

Coronavirus Policy

NQS

QA2	2.1.2	Health practices and procedures Effective illness and injury management and hygiene practices are promoted and implemented.
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National Law

Section	167	Offence relating to protection of children from harm and hazards
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National Regulations

Reg	77	Health, hygiene and safe food practices
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Aim

To ensure all employees and families implement appropriate risk management procedures to prevent the spread of coronavirus or reduce the potential for the illness to spread.

Related Policies

Excursion Policy
Fees Policy
Food, Nutrition and Beverage Policy
Health Hygiene and Safe Food Policy
Incident, Injury, Trauma and Illness Policy
Infectious Diseases Policy
Medical Conditions Policy
Relationships with Children Policy
Sleep, Rest, Relaxation and Clothing Policy
Transport Policy
Work, Health and Safety Policy

Implementation

Coronavirus (COVID-19) can cause illnesses similar to the common cold, but it can also cause more serious respiratory diseases. Symptoms include fever, chills or sweats, cough, sore throat, tiredness, shortness of breath, runny nose, loss of smell/taste, muscle/joint pains, diarrhoea, nausea/vomiting. People at higher risk of catching the virus include older people, those with underlying medical problems and Indigenous Australians. The threats posed by the virus mean serious steps must be taken to stop the spread of the disease.

As outlined in our Infectious Disease and Health, Hygiene and Safe Food Policies, the Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, educators and staff implement strict hygiene and infection control procedures at all times to prevent or minimise the spread of contagious illnesses. Hygiene measures and exclusion principles outlined in these policies continue to apply, and will be informed by current guidance on coronavirus issued by the State and Federal Government including:

- [Guidance for Managing a COVID case in ECEC](#) and [COVIDSafe settings guidance for ECEC VIC](#)
- [Federal Department of Education, Skills and Employment Information](#)
- [Federal Department of Health](#) information

If in doubt about current coronavirus guidance, the Approved Provider or Nominated Supervisor will contact **the Victorian COVID-19 EC Advice Line on 1800 338 663**.

The Approved Provider and Nominated Supervisor will also implement a COVID Safe Plan to ensure the service can provide an environment that's as safe as possible for children, staff and visitors.

What must employees and families do?

Comply with government guidance

The Approved Provider, employees and volunteers and families must:

- **comply with guidance issued by Government agencies, including in relation to attendance and self-isolation.** This includes following the '[Checklist for COVID contacts](#).' The State Government also advises any staff member or child who is experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, needs to stay at home, even if they are not a positive case or a close contact, [get tested](#) and self-isolate until they receive a negative result - unless those symptoms are known to be caused by an underlying health condition or medication. This would also apply to family members
- **comply with all service policies including Infectious Diseases Policy** which requires ill children and adults to remain at home and comply with relevant Exclusion periods. Note employees, volunteers and families must comply with any isolation/exclusion periods in relation to coronavirus implemented by the Approved Provider or Nominated Supervisor including periods which exceed government requirements
- **advise the service** if they develop symptoms of the virus or are confirmed to have the virus. This is particularly important if they have been at the service before a positive test
- **comply with guidance issued by the Government in relation to the wearing of face masks at the Service and on transport.**

The Approved Provider and Nominated Supervisor will ensure staff, parents and visitors are familiar with best practice infection control measures for wearing masks including:

- washing hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitiser with at least 60% alcohol before touching mask
 - not touching the front of the mask or the face while it's on or when removing it – grasping the ear loops or ties instead
 - disposing of single use surgical masks responsibly and putting reusable masks directly into the laundry or a disposable/washable bag for laundering.
- **comply with any Government requirements for vaccination against COVID-19.** This includes vaccination requirements for ECEC staff, volunteers and contractors who attend the Service as outlined on State Government websites and contained in Public Health Directions. Where

vaccination is mandated, the Nominated Supervisor will sight evidence of the person's vaccination status and keep a written record of this

- **comply with any Government check-in protocols**
- **comply with the Service COVID Safe Plan.**
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Implement effective hygiene process

The coronavirus is most likely to spread from person-to-person through droplets of saliva produced when a person coughs or sneezes. Droplets cannot go through skin and people can only be infected if they touch their mouth, nose or eyes once their skin (ie hands) is contaminated. Droplets usually travel no farther than 1 metre through the air. This means the transmission of droplets can occur when people:

- have direct close contact with a person while they are infectious
- have close contact with an infected person who coughs or sneezes
- touch objects or surfaces like door handles or tables contaminated from a cough or sneeze from a person with a confirmed infection, and then touch their mouth or face.

