

# **SUPPORTING THE CHILDCARE NEEDS OF ESSENTIAL PERSONS DURING A NOVEL CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK**

## **GUIDANCE TO SCHOOLS AND CHILD CARE PROGRAMS**

**March 17, 2020**

**Revised: March 22, 2020**

Issued by the Vermont Agencies of Education and Human Services pursuant to the Governor's Directive of March 15, 2020

## Purpose

These are difficult and unprecedented times. The directive outlined below describes the process for ensuring all Essential Persons have access to child care to remain on the job protecting and caring for Vermonters. This process will require schools to move quickly to develop plans that best fit their unique set of circumstances and needs, and it will require the support and cooperation of our private child care providers.

Pursuant to 20 V.S.A. §8, §9, §11, Governor Phil Scott has ordered a Closure Period of pre-k through 12 schools and state regulated child care programs in the State of Vermont from March 18, 2020 through April 6, 2020. He has further ordered that child care services be provided by schools, and state regulated child care programs are asked to provide care to, at a minimum, their own enrollees who are children of Essential Persons, under the guidelines provided below.

During the Closure Period schools are directed to provide care to, at a minimum, enrolled students up to grade 8 and, where necessary, students from other schools or districts. Regulated child care programs are strongly encouraged to provide care to children for Essential Persons during the COVID-19 crisis; the State will provide ongoing funding to child care programs in support of this effort, as specified below.

Essential Persons are defined as including:

- staff and providers of child care and education services (including custodial and kitchen staff and other support staff) for children of other Essential Persons;
- providers of healthcare including but not limited to workers at clinics, hospitals, Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs); nursing homes, long-term care and post-acute care facilities, respite house, VNAs; designated agencies, emergency medical services;
- criminal justice personnel including those in law enforcement, courts, and correctional services;
- public health employees;
- firefighters;
- Vermont National Guard personnel called to duty for this response;
- and other first responders;
- and state employees determined to be essential for response to this crisis under the State Emergency Operations Center.

## General Guidance

The Agency of Human Services, Department for Children and Families and Agency of Education provide the following emergency operating guidelines for schools and child care providers:

1. Children must be kept in small groups, **not more than 10 individuals in a classroom**; there must be **absolutely no large group activities**. Social distancing practices should be in place for all. **PLEASE NOTE: this guidance has been updated to specify that the 10 person limit applies to the total number of individuals rather than the total number**

children in accordance with updated guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Vermont Department of Health.

2. Child care facilities can maintain operations with an occupancy greater than 50 children as long as they are separated into classrooms as above and do not congregate.
3. Child care programs must follow child care regulations in regards to handwashing. Specifically, programs must engage in frequent handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially when:
  - Upon arrival at school
  - After going to the bathroom
  - Before eating
  - After blowing one's nose
  - When visibly dirty

Teachers should help young children do the same.

If soap and water are not readily available, closely supervise (to avoid ingestion) use of an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.

4. Programs should engage in frequent thorough cleaning each day. Child care programs shall follow regulations regarding cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting. Follow the program's routine cleaning and disinfecting practices. Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces such as:
  - all surfaces especially where children eat
  - bathrooms
  - frequently used equipment including electronic devices
  - door handles and handrails
  - items children place in their mouths
5. Staff should monitor themselves for symptoms and stay home if they are sick.
6. Parents/guardians must be instructed and required to keep children home if they exhibit symptoms of fever, cough, or shortness of breath. If a child care provider observes symptoms in a child, they should send the child home.
7. There should be **no outside visitors and volunteers** with the exception of **employees or contracted service providers for purposes of special education services, as authorized by the school or district.**
8. **Post signs.** As part of routine measures for the respiratory season, existing signs should be visible that remind staff and children to perform hand hygiene (sneeze/cough into their elbow, put used tissues in a waste receptacle and to wash hands immediately after using tissues). Avoid close greetings like hugs or handshakes.

Additional information and resources can be found at [healthvermont.gov/COVID-19](https://healthvermont.gov/COVID-19)

## Communication

Schools and child care centers should specify how parents and caregivers should communicate with them regarding their child care needs, and should work to calculate and plan for the number of children within their facility's care that will need to be served. Again, schools and child care providers must adhere to the guidance above on class size or group size and monitor for changes in guidance from the Vermont Department of Health or the Governor's Office based on the latest data and public health experts. Schools are encouraged to utilize multiple facilities to minimize the number of children and staff per facility.

Once a plan has been established, schools and child care providers should work with the Agencies of Human Services and Education to publicly communicate location, hours of operation and other necessary information.

## Child Care Provider Specific Information

- During the Closure Period, at the Governor's direction, the State shall continue to provide payments on behalf of eligible families to: (a) all child care programs serving CCFAP-eligible children; and (b) child care programs and schools providing services under Act 166 for pre-K students.
- The Child Development Division shall have authority, using their best judgment, to waive to the fullest extent possible all relevant licensing rules in order to permit licensed child care programs to serve children of Essential Persons during the Closure Period.
- In addition, the State is developing options for additional per-child-served funding to all child care centers that serve children of Essential Persons during this Closure Period.

## Education Specific Information

- Schools shall offer care services during regular school hours and are strongly encouraged to develop plans that continue after-school services to children of Essential Persons.
- Schools should develop plans for staffing, location of care, and meal support for the duration of the Closure period. Districts are encouraged to work with the Agency of Education on USDA waivers for meal support.
- Schools should engage children in academic and extracurricular activities consistent with the school's continuity of education plan for all students.
- Schools should work with AOE on waivers of regulations regarding geographic location of students receiving services.
- Schools can decide on transportation services during the Closure Period.

## Additional Information and Assistance

Child care providers and schools will communicate directly with parents to inform them of their plans to provide coverage for Essential Persons.

Child care providers with questions about this guidance should contact the Child Development Division and members of their licensing team at 800-649-2642. The State will continue to collect

and communicate information on child care in the coming days and weeks. This will include support from community partners.

Schools with questions about this guidance should contact the Agency of Education at 802-828-1130.