



## **COVID-19 update**

### **COVID-19 update – further advice for Early Childhood Education and Care services and providers**

Dear services and providers,

As you would likely be aware, on 26 June 2021, NSW Health advised a number of restrictions in a new Public Health Order, including lockdowns across the Greater Sydney region (this region includes Sydney, Blue Mountains, Central Coast, Wollongong and Shellharbour local government areas) until 11:59pm on Friday 9 July 2021.

We thank you for your ongoing support and perseverance during these challenging times and understand the critical role educators in education and care settings play in our community.

Further to advice already issued, the following information provides further clarity on health and safety precautions for services and providers during this period.

### **Updated Advice**

- Education and care services are considered an essential service and remain open, unless otherwise directed by NSW Health. Vacation care services on school sites should contact their site managers to determine if their sites are open.

## **COVID-safe practices**

- Services and providers should ensure they have up-to-date emergency contact details in the National Quality Agenda IT System (NQA ITS). These details will be used should NSW Health need to contact your service after hours.
- Services are encouraged to complete and implement a [COVID-19 Safety Plan](#) as part of their risk assessment. Please note this does not have to be submitted.

## **Hygiene and health**

- Services should continue to consider a variety of risk-mitigation strategies, such as physical distancing, cleaning, hand hygiene and outdoor air ventilation, to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in early childhood settings.
- To help slow the spread of COVID-19 in the community, staff and children should stay at home if experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms or if unwell, no matter how mild, and get tested immediately.

## **Frequently asked questions**

### **Is education and care restricted to children of 'essential workers' during this period?**

The Public Health order does not define 'essential workers'. Education and care services are able to remain open to offer care to people whose children require it. Services may, at their discretion, make business decisions that limit the number of children accepted into care.

### **What do best practice drop-off and pick-up procedures look like?**

The drop off and pick up of children should be managed as follows:

- where possible, parents/carers should drop off and pick up at the service entrance/exit and not enter the premises
- physical distancing should be maintained by parents/carers and staff
- parents/carers should wear a mask
- staff should wear a mask when interacting with parents/carer s

Temperature checks for arriving children are not required.

### **What are the symptoms to look out for in children that would require the child to be tested, and/or excluded from care?**

Children with any signs of unwellness should stay home.

Anyone experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 such as a fever or respiratory symptoms should have a COVID-19 test and self-isolate until a negative result is received and symptoms have cleared.

### **When can a child return to care following a period of illness?**

A negative COVID-19 test is reassuring, however, a child should not return to care if they remain symptomatic and unwell.

### **How is the Department supporting services in the event of staff shortages?**

Services and providers may apply for temporary waivers to address staff shortages. Waivers can be granted for qualifications and, in exceptional circumstances, ratios.

Waivers related to COVID-19 are:

- assessed on a case-by-case basis to ensure children are not placed at additional risk
- only open to services that can demonstrate need

- fast-tracked – as long as there's no increased risk to staff or children's safety.

The department's COVID guidelines for ECEC services [webpage](#) has more information about applying for a waiver.

### **Are masks required to be worn in education and care services?**

Staff are not required to wear masks while educating and/or caring for children, but may choose to do so.

Staff should wear masks if they are engaging with other adults and are not caring for children, for instance, in the office or staff room.

Staff should wear masks when dealing with adults during drop off or pick up.

Visitors, including families, should wear a face mask at all times while at the service where practical.

### **How far apart do adults need to be in education and care services?**

A density limit of one person per four square metres must be applied to any spaces that are accessible to the public (i.e. reception area) or shared workspaces (i.e. staffrooms, admin areas).

The density limit between adults should be maintained during pick-up and drop-off, and may mean staggering times when children arrive at and depart from services.

Visitors and adults should keep at least 1.5 metres apart.

Non-essential meetings and professional development should be postponed or held remotely (unless essential face-to-face training for first aid, anaphylaxis etc. is required).

### **Can educators work between different rooms, or at different service locations?**

Where possible and practical, movements between rooms and between services should be minimised. Risks associated with movement of staff should be considered as part of the services' COVID-safe plans.

**Should allied health services continue visiting education and care services during this period (speech therapists, occupational therapists etc.)?**

Services should limit non-essential visitors. However, visits by health and wellbeing professionals to support children can occur if necessary for the immediate health and wellbeing needs of children. Individual services should use their discretion in making this determination.

**If a staff member lives in Greater Sydney and works outside Greater Sydney, should they be attending work during this period?**

If a staff member lives in Greater Sydney and works outside Greater Sydney, they can attend their normal workplace while following the requirements of the Public Health Order. If a staff member has been identified as a close contact, they should follow the advice of NSW Health.

If a staff member is coming into Greater Sydney for work, while within the Greater Sydney region and when they return to their place of residence, they will need to follow the Public Health Order, including the stay-at-home restrictions. This includes not leaving home except for the 4 reasonable excuses that are in the Public Health Order.

**Can siblings of individuals identified as close contacts continue to attend education and care services?**

It is likely that siblings of close contacts will need to isolate and should not attend care however this depends on the circumstances.

Please contact NSW Health for further advice in relation to specific circumstances.

**Is the regulatory authority limiting its visits to services during this period?**

The regulatory authority will limit non-essential visits to services within the Greater Sydney region, based on the importance of the visit in minimising risk to children. Any visits that are undertaken will follow COVID-safe practices.

### **Where can I get further information relating to mental health and wellbeing?**

There are resources and support available, you can visit websites such as [Beyond Blue](#), [Headspace & Black Dog Institute](#) for support resources and information.

### **Where can I access current updates about COVID-19?**

The Department regularly updates the [COVID-19 Guidelines for ECEC services](#) based on advice from NSW Health. You are encouraged to regularly check the [NSW Health website](#) regarding restrictions in NSW and that of other state departments if you have recently travelled.

Educators are encouraged to review the [NSW Government COVID-19 news and updates](#) for venues and locations of concern and adhere to the advice provided.

### **How can I get vaccinated?**

The Australian Government's COVID-19 vaccination rollout is currently progressing through its identified phases. Eligibility for the COVID-19 vaccination is listed on the [Australian Government](#) website. To get the COVID-19 vaccine, you must [book an appointment](#). Please stay up to date with the [NSW Government's Getting Vaccinated webpage](#) for the latest information on the roll out. Further information on the phased COVID-19 vaccination rollout is available on the [NSW Government website](#).

**If you have any questions about your service operation you can contact the Information and Enquiries team on 1800 619 113 or by emailing [ececd@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:ececd@det.nsw.edu.au).**





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