by implementing recommendations provided by the [Australian Government- Department of Health](#), Safe Work Australia and the Department of Education and Training.

Our Service implements procedures as stated in the *Staying healthy: Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services* (Fifth Edition) developed by the Australian Government National Health and Medical Research Council as part of our day-to-day operation of the Service.

We are guided by explicit decisions regarding exclusion periods and notification of any infectious disease by the *Australian Government- Department of Health* and local Public Health Units in our jurisdiction under the Public Health Act. COVID-19 is a notifiable condition in all states and territories of Australia.

National Coronavirus (COVID-19) Health Information Line
1800 020 080 Call 131 450 for translating and interpreting service
24/7 Coronavirus Hotline 1800 675 398
Department of Health 1300 651 160
Health Direct 1800 022 222
COVID-19 Hotline Department of Education and Training (DET) 1800 338 663
Department of Education and Training Notification 1300 307 415
WorkSafe Victoria 13 23 60

This policy must be read in conjunction with our other Service policies:

- Sick Children Policy
- Incident, Injury, Trauma and Illness Policy
- Medical Conditions Policy

- Handwashing Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Interactions with Children, Families and staff Policy
- Payment of Fees Policy

Minimising the transmission of COVID-19

A statement from [Australian Health Protection Principal Committee](#) [15 November, 2021], details evidence that indicates that the Delta variant is more infectious and easily spread than other variants. The AHPPC acknowledges the many control measures implemented in schools and early childcare settings to help reduce transmission of COVID-19. The best method to protect all children from the disease is to ensure vaccination of those around them who are able to be vaccinated. The AHPPC recommends that anyone, with new respiratory symptoms, including children, parents and staff, should *stay at home* and arrange to be tested for COVID-10 as soon as possible. Actions in early childhood settings to help prevent transmission of the virus include well establish COVIDSafe practices of hand and respiratory hygiene, good ventilation, regular environmental cleaning and mask wearing by all adults.

Mandatory Vaccinations for ECEC

All educators and staff who work in early childhood education and care (ECEC) including Out of School hours care (OSHC) services are to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 by **29 November 2021** unless a medical exemption applies.

The Approved Provider will:

- collect, record and hold vaccination information of a worker scheduled to be on-site at an ECEC service for:
 - the fully vaccinated- (evidence of receiving two doses of COVID-19 vaccine) or
 - the partially vaccinated, evidence of first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine and subsequent booking to become fully vaccinated by 29 November or
 - for the unvaccinated, an AIR immunisation medical exemption form (medical certificates are NOT accepted)

Vaccination requirements for visitors including:

- contractors working in close proximity to children or staff
- staff of the Department of Education and Training

- staff of any other entity (allied health, NDIS providers, school readiness, Kindergarten Inclusion Support)
- volunteers working in close proximity to children or staff
- students on placements

Note: the above examples are not an exhaustive list.

Risk Management

Our Service has effective and systematic risk management processes in place to identify any possible risks and hazards to our learning environment and practices related to COVID-19. Where possible, we have eliminated or minimised these risks as is reasonably practicable. Control measures are reviewed in consultation with staff members. Due to the constant changes in managing our Service during the pandemic, our approach to risk management is ongoing and fluid.

Current risk mitigation measures include:

- the mandatory use of electronic record keeping of all parents and visitors to our Service using the Services Victoria QR Code (24 June 2021)
- adhering to density limits when required – one person per four square metres in any indoor space and one person to two square metres outdoors when accessed by visitors and used only by staff
- mask wearing by all adults in indoor settings [see Face Mask section]
- ensuring social distancing measures whenever possible
- exclusion of unwell staff, children and visitors
- reducing mixing of children by separating cohorts
- enhanced personal hand and respiratory hygiene for children, staff and parents
- improving ventilation in indoor spaces and adhering to any ‘ventilation plans’ implemented in schools or buildings
- where possible, moving lessons and activities to outdoors to reduce transmission between groups and limit the number of persons who may need to be quarantined if a case emerges
- full adherence to the NHMRC childcare cleaning guidelines and cleaning and disinfecting high touch surfaces at least twice daily, washing and laundering play items and toys
- providing staff and families with information and posters about [COVID-19 vaccination roll out](#)
- recommending influenza vaccination for children, staff and parents.

Infection Control Training

Our staff are committed to assist in infection prevention controls and have completed [COVID-19 infection control training](#).

