



COVID-19 update

Dear services and providers

On Friday, we issued updated advice as provided by NSW Health. Keeping children at home where possible is an important step to keep the ECE sector safe and we appreciate how proactive service providers have been in sharing this important health message with families.

There are over 5,800 ECE services in NSW. As of 22 August, the department has received notifications from 161 of these related to positive COVID cases in ECE services since the start of the current outbreak.

As we work through the updated Public Health Orders over the coming days, we will share more detailed information about what the latest changes mean for you. We have addressed some frequently asked questions in this email and will continue to provide regular updates to the sector as more information is available from NSW Health.

Key Updates:

- Parents and carers across the state are strongly encouraged to keep their children at home, unless they need to be at Early Childhood Education and Care services. Where families can care for their child at home, they should keep them at home.
- As of 22 August, the department has received notifications from 161 services about positive COVID cases in ECE services since the start of the current outbreak. These cases include educators, children and family members who have dropped off or picked up children. Parents and carers across the state are strongly encouraged to keep their children at home, unless they need to be at those services.
- Staff who live or work in the [LGAs of concern](#) must provide evidence of their first vaccination dose by 30 August. [The Public Health Order](#) has now been updated to

advise of this requirement and additional guidance is expected to be provided by NSW Health early this week.

- Central Coast and Shellharbour are now considered part of Regional NSW, not Greater Sydney.

This advice is current as of 22 August 2021 and is subject to change of stay-at-home rules or an update of the Public Health Order following advice from NSW Health.

Frequently Asked Questions

Attendance

Which children can I allow to attend my service? How will our service determine who can and cannot attend?

As per the Premier's advice on 20 August, there have been a significant number of cases in Early Childhood Education and Care Services, so parents and carers across the state are strongly encouraged to keep their children at home, unless they need to be at those services. Where families can care for their child at home, they should keep them at home. This will further assist in reducing movement within the community and help to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Services should consider Commonwealth Government funding requirements and discuss circumstances with individual families and consider their needs, health advice, and service policies and procedures.

If a child is not attending our service, can we waive the gap fee?

Early childhood education and care services in Commonwealth-declared COVID-19 hotspots where stay-at-home orders run for more than seven days can now waive gap fees for families who keep their children at home.

For more information on the gap fee waiver, eligibility criteria and Commonwealth support, [visit the Department of Education, Skills and Employment's webpage.](#)

Can Out of School Hours Care or Vacation Care continue? We are catering for

school aged students.

Parents and carers across the state are strongly encouraged to keep their children at home, unless they need to be at an education and care service. If families are able to care for their children at home, they should do so. This includes OSHC and vacation care and this will be relevant should stay-at-home orders continue through the school holidays.

Are there any resources that can be shared to support learning from home for children?

The department has prepared a range of helpful resources you can share with families to support continued [learning from home](#). Our website also includes information on how learning through play can help a child's development:

- [Supporting young learners](#)
- [Podcasts for families](#)
- [Early learners animations](#)

Vaccination

Who does the mandatory vaccine apply to?

[The Public Health Order](#) has now been updated with detail on mandatory vaccination for early childhood education and care educators, staff, volunteers and practicum students living or working [in the 12 LGAs of concern](#). This is an important step to keeping the ECE sector safe.

- The Public Health Order applies to a relevant care worker (including ECE) whose place of residence or place of work is in an area of concern.
- A relevant care worker must not enter or remain in the worker's place of work **from 30 August** unless the worker—
 - (a) has had at least 1 dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, or
 - (b) has been issued with a medical contraindication certificate.

The relevant care worker must, when entering the worker's place of work—

- (a) carry the required evidence (name and place of residence identification and vaccination evidence), and
- (b) produce the required evidence for inspection if requested by—
 - (i) the worker's employer, or
 - (ii) the occupier of the worker's place of work, or
 - (iii) a police officer, or

(iv) an authorised officer.

In the Public Health Order, early education and care facility means a building or place used for the education and care of children, and includes any of the following—

- (a) a centre-based child care facility,
- (b) home-based child care,
- (c) school-based child care.

We are currently working with NSW Health regarding the range of questions that have been asked about how this will be implemented and monitored. We will bring you more information as it becomes available.

How can ECE staff access vaccines?

All people over the age of 16 are encouraged to get vaccinated. The Australian Government has announced new vaccine arrangements for people aged 16 to 39, with eligibility for the COVID-19 Pfizer vaccine from 30 August 2021.

NSW Health vaccination clinics and participating general practices and pharmacies across the state are open for COVID-19 vaccination bookings. NSW Health is also providing [walk-in centres](#) in some locations where no appointments are required.

To check your eligibility and book an appointment at a location near you, use the [COVID-19 Vaccine Eligibility Checker](#) on the Australian Government website. More information on COVID-19 vaccination, including translated information, is available from [NSW Health](#).

What are my rights with regards to mandatory vaccinations?

At least 1 vaccination will be required **by 30 August 2021** for early education and care, and disability support workers who live in or work in an area of concern or leaving an area of concern for the purposes of work.

It is an employee obligation and will be a condition of employment to seek out a COVID-19 vaccination unless a medical exemption applies. A collaborative approach in the workplace that includes discussing, planning and facilitating COVID-19 vaccinations is an important part of Australia's vaccine rollout, because having a vaccine is one of the best ways to protect ourselves and our community against COVID-19.

