

Supporting Child Wellness:

Public Health Guidance for Communicable Disease Management in Child Care Settings



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority

September 13, 2023

Introduction

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 impact of communicable diseases, such as COVID-19 and influenza, on their operations.

First Nations have the authority to make decisions about child care operations and vaccines, 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. 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 communicable diseases 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

Vaccines

Vaccines are important tools to protect against many communicable diseases, including COVID-19 and influenza. Child care providers and children are encouraged to ensure they are up to date on [all recommended vaccines](#).

Child care providers are encouraged to share evidence-based information and promote opportunities to be vaccinated in partnership with public health and the local medical health officer. For child care providers and staff, more information on vaccination and communicable disease prevention in the workplace is available on the [Work Safe B.C. website](#). Evidence-based immunization information and tools for B.C. residents are available from the [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 children not attending child care if they are sick and unable to participate fully in routine activities.

A health check means a person regularly checking to ensure they (or their child) are not experiencing symptoms of illness that would limit their ability to participate fully in regular activities before coming to child care to prevent spread of communicable diseases within child care settings. Child care facilities do not need to monitor children or staff for symptoms of illness.

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What to Do When Sick

Staff, children, or other persons in the child care setting who are exhibiting symptoms of illness, such as respiratory illness, should stay home until they are well enough to participate in regular activities or otherwise advised by a healthcare provider. Those experiencing certain illnesses, such as gastrointestinal illness caused by norovirus, may be advised to stay home for longer. 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 return to regular activities or otherwise advised by a healthcare provider. If you are unsure or concerned about your symptoms, connect with your health care provider or call 8-1-1.

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 or otherwise advised by a healthcare provider. 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

Rigorous 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.

To learn more about how to perform hand hygiene, please refer to the [How to clean your hands 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.

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.
- Refrain from touching their eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Refrain from sharing any food, drinks, unwashed utensils, cigarettes, or vaping devices.

Non-Medical Masks & Face Coverings

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 wear a non-medical mask or face covering throughout the day or for certain activities. The choice of staff, families, or children to choose whether they practice

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additional personal prevention measures should be respected. 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.

PPE When Providing Child Care

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

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. Windows may be opened when the weather permits if it does not impact the functioning of ventilation systems.

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.

Food Safety

Child care providers that provide food services regulated under the [Food Premises Regulation](#) should adhere to the required measures (e.g. a FOODSAFE trained staff member, a food safety plan, etc.). For special events or sites requiring food permits, please consult your local health authority environmental health officer.

Child care staff, students, or other persons in the school setting should also follow routine food safety practices, including diligent hand hygiene. More information may be found on the [BCCDC Food Safety webpage](#). 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.

Gatherings & Events

Child care extracurricular and social gatherings and events (including those occurring within and between child care centres), regardless of location, can occur in line with the guidance in this document.

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Space Arrangement

In child care environments, child care providers can use room and learning environment configurations and activities that best meet learner needs and preferred child care approaches.

Transportation

Buses and vans used for transporting children should implement the prevention measures included in this guidance document, where applicable.

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

Most communicable diseases experienced by children and staff within child care settings can 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. Information is available to support management of routine communicable diseases, including [HealthLinkBC](#), the [BCCDC Guide to Common Childhood Diseases](#), the [Sneezes and Diseases](#) website, [First Nations Health Authority webpage](#), and other health resources hosted on regional health authority webpages ([Fraser Health](#); [Interior Health](#); [Island Health](#); [Northern Health](#); [Vancouver Coastal Health](#)).

Public health works closely with child care partners to support the health and wellbeing of children and staff in child care settings. 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 providers can contact public health if they have concerns about communicable disease transmission within the school setting and require additional support.