Hygiene practices

Our Service will ensure [signs and posters](#) remind employees and visitors of the risks of COVID-19 and the measures that are necessary to stop its spread including hand washing and hand rub procedures and information about COVID-19. <https://www.dese.gov.au/covid-19/childcare>

These will also be communicated to families through email, newsletters and social media. Alcohol-based hand sanitiser will be kept out of reach of young children and only available for adults to use. If parents decide to apply this to their child, they must supervise the child to avoid rubbing it into their eyes or a child swallowing the gel/liquid. Our Service will supply disposable tissues and have bins available with plastic liners available in several locations for disposing used items.

Information provided to families may include:

- symptoms of COVID-19
- transmission of the virus
- messaging to reinforce- *'stay at home when unwell'*
- self-isolation and exclusion
- prevention strategies- including hand hygiene and self-isolation
- contact details for health assistance
- CCS and ACCS information
- Public Health Orders
- Wearing of face masks
- mandatory vaccinations for all adults working or visiting an ECEC service as per public health order
- changes to management of cases and close contacts in our service (including requirements of negative PCR test for adults)

Parents of children with a current Asthma Action Plan are advised to update this if needed in consultation with their child's health care professional. Updated plans should be provided to management for distribution to relevant staff members. (Asthma Australia).

The Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, educators, staff, families and visitors will comply with the following.

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Our Service has an obligation to ensure the health and safety of employees, children and visitors in our workplace, so far as reasonably practicable. We may therefore collect information from visitors about their potential exposure to COVID-19 in order to identify, assess and control risks of infection in line with Victorian Government guidelines. Information collected will only be viewed by designated staff members management and will be stored securely. To comply with privacy laws, personal information will only be disclosed on a 'need to know' basis to the Public Health Unit to prevent and manage COVID-19 if required. (ACTU Privacy at work).

- o all parents and carers, visitors including contractors, external staff and building and maintenance staff are required to use the Victorian Government QR Code Service for electronic record keeping- (staff and children are exempt)
- o any person (employee, enrolled child, parent, caregiver, visitor or contractor) who is displaying symptoms such as: **fever, coughing, sore throat, fatigue and shortness of breath**, should be tested for COVID-19 and not attend our Service **under any circumstance**

Managing a confirmed case of COVID-19 in an early childhood education and care service

[The information below has been provided by the DET- effective 19 November 2021]

NOTIFICATION

The Approved Provider will utilise the communication pack from the Department of Education and Training to assist in management of a confirmed case of COVID-19 and refer to the DET Action Plan template as below. [Contact Management of an ECEC Service](#)

Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) will need to communicate closely regarding PCR status of identified contacts. For any COVID-19 positive cases reported directly to the school, the school is required to notify any onsite school OSHC provider to identify any parent or child as a contact. For any COVID-19 positive case reported directly to the OSHC service, the provider is to inform the school and collectively undertake contact identification and follow exclusion steps as applicable.

Please note: links below are NOT active. Refer to the DET official document.

NOTIFICATION

ECEC service notified directly by parent of child, a parent, ECEC employee or ECEC worker of positive test result.

- o ECEC provider or nominated supervisor submits a notification through National Quality Agenda IT System (NQAITs) as soon as they become aware that a child, parent, contractor, or worker has been

- onsite but only in the 48 hours prior to the onset of symptoms consistent with COVID-19 or receipt of positive test if asymptomatic (no symptoms).
- If services need immediate advice, they can call the DET on 1300 307 415. On weekends, they can call the DET Covid Advice Line on 1800 338 663 between 10am and 3pm.
 - ECEC service no longer need to report confirmed positive cases of ECEC community members, if those community members were not onsite in the 48 hours prior to the onset of symptoms consistent with COVID-19.

RESPONSE
<p>After identifying a positive case and notifying DET, the ECEC provider needs to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) identify and notify contacts b) support service staff to undertake initial testing c) assess and organise cleaning. <p>In some cases, the service may determine it needs to close for a short period to enable it to undertake this activity. (Refer to template Letter to parents /carers staff and contractors confirming case and pre-emptive closure)</p>
A. PRIMARY CLOSE CONTACT IDENTIFICATION AND NOTIFICATION
<p>The provider in liaison with the service is required to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify and record all potential children, parent and staff contacts using attendance and staffing records. (Refer to template Contact Spreadsheet) ○ Confirm vaccination status for staff contacts (noting need to be fully vaccinated after 29 November), noting children in service will be unvaccinated (Any persons over 12 years of age if unknown, consider unvaccinated) and record in Contact Spreadsheet) ○ Utilise the Risk Framework to identify the contact in the case of staff or contractors. (Refer to template Risk Assessment Framework) ○ ECEC to communicate to identified contacts that they need to be receive a negative PCR test before returning to the service (Refer to template Letter to Contacts).
B. CLEANING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ECEC provider to contact their cleaning contractors and identify any high-touch areas where the case had been that will require additional cleaning. There is no need to do a deep clean.



