



# Gallatin City-County Health Department

## Guidance for Child Care Facilities in Response to COVID-19

This interim guidance is based on what is currently known about the spread and severity of COVID-19.

This guidance is intended primarily for temporary child care provided in response to COVID-19 as well as child care facilities licensed by the State of Montana (including; day care homes, group day care homes, centers, preschools, school age programs and drop in programs for school age children and youth). The purpose of the guidance is to educate child care staff on how to help slow the spread of COVID-19 as well as provide direction to staff and parents should a case be identified in the child care facility.

**Child care facilities can remain operational but should follow state and local guidelines regarding operational levels and occupancy. The operational requirements in the [April 1, 2020 Directive](#) on child care remain in effect.**

- Childcare providers must comply with the following requirements, to the maximum extent possible:
  - Child care must be carried out in stable groups of 10 or fewer children. The same children must be in the same groups each day.
  - Children may not access any classroom space allocated to a different group of children. Priority should be given to keeping members of the same family in the same group.
  - Facilities must prioritize the needs of children in the custody of individuals engaging in Essential Businesses and Operations, as defined in my March 26, 2020 Directive.
- Child care providers and parents should review the Appendix to the April 1, 2020 Directive, titled "[Information for Child care – Frequently Asked Questions: COVID-19](#)" for additional safety precautions that should be taken by child care providers at this time and more information on child care operations.
- Child care providers should, where possible, limit the total number of children in any one facility to 24.
- Strict compliance with the provisions of Title 37, Chapter 95, Subchapters 1, 6, and 7 - ARM, relating to staffing ratios and maximum group sizes are suspended, but only to the extent that strict compliance conflicts with the provisions of this Directive, and only for the duration of this Directive.
- Facilities that cannot comply with the above Directive should cease operations for the duration of this Directive or until this guidance is amended.

- To limit in-person encounters between child care license applicants and DPHHS employees, strict compliance with the following statutes and rules are suspended, but only for the limited purpose of complying with this Directive and only for the duration of the Directive:
  - ARM §§ 37.95.161 and 37.95.161, but only to the extent that applicants for these licenses need for the duration of this Directive only submit to name-based background checks for the duration of the emergency; April 1, 2020 Page 3
  - Sections 52-2-733, 52-27-735, MCA; and Title 37, Chapter 95, Subchapter 1, ARM, but only to the extent those provisions require inspections or in-person contact with DPHHS employees for the duration of this Directive.
- To provide continuity of child care for children whose lives may be disrupted by the COVID-19 outbreak, certain requirements of the Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship program require temporary modification:
  - Strict compliance with the provisions of Title 37, Chapter 80, Subchapters 1-3 in part, ARM, with respect to certain eligibility policies and certification is hereby waived for the duration of the emergency.

## Determine if, when, and for how long childcare facilities may need to be closed

It is important that child care providers know that they are not expected to make these decisions alone. Gallatin City-County Health Department staff will remain as partners in any effort to respond to a known case connected to a child care setting. Child care providers concerned about a possible exposure to a known case should contact the health department by calling 406-582-3100. In addition to using your local public health department, you may also contact the local Child Care Resource and Referral agency, Child Care Connections, at 406-587-7786.

- Licensees should work in close collaboration and coordination with local public health officials to make closure decisions. Facility closures may be recommended for a time period necessary to reduce the risk of further disease spread. The nature of these actions (geographic scope, facility type, and duration) may change as a local outbreak situation evolves.
  - Local public health officials may recommend or require temporary closure if a child in care or staff member were present in the facility prior to being confirmed as a COVID-19 case. The recommendations for the duration of a facility closure will be made case-by-case, based on the most up-to-date information about COVID-19 and the specific cases in the impacted community.
  - Facilities located in a residence should temporarily close if the licensee or someone else living in the residence becomes ill.
  - Licensees should work with local public health officials to communicate about a possible COVID-19 exposure. Parents of children in care and staff members will need to be notified. When communicating information, it is critical to maintain the confidentiality of any ill child in care or ill staff member.
  - If a child in care or staff member has been confirmed as a COVID-19 case, the licensee should seek guidance from local public health officials to determine when the child or staff member may return to the facility and what additional steps may be needed. Follow the instructions of local public health officials to determine when children and staff who are well but are sharing a home with someone with a case of COVID-19, should return to the facility.

