



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

September 25, 2020

Dear Child Care Provider:

Thank you for the important service you provide to keep children safe, allowing parents and caregivers to work and helping businesses function. You are true heroes on the front-line of our Commonwealth's response to the pandemic.

As we review updated guidance, public health research, and practices surrounding the response to COVID-19, the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) continues to revise and update guidelines to reflect best practices. These guidelines have been created at the recommendation of health experts in collaboration with state partners and with input from the child care provider community and parents of children in care. This document includes revised guidelines regarding group size and face coverings and reinforces the importance of other mitigation strategies, such as social distancing, monitoring signs and symptoms of illness, and following public health recommendations.

In response to the feedback received from many providers about the impact group size has on child care operations and the diligence demonstrated by many providers in keeping children, families, and staff safe, **effective September 25, 2020, group size limitations are being lifted for child care programs.** However, all child care programs must continue measures to keep children physically distanced and with consistent caregivers, use face coverings, monitor children and staff for symptoms, and maintain ongoing compliance with the [Virginia Department of Health](#) and [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) health and safety recommendations.

We extend our continued thanks to programs working diligently to continue and/or resume operations to help more children return to care and normalcy and support the safe reopening of Virginia.

Following are two key changes to our guidelines:

1) Group Size

- Recommendations for modified group size for all ages are no longer in effect. All programs receiving funding from the Child Care Subsidy Program must adhere to all requirements for ratio and group size set by the program regulations.
- Recommendations for social distancing as outlined in the attached Phase III Guidelines and Information for Child Care Programs (revised 09/25/2020) remain in place.

2) Face Coverings

- VDSS strongly recommends that children 2 years of age and older wear a face covering. This will decrease the risk of COVID-19 transmission when children and caregivers are in close proximity.
- The [Virginia Department of Labor and Industry](#) (DOLI) recently approved an Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and to protect Virginia workers. The standards apply to every employer, employee, and place of employment in Virginia, including child care settings. These regulations require staff in child care settings to wear cloth face coverings. Visit <https://www.doli.virginia.gov/covid-19-outreach-education-and-training/> for the text of the ETS and additional resources. If you have questions regarding the applicability of these standards to any specific program, please visit the DOLI website at www.doli.virginia.gov or contact DOLI at 804-371-2327.

In addition, it is essential that child care programs continue to use the following strategies to mitigate the spread of COVID-19:

1) Social Distancing

- Child care programs should continue to implement practices to minimize contact between staff, children, and any other individuals within the program and maintain 6 feet of distance to the fullest extent possible.
- Continue to keep children with the same group throughout the day and, to the fullest extent possible each day, with consistent staff. Groups should not be combined, including during drop off and pick up each day. To the fullest extent possible, caregivers should stay with the same cohort of students and not rotate.

2) Monitoring Signs and Symptoms; Confirmed COVID-19 Case

- Monitor staff, children, and parents for [signs/symptoms of COVID-19](#).
- Review the [VDH Infographic on Release from Isolation or Quarantine](#).
- Staff or children with [symptoms of COVID-19](#) (e.g., fever of 100.4 F or higher, chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea) must be excluded from child care facilities and isolated from others until [criteria for ending isolation](#) have been met. The Department of Labor and Industry establishes [return to work criteria](#) for employees.
- Children and staff with [close contact](#) with others who are known to have COVID-19 should be excluded from the child care facility until [criteria for ending quarantine](#) have been met. If the employee or child tests negative during the quarantine period, they must continue to quarantine for the full 14 days.
- If staff or children receive a positive COVID-19 test, advise the staff member or child's parent or caregiver to inform the facility immediately.
- If a child or employee tests positive for COVID-19, contact the local health district to assist in the public health investigation and to help identify the close contacts who will need to quarantine. It is likely that all members of the infected child's or adult's group would be considered close contacts.

- Facilities with a confirmed case of COVID-19 among their population may need to close temporarily (e.g., 14 days or the duration advised by local health officials). The duration may be dependent on staffing levels, levels of COVID-19 activity in the community, and severity of illness in infected individuals. Persons who are identified as close contacts to a case will be instructed to seek testing and [self-quarantine at home](#) and should not attend work (at any workplace) for the duration of the self-quarantine period, which is typically 14 days from the point of last known contact with the case as long as they remain symptom-free and do not test positive.

If your facility was closed and has reopened, if you are planning to reopen, or if you are planning to close, please advise your licensing inspector and [Child Care Aware](#). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers guidance for reopening [child care programs](#). For more information on Virginia's response to COVID-19 and relevant updates and guidelines, see [VDSS COVID-19 Response](#), [VDSS COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\) Update and Resources for ChildcareVA](#), and the [Virginia Department of Health](#) website.

Thank you for safely serving Virginia's children and families at a time they need you the most.