CONTACT TRACING

- The service will be required to notify individuals that they are a contact of a positive case, and advise them of their obligation to obtain a PCR test and quarantine until they receive a negative result. Subject to this testing, these contacts will not need to undertake any further period of self-quarantine unless they are exposed at another time.
- Children and staff who are identified as a contact will receive a package of five rapid antigen tests at the PCR testing site, on the day they attend after being notified by the ECEC service that they are a contact (refer to Operations and RAT section below)
- All contacts will need to provide evidence of their negative PCR test to the ECEC provider or Director to return and be on-site the ECEC service.
- Families/households of contacts are not required to limit their movements or stay at home.



OPERATIONS AND 7 DAY RAPID ANTIGEN TESTING (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)

- Before resuming operations following a positive case, all necessary cleaning must have been arranged and contacts identified and contacted.
- The decision to continue or resume operations after a positive case has been identified will depend on whether the service can continue to meet their regulatory obligations under the National Law. If in doubt, the service should talk to DET on 1300 307 415.
- Staff and parents / carers of children who are identified as a contact are strongly encouraged to use an at-home rapid antigen test before entering the ECEC service in the seven days after exposure.
- There is no obligation on the ECEC services to sight the staff or child contact rapid antigen test results. The onus and responsibility is on staff and parents / carers to complete the rapid antigen test on the day of attending service to protect their children, other children and their broader communities.
- Services who are assessed to have an outbreak will be managed through the Department of Health or Local Public Health Units.

- For any service, the Department of Health or Local Public Health Unit retains the ability to require a service to remain closed given the individual circumstances and transmission patterns.
- Services will need to adhere to COVID-safe plans in making a decision about re-opening.

At-home rapid antigen testing

Staff and parents/carers of children who are identified as a contact are encouraged to use an at-home rapid antigen test before entering the ECEC service. Contacts will receive 5 tests from the PCR testing location and should take the test each day before attending the ECEC service until they run out.

Confirmed case of COVID-19

Confirmed cases of COVID-19 must quarantine for 10 days from the ECEC service. Evidence of a negative PCR test is required to be shown to the Approved Provider/Nominated Supervisor before returning to the service.

Vaccinated household close contacts must complete 7 days of quarantine. This includes unvaccinated children under 12 years if all members of their household over 12 years are vaccinated. Other unvaccinated household contacts will be required to complete 14 days of quarantine.

Implement effective hygiene measures

The national campaign *Help Stop The Spread and Stay Healthy*, launched by the Australian Government has emphasised that effective handwashing is a vital strategy to help reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds whenever you cough, sneeze or blow your nose, prepare food or eat, touch your face or use the toilet is recommended.

Our Service will adhere to National Regulation requirements and Government guidelines to ensure all educators, children, families and visitors to the Service implement best practice. We are guided by the recommendations and current health advice by the Victorian Government for early childhood education- <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/early-childhood-education-and-care>

Face coverings

[face masks requirements have been relaxed effective 19 November 2021]

Face masks are required by visitors in an indoor space and are recommended to be worn where social distancing cannot be maintained. Parents and carers, and any person aged 12 and over are requested to wear a fitted face mask during drop-off and pick-up times

Educators and carers working in early childhood are not required to wear a mask whilst educating and caring for children, but those who wish to do so, can.

Staff must wear face coverings whilst completing other duties in within the ECEC service.

A person who has a medical condition, disability or a mental health condition is not required to wear a mask or face covering. Our Service will educate staff on how to wear a face covering correctly and other risk mitigation strategies to ensure the face covering does not become contaminated.

[Face coverings: whole of Victoria](#)

Our Service will ensure:

- o Service Victoria QR Code check-ins are used by all parents/carers and visitors (this includes contractors and external staff)
- o a workplace attendance register is maintained for all staff, children and visitors at all times (including contact phone numbers) as per National Regulations
- o all employees, parents, children and visitors must wash their hands with soap and water or use the alcohol-based hand sanitiser provided upon arrival to the Service
- o hands must be thoroughly dried using disposal paper and disposed of in the bin provided
- o disposable tissues must be used to wipe noses, eyes or mouths and disposed of in the bin provided immediately after use
- o hands must be washed following the use of tissues
- o hands must be washed thoroughly using soap and water before and after using the toilet
- o cough and sneeze etiquette must be used- cover your cough and sneeze with your hand or elbow
- o educators and staff must adhere to our *Handwashing Policy* at all times
- o children are supervised when washing hands
- o educators and staff must adhere to effective food preparation and food handling procedures
- o educators will wash their hands or use alcohol-based sanitiser, before wearing gloves and wash their hands after wearing gloves
- o educators and staff must adhere to our *Health and Safety Policy* for cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and equipment (such as toys, puzzles, outdoor toys, bedding, playdough etc) as per *Staying healthy: Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services* recommendations
- o staff will maintain a cleaning register of all surfaces and equipment conducted