Employees and volunteers will ensure they continue to implement hygiene processes outlined in the Health, Hygiene and Safe Food Policy to ensure high standards of hygiene and infection control at all times. This includes ensuring they and where relevant children:

- wash hands frequently with soap and water including before and after eating or handling food, going to the toilet, changing a nappy, handling play dough, using gloves, after wiping or touching nose and cleaning up spills of body fluids.
- wash hands in ways that meet the principles recommended by the World Health Organisation in the following videos [wash hands with soap and water](#) and [wash hands with alcohol based sanitiser](#)
- cough and sneeze into their inner elbow, or use a tissue to cover their mouth and nose and placing tissues in the bin immediately after use.

The Approved Provider or Nominated Supervisor will implement and ensure the following practices to ensure high standards of hygiene and infection control:

- ensure all staff complete the online [COVID-19 Infection Control Training](#) made available by the Federal Department of Health. Certificates of completion will be displayed
- ensure educators engage in regular handwashing with children
- ensure hand hygiene posters are displayed in the kitchen, learning spaces, hand wash and toilet areas, staff room and any other areas which can easily be seen by families, including the front entrance, and require all employees and families to use hand sanitiser provided at service entrances and in rooms. If using alcohol-based hand sanitiser in place of soap it will contain 60-80% alcohol and antibacterial soap/gel will never be used
- place signs and posters about physical distancing around the Service like those from [Safework Australia](#).
- ensure educators or cleaning staff implement appropriate cleaning practices which are implemented and documented more frequently than before the pandemic. This includes regularly cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces like door knobs, bathrooms (eg

taps, toilets), tables and chairs, phones, tablets, keyboards, playground equipment. Cleaning staff, including contracted cleaning staff, will implement appropriate COVID cleaning procedures like those outlined in the [Information about routine cleaning and disinfection in the community](#) Information Sheet or [VIC Health COVID Cleaning Guidelines](#). They will, for example:

- wear gloves and use alcohol-based hand sanitiser before and after wearing gloves
- wear masks if cleaning area where COVID positive person has been or there are spills of body fluids which could be infectious
- disinfect surfaces with an anti-viral disinfectant (made to strength recommended by manufacturer) after cleaning with detergent and water
- ensure all bathrooms are always well stocked with hand soap and towels, and they are sufficient quantities of essential items eg gloves, masks, wipes, sanitiser, disinfectant, soap, detergent and hand towels
- provide hands free sealed bins in bathrooms/rooms and ensure they're emptied daily and when full
- replace high touch communal items with alternatives where possible, for example:
 - providing staff with own personal equipment labelled with their name where possible
- open windows to circulate fresh air as much as possible and adjust air-conditioning from recycle to fresh air(unless air quality outside is poor).

Social distancing

The Approved Provider or Nominated Supervisor will also implement the following social distancing strategies where possible to limit the potential spread of COVID:

Information and notification requirements

The Approved Provider or Nominated Supervisor will:

- follow [VIC Government Guidance](#) in relation to managing COVID suspected and confirmed positive cases of COVID-19 in ECEC services – and follow the 'ECEC COVID-19 Response Guidelines – exposure management pack' which can be downloaded from the site
- comply with notification requirements for serious incidents which include:
 - any incident involving serious illness of a child at the service where the child attended, or should have attended, a hospital
 - any emergency where emergency services attended ie there was an imminent or severe risk to the health, safety or wellbeing of a person at the service
- comply with other notification requirements including notifying:
 - the Regulatory Authority within 7 days about any changes to service days or operating hours
 - the Regulatory Authority within 24 hours if Service is directed to close or closing voluntarily because of COVID – and again when Service reopens. (If closing voluntarily, children cannot be reported as absent and CCS will not be paid unless the closure is determined as a local emergency by VIC Education)
 - the Regulatory Authority within 24 hours if reducing the number of children attending
 - any third party software provider or via operational details in the Provider Entry Point of closures/re-openings or other relevant changes
 - the Regulatory Authority as soon as possible if they're receiving Kindergarten funding and an ECT is absent and another ECT is not available to deliver the Program

- WorkSafe VIC if an employee is hospitalised and/or dies as a result of contracting COVID-19 at work
- apply for waivers from ratio and qualification requirements if required where staff are required to self-isolate.