- When childcare facilities are temporarily closed, children and staff should work with local public health officials to quarantine themselves by staying home; away from gatherings, crowds or other social settings.
- Understand that the length (duration), criteria, and public health objective of child care facility closures may be re-assessed and changed as a local outbreak situation evolves. Licensees should follow the advice of the CDC and local public health officials.

## Additional Guidelines from Gallatin City-County Health Department

### Assessing for Signs of Illness

- Children and staff should be assessed for signs of illness (fever, cough, shortness of breath, signs of exhaustion/tiredness) when they arrive and frequently throughout the day.
- Providers should also ask about potential exposures, particularly signs of illness consistent with COVID-19 in parents, guardians and other household members of children and staff.
- Post the [signs and symptoms of COVID-19](#): fever, cough, shortness of breath on front entrances.
- Families who have been traveling outside of Montana should not bring their child into the child care setting for 14 days after the family last traveled.

### Limiting Hard-to-Clean Surfaces

It is important that providers minimize the potential spread of coronavirus by eliminating to the extent feasible surfaces that are difficult to effectively clean and disinfect or that may increase transmission.

- Providers should limit the number of toys that are in use each day so that washing and disinfecting toys is more manageable and clean toys can be rotated in as needed.
- Providers should limit the toys in use to those that are easily cleanable, non-porous, with smooth surfaces and eliminate soft, fabric toys, dress up clothing, sensory tables and water play while social distancing orders are in place.
- All toys should be sanitized continuously throughout the day.

### Cleaning and Disinfecting

- Commonly touched surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected often to control the transmission of the novel coronavirus, influenza, and other [communicable diseases](#).
- You can find the [CDC's Environmental Cleaning and Disinfecting Recommendations for COVID-19](#) here. If cleaning and disinfectant products you usually use are unavailable, there are many other effective products to consider.
  - Chlorine (bleach/sodium hypochlorite) can be used at 1-2 tbsp per 1-gallon water for continuous sanitizing.
  - For disinfecting use 1/3-cup chlorine per 1-gallon water, disinfecting should be done at the end of each day.

## **Social Distancing & Hand Washing**

Social distancing is important to control the spread of the novel coronavirus responsible for COVID-19.

- Child care facilities should limit group size to 10, including staff and children.
- Maintaining a distance of 6 feet between young children and between caregivers and children is not feasible. Therefore, child care providers must be vigilant about implementing frequent sanitation procedures and handwashing.
- Avoid mixing children in common areas.
  - For example, allow students to eat lunch and breakfast in their classrooms rather than in a common area, consider staggering playground use rather than allowing multiple classes to play together, and limit other activities where multiple classes interact.
- Adapt drop off and pick up processes (such as signing in and out) to support social distancing and decrease shared surface touches and the spread of infection.
  - Stagger arrival and/or pick up times
  - Limit nonessential visitors and volunteers
- Increase hand washing with children and staff. (I.e. create protocols for hand washing when arriving, after each activity, before and after eating, after coughing/sneezing/blowing nose)

## **Food Safety**

To ensure the safe preparation and service of food and bottles, basic food safety measures must be in place. This includes:

- Adequate and working refrigeration, properly washing and sanitizing of dishes, washing produce, sanitizing food contact surfaces, properly cooling procedures, and performing adequate hand washing.
- No bare hand contact should occur with staff preparing or serving ready-to-eat foods.
- Family style meal service should be discontinued to reduce the risk of viral spread during this time.

## **Safe Water**

Ensure a safe water source is available for drinking, food and bottle preparation as well as hand washing, dishwashing, cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting. Municipal sources of water are considered safe. Wells, cisterns and other water sources are safe as long as they meet general requirements for chlorination, filtration, etc. For more guidance on wells, cisterns, and other water sources, consult your local health department.

## **Access to Restrooms**

Access to adequate restrooms that meet the needs of the staff and children in care must be provided. If permanent restrooms are not available or adequate, alternative restrooms such as portable toilets can be used. For more guidance, consult your local health department.

## For More Information

[Gallatin City-County Health Department](#)

Additional Questions: COVID-19 Call Center 548-0123 or [callcenter@readygallatin.com](mailto:callcenter@readygallatin.com)

## CDC Resources

- [Guidance for Child Care Programs that Remain Open](#)
- [Coronavirus Disease 2019 website](#)
- [What to Do If You Are Sick with COVID-19](#)