- equipment, resources and surfaces including high-touch surfaces- taps, door handles, light switches, nappy change areas, toys, keyboards and laptops/iPads will be cleaned more frequently as required using detergent and water followed by disinfectant
- cleaning contractors hygienically clean the Service to ensure risk of contamination is removed
- washroom facilities for employees have adequate supplies of soap, toilet paper and alcohol-based sanitiser

Social/Physical distancing in childcare

Social or physical distancing is important because COVID-19 is most likely spread from person-to-person through close contact with a person while they are infectious, close contact with a person with a confirmed infection who coughs or sneezes or from touching objects or surfaces (such as door handles or tables) contaminated from a cough or sneeze from a person with a confirmed infection and then touching your nose or mouth. (Source: Australian Government Department of Health. Coronavirus disease)

Social or physical distancing in early childhood education and care is not feasible for educators to perform their job, however we will implement measures to minimise the risk of exposure as *reasonably practicable*.

Early Childhood Education and Care services in Victoria may be subject to restrictions on how many people (adults or children) can be on the premises at one time. Our Service will apply a density limit of one person per four square metres in indoor spaces and activities accessible to families and visitors (reception/foyer areas) and children's rooms (if these are open to visitors).

The density quotient of one person per two square metres should be applied to any outdoor space being attended by parents/carers and other visitors. (November 1, 2021).

Our Service will encourage educators to apply physical distancing measures where possible and not gather in groups or encourage groups of parents to congregate. (Worksafe Victoria, AHPPC)

To reduce the spread of COVID-19 parents are reminded of the following:

- electronic record keeping is mandatory using Services Victoria QR Code for all parents and carers (effective 25 June 2021)
- if your child is sick, do not send them to our Service – Stay at home when unwell and get 'tested'
- do not visit our Service if you or another family member is unwell
- sanitise your hands at regular intervals throughout the day

- avoid physical contact with other people who may be sick- such as older people and people with existing health conditions
- clean and disinfect high touch surfaces regularly (door handles, car seats, mobile phone, toys, dummies)
- promote strictest hygiene measures when preparing food at home and at the Service
- promote the importance of families and children over the age of 12 years to receive their COVID-19 vaccine

To minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19 our Service will:

- undertake a risk assessment to identify potential risks and mitigate with consideration risks to children and staff
- revisit the risk assessment whenever new risks or potential risks are identified and adjust our management plan
- establish an external area for parents/carers to drop off and pick up their child/ren
- ensure visitors wear a face mask in an indoor space
- ensure all visitors, parents and carers check in to our Service using the Services Victoria QR Code
- display QR code posters in various locations to avoid congregations of parents at peak times of the day (e.g., foyer, building, fence line)
- ensure parents and carers keep at least 1.5metres distance from others wherever possible
- provide an alternative check in 'kiosk' for persons who do not have smartphones or are otherwise unable to use the QR Code record
- restrict the number of visitors to our Service (including students, delivery of goods)
- restrict the number of family members visiting our Service- (subject to physical distancing between adults)
- restrict the number of educators using the staff room at any one time
- encourage staff to take breaks and eat lunch outside if possible
- reduce mixing of children by separating cohorts (including staggering meals and play times)
- where possible, outdoor play will be promoted within our Service to provide children with additional personal space
- large groups will be monitored to provide flexible learning to ensure groups are smaller in both the indoor and outdoor environment
- mixing of staff and children between rooms should be avoided where possible
- office staff should, where reasonable practical use separate areas or separate themselves as much as possible from one another

- increase ventilation and fresh air flow into the indoor spaces within the Service
- switch air handling units with central recirculation to 100% outdoor air to increase ventilation
- ensure air conditioners and/or heaters are well maintained
- ensure cots, mats, cushions, highchairs etc are positioned at least 1.5 metres apart
- seat children at opposite ends of a table when playing and eating
- staff should serve children food and avoid children to self-serve from a shared plate
- avoid any situation when children are required to queue- waiting their turn to use bathroom for handwashing or toileting, waiting their turn to use a piece of equipment etc.
- contact parents of children who have chronic medical conditions or immunosuppression as they may be at an increased risk of disease and require additional support/care

Suspected cases of COVID-19 at our Service

As per our *Sick Child Policy* we reserve the right to refuse a child into care if they:

- are unwell and unable to participate in normal activities or require additional attention
- have had a temperature/fever, or vomiting in the last 24 hours
- have had diarrhoea in the last 48 hours
- have been given medication for a temperature prior to arriving at the Service
- have started a course of anti-biotics in the last 24 hours

If a child becomes ill whilst at the Service, educators/staff will respond to their individual symptoms of illness and provide comfort and care. The child will be cared for in an area that is separated from other children in the service to await pick up from their parent/carer.

