

Date: March 13, 2020

Memo to: Early Childhood Care and Education Program Administrators

Subject: COVID-19: Information and Support for Early Childhood Care and Education Programs

The Illinois Department of Children & Family Services (IDCFS) knows that many early childhood care and education (ECCE) programs are wondering what can or should be done to prepare for a possible increase in the number of cases of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Illinois.

[The United States \(U.S.\) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) provides up-to-date information about prevention, symptoms, testing, and the current situation. Follow CDC recommendations.

The health and well-being of children, families, and staff in Illinois is of utmost importance. The immediate health risk to the general public from the virus causing COVID-19 remains low both in the U.S. and in Illinois. However, there are steps individuals can take to help minimize the COVID-19 spread.

#### **For Program Staff**

The best way to prevent illness is to avoid exposure. When talking with program staff, administrators are encouraged to emphasize the following to help keep your staff and program participants healthy; these strategies also can help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases:

- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after staff have been in a public place, or after blowing their nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. All hand surfaces should be covered; hands should be rubbed together until they feel dry.
- Cover mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing or use the inside of the elbow.
- Stay home when sick.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily. This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks.

For more information, see [Steps to Prevent Illness](#) or [Handwashing: Clean Hands Save Lives](#) from the CDC.

#### **For Families**

Support families in planning and making decisions for how they can protect themselves and their family members and homes. See the CDC [Get Your Home Ready: Checklist for Individuals and Families](#) for information on how families can [create a household plan of action](#). Encourage families to consider members of their household that may be of greater risk, particularly older people and people of all ages with severe underlying conditions.

## **Develop an Action Plan**

Through collaboration and coordination with local health departments, child care facilities and ECCE programs can take steps to disseminate information about COVID-19 and its potential transmission within their community. The IDCFS is requesting that you **create a COVID-19 Action Plan** that outlines, but is not limited to, the following:

- **Be Proactive**
  - Develop strategies to reduce the spread of infectious diseases. Effective strategies build on already established infection control policies and practices.
  - Determine the need to develop and implement policies and procedures for working with, and providing services to, vulnerable populations.
  - Develop and identify how you will manage each staff member's responsibilities in the event of his or her illness or extended absence to ensure continuation of service.
  
- **Avoid Exposure**
  - Outline preventive steps to limit the frequent and close interaction between staff and delivery service personnel.
  - Ensure children's daily health checks are completed upon arrival. Strictly enforce policies about excluding children when they are ill.
  - Via routine communication, inform potential visitors that symptomatic persons will not be able to enter the program facility. Be sure to screen and exclude visitors upon arrival if they have had potential exposure to COVID-19, recently travelled from an affected geographic area, or who appear to be experiencing fever, cough, or shortness of breath.
  - Minimize the number of events, including parent groups, until further notice.
  
- **Sanitize**
  - Purchase infection control supplies such as hand sanitizer and soap for children, staff, and visitors to your facility per [CDC recommendations](#).
  - Evaluate existing janitorial services and cleaning operations against the [current CDC cleaning guidance](#).
  
- **Monitor and Plan for Absenteeism**
  - Review the usual absentee patterns among both students and staff. Alert local health officials about large increases in children and staff absenteeism, particularly if absences appear to be due to respiratory illnesses.
  - Review current attendance and sick leave policies. Develop new policies outlining mandatory leave for staff with COVID-19 exposure, symptoms of illness, or confirmed infection. This should include quarantine for 14 days post-exposure or isolation, if symptomatic.
  - Determine the need to anticipate and approve flexible work schedules for staff absences.
  - Develop a tracking mechanism to monitor staff illness and determine your program's ability to meet required staffing ratios.

- **Communicate**
  - Develop an *employee awareness campaign* that provides information on COVID-19 and protective measures. Create a communication strategy to describe actions being taken to keep staff informed.
  - Develop a *family awareness campaign* that provides information on COVID-19 and protective measures. Create a communication strategy to describe actions being taken to keep families informed. Ensure Action Plans address the need for effective communication with individuals with limited English proficiency or for whom English is not their native language.
  - The CDC has numerous [print resources](#) available in several languages, as well as a series of [videos](#) (in English) that can be shared with staff and families.
  
- **Partner**
  - Reach out to your local public health officials (such as the county health department) for guidance if you are considering closing for a COVID-19 related reason. This is not a decision that you should be making on your own, but in partnership with local health officials.

See the [CDC Interim Guidance for Administrators of U.S. Childcare Programs and K-12 Schools](#) for additional recommendations.

Please submit to IDCFS ([DCFS.COVIDPlans@illinois.gov](mailto:DCFS.COVIDPlans@illinois.gov)) your Agency Action Plan providing details on preventive measures and continuity of operations protocols by March 20, 2020. Your assigned IDCFS Licensing staff will be available to answer any questions or provide clarifications.

For additional information and updates, visit the following:

[IDPH COVID-19 Website](#)

[CDC Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)