The Fair Work Ombudsman has prepared information with regards to vaccinations and the workplace. This includes:

- [Managing vaccinations in the workplace](#)
- [Requiring employees to be vaccinated](#)
- [Refusing directions to be vaccinated](#)
- [Providing evidence of vaccination](#)

You can read more here: <https://coronavirus.fairwork.gov.au/coronavirus-and-australian-workplace-laws/covid-19-vaccinations-and-the-workplace>.

Safety

What do we do if children are unwell?

If children display signs and symptoms of being unwell, they should be kept at home and may be asked to provide a negative COVID-19 test or a doctor's certificate before they return to the service. Services should continue to follow their policies and procedures to ensure the health and safety of everyone at the service (per [Regulation 168 of the National Regulations](#)).

NSW Health recommends services:

- Request evidence of a negative COVID-19 test before staff and children can return.
- Adopt this in the content of their infectious disease policies.

What if parents are unwell and want to drop off their children?

There are known cases of transmission in ECE services as a result of parents who are positive dropping off their children. Please reinforce to families that they should not bring their children if anyone in the household is unwell or has tested positive.

As an educator, how can I ensure my safety while working in an ECE service?

Vaccination offers the best protection possible against COVID-19 and will be mandatory for ECE staff in the [12 LGAs of concern](#) from 30 August. Educators should wear masks, practice physical distancing where possible and maintain increased cleaning and hygiene practices in services in line with Health advice.

Even when vaccinated, wearing masks, physical distancing and being vigilant about hygiene remain important to limit the spread of COVID-19.

What are the requirements for masks?

[Masks are required in both indoor and outdoor settings in](#) Early Childhood Education and Care settings across NSW. It is not sufficient to carry a mask on your person - it should be worn on your face, covering your nose and mouth.

Limited exemptions for wearing masks for staff in ECE apply:

- Where a child is deaf or hard of hearing; or
- The clear enunciation or visibility of the educator's mouth is essential.

Where an exemption for wearing a mask applies, physical distancing should be practiced where possible as another measure to limit COVID-19 transmission.

All parents dropping off or picking up children should be asked to wear masks.

Service NSW permits

From Saturday 28 August, [authorised workers](#) living in or entering the LGAs of concern will be required to carry a permit from Service NSW declaring that they are an authorised worker and cannot work from home.

- Service NSW is authorised to issue permits and these are expected to come online this week.
- A permit may be issued subject to conditions, including a requirement to carry specified supporting information (for example, a letter from an employer)
- A permit may be issued for a period specified in the permit or indefinitely.
- A person who is at least 16 years of age and who relies on a permit must—
 - (a) carry the permit and evidence showing the person's name and place of residence, and
 - (b) produce the permit and evidence for inspection if requested to do so by a police officer.

More information will follow on this.

Funding and Supports

What funding supports are available?

For Australian Government support to eligible services receiving Child Care Subsidy visit:

<https://www.dese.gov.au/covid-19/childcare>.

The [COVID-19 Disaster Payment](#) provides financial support for workers who have lost hours as a result of a state or territory public health order.

Providers and services may be eligible for a range of COVID-19 support funding. For information on whole-of-Australian Government support for businesses affected by COVID-19, visit business.gov.au. Some services may be eligible for a [Community Child Care Fund Special Circumstances Grant](#). Applicants must request funding after an event has occurred and they have accessed other COVID support.

We encourage you to discuss any concerns you may have directly with the Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment by contacting the Helpdesk on: [1300 667 276](tel:1300667276) Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm (AEDT) or [via email](#) anytime.

For broad based support available to eligible individuals and businesses in NSW who are impacted by COVID-19 restrictions visit [Service NSW](#) and <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/2021-covid-19-support-package>.

My service is a community or mobile preschool, where can I get information on funding obligations and requirements?

Details of funding obligations to mobile and community preschools are set out in your funding agreement. This includes Terms and Conditions of funding and Funding Guidelines for relevant programs.

- Terms and Conditions of funding are available through the Early Childhood Contract Management System (ECCMS)
- The latest versions of Program Guidelines are available on the Department's website: <https://www.education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/operating-an-early-childhood-education-service/grants-and-funded-programs>

Program Guidelines may change from time to time, and services should make sure they check the website regularly to ensure they are accessing the latest advice.

For more information

The department regularly updates the [COVID-19 Guidelines for ECEC services](#) based on advice from NSW Health.

Educators are encouraged to regularly check the [NSW Health website](#) and [NSW Government website](#) regarding up-to-date restrictions in NSW. Here are some links that may be useful:

- [Regional and rural NSW restrictions](#)
- [COVID-19 tests for Sydney workers](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccination for workers](#)

Your mental health and wellbeing is important. Support and resources are available to support you:

- [Department of Education wellbeing webinars](#)
- [Information for Educators and Staff](#)
- [Beyond Blue](#)
- [Headspace](#)
- [Black Dog Institute](#)

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.



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Our mailing address is:

Early Childhood Education
L 8 10 Valentine Avenue
Parramatta, NSW 2150
Australia

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