Educators will take the child's temperature. If the temperature is above 37.5°C parents will be contacted immediately and required to collect their child within 30 minutes. If they are unable to collect their child, an emergency contact person/authorised nominee will be contacted, and they must collect your child within 30 minutes. [DHHS (Vic) classifies a fever as temperature reading at or above 37.5°C]

Educators will attempt to lower the child's temperature by:

- removing excessive clothing (shoes, socks, jumpers)
- encourage the child to take small sips of water
- move the child to a quiet area where they can rest whilst being supervised

Educators will wear disposable gloves and a face mask to avoid possible contamination. All items/resources touched by the child will be cleaned and disinfected to avoid possible cross contamination.

Educators will keep accurate records of the child's temperature, time taken, time parent/s were contacted, staff member's name and time of collection.

All information will be recorded in our *Incident, Injury, Trauma and Illness* Record. Parents will be required to sign this record upon collection of their child.

Parents are reminded to ensure their contact details are current and emergency contact details are updated if required.

Our Service also reserves the right to prevent employees, parents, family members or visitors to enter our premises if the Approved Provider or Nominated Supervisor suspects instances of COVID-19 due to symptoms being displayed. [adjust to your own context/service decision]

The section below has been updated in-*Managing a confirmed case of COVID-19 in an early childhood education and care service*

Talking to children about COVID-19

As per our *Interactions with Children, Families and Staff Policy*, our Service is committed to maintaining positive interactions and relationships with children and their families. Information provided to children about COVID-19 will be age appropriate and sensitive to their emotional wellbeing. Educators will both acknowledge children's concerns and be open to discussions about COVID-19.

Educators will inform children about the virus and emphasise preventative measures such as handwashing, use of tissues, cough and sneeze techniques and limiting touching other children's faces.

Posters to demonstrate correct handwashing methods will be referred to and educators will model techniques.

Children's emotional well-being will be closely monitored by all educators and staff and any concerns communicated with parents and families. Children's questions will be respected and supported.

Staff will be supported in professional learning to help children deal with trauma related to COVID-19 through resources, webinars and online modules. (Emerging Minds, beYou)

In the event of the Service being closed as a precaution to limit the spread of the virus, information will be provided to parents/families to help explain the situation to young children.

Payment of Fees (Child Care Subsidy- CCS)

As per our *Payment of Fees Policy*, fees are payable in advance of your child's attendance. CCS hourly rate caps will be adjusted from 12 July 2021. see: [Child Care Subsidy rates](#). Children must continue to meet immunisation requirements.

Waiving of gap fees

The gap fee is the difference between the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) the Government pays to a service and the remaining fee paid by the family. Services can waive the gap fee and receive Child Care Subsidy (CCS) if the child cannot attend care because:

- they or a member of their immediate household, must isolate due to COVID-19. This applies from 9 November 2021.
- the service or room at the service is closed on advice from the state or territory government due to COVID-19. This includes:
 - where a Family Day Care or In Home Care educator isn't able to provide their usual care because they, or a member of their immediate household is quarantining or isolating
 - an Outside School Hours Care service operating on a school campus is required to close as part of a direction to the school to close
- the state or territory has restricted access to child care in a region due to COVID-19

Gap fees may be waived until 30 June 2022. Services must keep a record of the advice by a state or territory authority advising that they close and accurately reflect waived gap fees in the fee statements provided to parents. Check the [Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment website](#) for further information regarding gap fee waiving general information.

Child Care Safety Net- Additional Child Care Subsidy (Temporary Financial Hardship)

The Child Care Safety Net gives families and services extra support if they are vulnerable or disadvantaged or located in a regional or remote community. Families may be eligible for [Additional Child Care Subsidy](#) (ACCS) due to temporary financial hardship, such as loss of income and be entitled to access up to 100 hours of subsidised childcare per fortnight for up to 13 weeks. Families will need to apply for ACCS (Temporary Financial hardship) and update their activity levels through [myGov](#). ACCS is also available for families to support their children's safety and wellbeing, for grandparents who care for their grandchildren and parents transitioning from welfare to work.