Interactions with Children

Where appropriate, educators will speak with children about COVID in ways that do not alarm them or cause unnecessary fear or distress. Educators may, for example, discuss with children their feelings in relation to the virus, remind children that the risk of catching the illness is very low, review hygiene measures they can take to reduce the risk of infection, discuss some of the good things happening in the world, or implement other strategies outlined in our Relationships with Children Policy. Educators will be careful not to speak to others in an alarmist way about COVID if children are present or within hearing.

What else should families do?

Asthma Australia has advised doctors to ensure all patients with asthma have a current Asthma Action plan and to update it if needed via a phone consultation, with any new plan delivered electronically. If their child has an Asthma Plan, families must consult their doctor and provide the Nominated Supervisor with an updated Plan or written confirmation from the doctor that the current Plan can continue. The Nominated Supervisor will distribute any updated Plans to relevant educators.

Fees

The Approved Provider or Nominated Supervisor will advise families of any relevant fee support which may be provided by the Government to assist families impacted by COVID-19. Without any Government fee support families must pay fees as outlined in our Fees Policy. Please note families approved for Child Care Subsidy may be eligible for Additional Child Care Subsidy (temporary financial hardship) where their income has dropped because of COVID-19. Kindergarten programs for four year olds and eligible three-year-olds in Victorian Government funded services will be [free in 2021](#). Families with children enrolled in kindergarten programs at unfunded sessional kindergartens and long day care centres will also benefit from a reduction in fees.

Staff Entitlements - Employees are ill or need to care for family member

Permanent employees are entitled to paid sick leave if they're ill with coronavirus. Employees must provide a medical certificate confirming they have the virus. Permanent employees who need to look after a family member or someone in their household who's sick with the virus are also entitled to paid carer's leave, or unpaid carer's leave if they have no paid sick or carer's leave left. Casual employees are entitled to 2 days unpaid carer's leave per occasion. Employees must provide evidence supporting an application to take carer's leave if requested. Permanent employees who want to stay at home as a precaution against exposure to coronavirus must apply for paid or unpaid leave.

Staff Entitlements - Employees required to self-isolate or wish to stay home as precaution

The Approved Provider or Nominated Supervisor will discuss available employment options with permanent employees who can't return from overseas or are required to enter quarantine or

isolation but aren't sick. Options include taking annual leave or other leave eg long service leave, and taking unpaid leave.

Staff Entitlements - Employees directed not to work

Permanent employees will be paid if they are directed not to work to prevent the spread of the illness, cannot work because numbers of children have declined or the centre is voluntarily closed by the Approved Provider.

In cases where service viability is threatened, for example because enrolments have significantly reduced, the Approved Provider will discuss the situation with all permanent employees and seek their views on possible changes to staffing arrangements eg reductions in hours. Employees' written consent to any new arrangements will be obtained.

Staff Entitlements - Stand downs

Under the Fair Work Act, an employee can only be stood down without pay if:

- there's a stoppage of work
- the employees can't be usefully employed (not limited to an employee's usual work)
- the cause of the stoppage is one the employer cannot reasonably be held responsible for (eg service is directed to close by Government).

Note employees may use paid leave entitlements if the Approved Provider agrees. During stand down periods there is no interruption to continuity of service and leave accruals continue. The Approved Provider may seek legal advice to confirm payment of salaries is not required under the 'stand down' provision of the Fair Work Act if directed to close by the Government.

During this time employees may engage in activities which don't involve children, for example, training, deep cleaning or administration.

COVID Entitlements

Employees may be eligible for financial assistance and should check Government websites (eg [Financial and Other support for COVID-19](#), [Services Australia](#)).

Source

[ECEC COVID-19 Response Guidelines – exposure management pack](#) - VIC Government

[ECEC COVIDSafe Settings Guide](#) – VIC Government

Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations

Fair Work Act 2009

Fair Work Ombudsman 'Coronavirus and Australian Workplace laws'

Federal Department of Health coronavirus information sheets

Federal Department of Education, Skills and Employment coronavirus information sheets

National Quality Standard

Occupational, Health and Safety Laws and Regulations

Review

The policy will be reviewed annually by the Approved Provider, Supervisors, Employees, Families and any committee members.

Last reviewed: 1st May 2023 Date for next review: as needed