Allowable Absences from childcare/COVID-19 Lockdowns

For the 2021-22 financial year, all Australian families can access 10 extra allowable absence days per child.

Allowable absences have been reset for the 2021/22 financial year to 42 days. For the 2021-22 financial year, all Australian families can access 10 extra allowable absence days per child. The extra 10 days are on top of the additional allowable absences provided for families in Victoria during the extended lockdowns.

Staff entitlements if sick or suspected to have COVID-19

Under workplace health and safety laws, our Service must ensure the health and safety of all employees.

Caring for a family member or emergency

If an employee cannot attend work due to caring for a family member due to COVID-19, they are entitled to take paid carer's leave. Casual employees are eligible to have 2 days unpaid carer's leave per occasion. See [Fair Work Act](#) for entitlements for casual, part time and full-time employees. Reasonable evidence is required to justify the absence.

Self-Isolation Unpaid Pandemic Leave

Effective 8 April 2020, employees who are required to self-isolate by government or medical authorities or acting on advice of a medical practitioner may access unpaid [pandemic leave](#). (Extended until 31 December 2021). The agreement has to be in writing and the employer needs to keep it as a record.

This leave provides employees with:

- 2 weeks of unpaid pandemic leave
- the ability to take twice as much annual leave at half their normal pay if their employer agrees.

Paid pandemic leave (Victorian services only)

Should an employee be instructed by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to self-isolate or quarantine at home or are caring for someone with COVID-19 and have no entitlements remaining, they may be eligible for Pandemic Leave Disaster Payment (\$1500).

<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/pandemic-leave-disaster-payment-victoria/who-can-get-it>

Self-Isolation directed by Service

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Waivers

In the event of staff members requiring to self-isolate due to possible infection of COVID-19, the Approved Provider will apply to the Regulatory Authority for waivers for qualifications and/or ratios to minimise disruptions to our provision of care. (Payment for waivers must be paid, however will be reimbursed by the regulatory authority). see: [NGA ITS Portal Emergency Management Help Guide](#)

Communicating with families

Our Service will establish continue regular communication channels with families and share information about COVID-19 as required including mandatory requirements such as:

- wearing of face masks
- QR code check in
- mandated COVID-19 vaccinations for all educators and staff in Early Childhood Education and Care settings- (including OSHC and Family Day Care)
- mandated COVID-19 vaccinations for visitors to our service including parent helpers, contractors and students
- Rapid Antigen Tests
- Orientation, graduation, transition to school visits and other ceremonies (including events held off ECEC premises)

Due to the fluid nature of COVID-19 and the necessity of self-isolation for some staff members, our Service will endeavour to inform parents and families of any staff changes on a daily basis. Staff who have approved leave will be replaced with casual staff and families will be informed as per our usual practices to ensure continuity of care where possible. Our risk mitigation measures will change as per guidelines from DHHS and the Chief Health Officer. Any changes to our current organisational plans will be communicated clearly with families.

Caring for our community

We understand that the outbreak of COVID-19 and the constant amount of information received through the media may be very stressful to young children and parents. The anxiety about this virus may be overwhelming and cause fear and anxiety to some people, especially children.

Our Service is committed to continue to provide quality education and care to all children and support families responsibly during this unprecedented challenge with the COVID-19 outbreak.

Knowing how to look after yourself, and others is very important during this crisis. We will promote a safe and supportive environment by:

- o reassuring children they are safe
- o acknowledging and listening to children’s questions
- o promoting and implementing hygiene routines for handwashing and cough and sneezing
- o keeping regular and familiar routines within our Service
- o ensuring children eat well throughout the day
- o engaging children in play, games and other physical activities
- o being alert to children’s level of anxiety and provide quiet and relaxing activities
- o ensuring children are provided with rest and sleep when needed
- o providing information to families and support services as required

Dr Michelle Dickinson- Video for kids about COVID-19

<https://youtu.be/OPsY-jLqaXM>

Emerging Minds- Talking to Children about Natural Disasters, Traumatic Events or Worries About the Future

<https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/supporting-children-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/>

Play School- Hello Friends! (A COVID-19 Special)

<https://www.abc.net.au/abckids/shows/play-school/covid-19/12114308>

[UNICEF- How to talk to your child about COVID-19](#)

In Home Care Support Agency resources – [Talking to children about COVID-19](#)

Asthma Australia- [What does Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) mean for people with Asthma](#)

Disclaimer

The information contained in this ‘draft’ policy is based on current information from the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Australian Government Department of Health, Australian Government- The Treasury, Family Assistance Law and Fairwork Ombudsmen (20 November 2021).

This policy reflects the easing of restrictions announced by the Victorian Government effective 19 November 2021. Changes to management of cases and close contacts in ECEC services (excluding OSHC) are included in this policy update. Services should consult the DET for further information as required.

More information and resources

[Child Care Centre Desktop- COVID-19 Support Module and Resources-available on our home page](#)

[Australian Business Lawyers & Advisors](#)

[Australian Government Department of Education Skills and Employment- absences from child care due to local emergency](#)

[Beyond Blue Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Supporting educators, children and young people](#)

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CCS Helpdesk 1300 667 276

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) resources Australian Government](#)

[COVID-19 Infection control training](#)

[Emerging Minds Community Trauma Toolkit](#)

[Fairwork Australia- Coronavirus and Australian workplace laws](#)

[Healthdirect Coronavirus hub](#)

[Home Isolation Information](#)

[Information for employers](#)

[Information on Social distancing](#)

[Local state and territory health departments](#)

[Raising Children](#)

[Victoria State Government Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) advice for early childhood services](#)

Victoria Department of Education and Training [Health and safety advice for early childhood education and care services in the context of coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

Victoria Department of Education and Training Coronavirus: [Early Childhood Education and Care Services Communications Pack](#)

[Worksafe Victoria](#)

Posters and Visuals

[COVID-19 coronavirus in pictures](#)

[Manuela Moina- Children's book- "Hello! I am the Coronavirus"](#)

[Simple Steps To Help Stop The Spread Poster](#)

[Poster for service entrance \(pdf - 42.94kb\)](#)

[Poster for staff \(pdf - 79.86kb\)](#)

[Poster for families \(pdf - 54.42kb\)](#)

[When to use a face covering \(pdf - 31.73kb\)](#)

[Are you wearing your mask correctly? \(pdf - 31.14kb\)](#)

State and Territory specific information

[ACT Health- Latest information about COVID-19](#)

[NSW Health alert COVID 19](#)

[Northern Territory Government Department of Health](#)

[Queensland Health – Novel coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

[SA Health – Coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)

[Tasmanian Government Department of Health – Coronavirus](#)

[Victorian Government Department of Health and Human Services – Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#)

[Western Australian Government Department of Health – Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

Source

Australian Council of Trade Unions Coronavirus (COVID-19) Privacy at work <https://www.actu.org.au/coronavirus>

Australian Children’s Education & Care Quality Authority. (2014).

Australian Government Department of Health *Health Topics* [Health Topics Coronavirus COVID-19](#)

Australian Government Department of Health Coronavirus (COVID-19) Infection Control Training <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/covid-19-infection-control-training>

Australian Government Department of Health. Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) statement on COVID-19, schools and early childhood education and care (15 November 2021). <https://www.health.gov.au/news/australian-health-protection-principal-committee-ahppc-statement-on-covid-19-schools-and-early-childhood-education-and-care>

Australian Government Fair Work Ombudsman *Coronavirus and Australian workplace laws* (updated 13 March 2020) <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/news-and-media-releases/website-news/coronavirus-and-australian-workplace-laws>

Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment

Australian Government Department of Health

Guide to the Education and Care Services National Law and the Education and Care Services National Regulations. (2017).

Guide to the National Quality Standard. (2020)

National Health and Medical Research Council. (2012). *Staying healthy: Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services.*

Public Health Act 2010

Public Health Amendment Act 2017

Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2019 Victoria

The Australian Parenting website Raisingchildren <https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/a-z-health-reference/coronavirus-and-children-in-australia>

Revised National Quality Standard. (2018).

Safe Work Australia (2020)

Victoria Government. Department of Education and Training. (2021). COVIDSafe ECEC Setting Guide. COVIDSafe advice for Early Childhood Education and Care Services. [15 November Update] <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/covidsafe-settings-guidance-early-childhood-education-and-care>

REVIEW

POLICY REVIEWED	NOVEMBER 2021	NEXT REVIEW DATE	As required
UPDATED 10 AUGUST 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes to management of cases and close contacts in ECEC services added (19 Nov) Additional guide and information added from COVIDSafe ECEC Settings Guide – DET (15 Nov 2021) Rapid Antigen Program information added Vaccination requirements and changes added (re: medical exemption) New guidelines for COVID-19 Outbreak Management in ECEC added CCS- Changes to Gap Fee Waivers added CCS- additional absences added Additional resource and sources 		
OCTOBER 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addition of mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations for all ECEC educators and staff by 29 November 2021 		



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> new and enhanced COVIDSafe practices added to existing policy
AUGUST 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updates to adhere to new restrictions for Victoria (5 August 2021) [face masks, density limits, operational advice] Broken links to DESE/ Department of Education Victoria repaired Allowable Absences for 2021/22 updated Gap fee waiver information added sources checked for currency
JUNE 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> updates from DHS- re: CovidSafe settings mandatory QR code check in for parents/carers and visitors at all ECE services removed temperature testing for Victorian ECE services mandatory mask wearing for parents/carers for pick up/drop off mandatory mask wearing whilst indoors for all persons over age of 12 (educators when teaching and learning are exempt) information related to COVID-19 vaccinations added extension of gap fee waiving- 31 Dec 21 extension of Pandemic Leave- 31 Dec 21 allowable absences extended until 30 Jun 2021 links checked for currency and edited where required removed references to recovery package, activity test details for CCS
NOVEMBER 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> updates including Last Step for reopening road map (22 November) extension of changes to Activity Test extension of Pandemic Leave Information about Test Isolation payment added added information about Recovery Package funding for sessional Kindergarten programs added Deleted information related to Transition Payment/ Leave Additional absence allowance for services in Victoria added Sources checked and edited where needed
UPDATED 13 AUGUST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommendation of COVIDSafe Plan added Workplace attendance register Permitted Worker Scheme (Victorian services only) Additional allowable absences (Victorian services only- Stage 3 & 4) Pandemic Leave Disaster Payment (Victorian services only) Coronavirus isolation payment (Victorian services only) Additional viability support payment for OSHC (Victorian services only)
UPDATED 31 JULY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> mandated wearing of face covering from 2 August 2020 Mandatory notification to WorkSafe Victoria re confirmed COVID-19 case in workplace Additional posters for Victorian Services- use of masks
UPDATED 26 JULY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Definition of a fever as per Coronavirus Disease -CDNA National Guidelines for Public Health Units Posters for NSW
UPDATED 21 JULY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information about JobKeeper deleted email addresses for DESE for each state/territory added Introduction of Victorian health orders to wear face covering in Melbourne CBD and Mitchell Shire Temperature checks- information and posters from Department Education and Training Victoria communication pack for families added in case of forced closure (Department of Education and Training Victoria)
UPDATED 10 July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> updates re: border closures NSW/VIC and self-isolation requirements waive of gap fees during forced closure or during Stage 3 or higher 'stay at home' restrictions

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • updates regarding service closures due to COVID-19 re: local emergency procedures • extension to pandemic leave • links to posters from DESE
UPDATED 17 June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updates to AHPPC health recommendations • amendments to Payment of Fees • reintroduction of CCS and ACCS from July 13 2020 • changes to Activity Test for families • changes to absences updated • cessation of JobKeeper and introduction of Transition Payment for services
UPDATED 15 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slight amendments to physical distancing requirements as per AHPPC guidelines • Updated health plan reminders • deletion of resources no longer available/or moved • clarification of resources covered in 'no fee' from parents • sick child additional information
UPDATED 04 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Added a section at the top of page 5 relating to privacy laws • Updates from the April 30 review remain highlighted – see below
UPDATED 30 April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk assessment and risk management plan information updated • Consideration included for children with chronic medical conditions or immunosuppression • Updated recommendations from Australian Health Protection Principles Committee • Additional information related to Exceptional Circumstances Supplementary Payment • additional resources for supporting families and educators
UPDATED 16 April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional information for JobKeeper- nomination acceptance form • Fair Work Australia laws- direction to perform different duties • Self-isolation and Pandemic leave • Additional information regarding children 'at risk' notification • Additional resources added as highlighted
UPDATED 5 April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major changes to Payment of fees related to CCS and ACCS • introduction of Early Childhood Education and Care Relief Package payments (effective 6 April) • introduction of JobKeeper Payments • removal of 'stand down' information • addition of Safe Work Australia suggestions • amendment to return to work requirements for positive COVID-19 employees requiring a medical certificate • additional information about staff travel to and from work
UPDATED 28 March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • changes to reflect changes in periods of local emergency and absences • new isolation restrictions for people travelling interstate • small edits to leave entitlements for staff • Fair Work information added- employee entitlements, stand down
UPDATED 24 March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • updated effective 24 March 2020 • changes due to Ministerial update re: increase in absences for children to receive CCS payments and CCS payments if services are forced to close • new information for CCCF funding for COVID-19 • modification to staff requested to be isolated from Service due to flu-like symptoms • modifications of entitlements relating to sick pay if employees are forced to be self-isolated • additional resources for state/territory specific information
16 March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • original policy drafted

