

QUESTIONS FROM FORUM – 13 JULY 2020

HEALTH AND SAFETY

1. Is the recommendation to wear face masks when temperature checking for the locked down areas only or is this for all services?

The Victorian Government has announced that [those in metropolitan Melbourne and Mitchell Shire must wear a face covering](#) when they leave home from 11.59pm on Wednesday 22 July 2020.

Face coverings **will be mandatory** for people **aged 12 and over**.

The Victorian Chief Health Officer has advised that any face covering will be acceptable – it does not need to be a surgical mask.

In ECEC services, including kindergartens, it is not mandatory for teachers and educators to wear a face covering while working with children, but those who wish to do so, can.

In general, staff are **required to wear face coverings when not working with children in other areas** of the service (for example, in reception areas, staff rooms and foyers, when providing first aid or taking temperatures), and in travelling to and from your service.

In general, **parents will be required to wear face coverings at drop-off and pick-up times**.

Children aged under 12 are not required to wear a face covering. **Face coverings should never be placed on children aged under two due to choking and strangulation risks**.

A person who has a medical condition - including problems with their breathing, a serious skin condition on their face, a disability or a mental health condition - is not required to wear a mask or face covering.

Staff outside of metropolitan Melbourne or Mitchell Shire

Staff who live outside metropolitan Melbourne or Mitchell Shire and need to visit these areas for one of the permitted reasons, including for work, will have to wear a face covering.

Face coverings are also recommended in situations where maintaining 1.5 metres of physical distance is not possible.

If staff live in metropolitan Melbourne or Mitchell Shire and work outside of these areas, they must continue to wear a face covering, consistent with the advice above.

The Department of Health and Human Services website has [advice about face coverings](#), including:

- different types that can be used
- [how to make your own](#)
- [how to safely wear and safely remove](#)

If you are having short term difficulty sourcing face coverings for staff, we may be able to provide you with a number of single-use masks while you establish supply. Please email Early.Childhood.Implementation@edumail.vic.gov.au to request assistance.

Funded kindergarten providers will be given priority.

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Please note:

Face shields may be easier to wear for some individuals who have limited ability to wear masks. If face shields are used, ensure they are properly designed to cover the sides of the face and below the chin. Reusable face shields should be cleaned and disinfected after each use. Disposable face shields should only be worn for single use.

2. Please clarify DET position in temp checking for staff

There has been no information provided regarding temperature checking of staff.

Staff should be reminded that if they have any symptoms, even mild, they should not attend work. They should seek a coronavirus (COVID-19) test and remain at home until you receive your test result.

3. Should we be checking parents/carers temperatures at drop off or pick up?

No information has been provided that recommends this process.

4. Regarding COVID 19 testing, if someone within a child's household is getting tested do you recommend the child stays home until results are received?

If you have [symptoms of COVID-19](#) or have tested positive for COVID-19, you must stay at home or in your accommodation until you are told by health authorities or your GP to stop isolating.

Don't go to public places or places where you might have contact with other people, such as work, school, childcare, university or public gatherings. You should not have any visitors at home.

Only people who usually live with you should be in the same home but you must, if practical, isolate from them as well. If you have household members who are [close contacts](#), they will have to quarantine and get tested if they develop symptoms.

FUNDING

5. Will there be extra funding allocated to buy masks as recommended and contactless thermometers

No information has been provided on this to date.

If services do not have access to appropriate thermometers, they should email Early.Childhood.Implementation@edumail.vic.gov.au

6. Is there any clarification on if long-day care waiving of gap-fees can be at the discretion of the centre, i.e. can we waive 50% of the gap, can we choose who we waive fees for (i.e. people with financial hardship)?

Up to 31 December 2020, services open and located in an area of Stage 3 or higher – stay at home restrictions in Victoria are able to waive families out of pocket fees only where a child is not attending due to COVID-19 and an absence is recorded.

The CCS helpdesk has advised that services have been given the option to waive the gap fee, how they choose to do it, is at their discretion.

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Family Day Care/In Home Care need to seek approval before offer a fee waiver.

7. Are kindergartens allowed to charge the fee difference between normal term fee and covid19 fee assistance from government?

DET have advised that Services that accept the funding offer of \$460 per child **must provide a free 15-hour kindergarten program to all children in the funded kindergarten program**. If the funding does not cover parent fees, service providers may decide not to accept the funding and continue charging fees.

8. Our service has an integrated program and the childcare staff are the support staff for the funded program. Does this mean that we can still continue to get Jobkeeper for all these staff?

The CCS helpdesk provides the following advice;

Jobkeeper will cease from 20 July 2020 for employees of a CCS approved service. Employees working in the education and care sector organisations that deliver a mix of approved child care and other services, that are not working in delivering a CCS approved service remain eligible for Jobkeeper.

The support staff will not be eligible for Jobkeeper as they are delivering a CCS approved program.

9. We are in metro Melbourne; can we accept the \$230 offer for non lockdown areas in Victoria, and charge the gap instead of the \$460?

DET have advised that If the funding does not cover parent fees, service providers may decide not to accept the funding. It is at their discretion.

If full fees have already been paid for Term 3, the full amount should be refunded in a timely way.

10. Are we able to offer a refund of \$400 to 3-year-old students who have paid but not attending, and charge the gap fee?

The Victorian Government will offer funding to eligible unfunded three-year-old kindergarten programs located in **metropolitan Melbourne and Mitchell Shire** in Term 3. This will provide eligible services with a flat subsidy of \$400 for each enrolment where a child is not attending or paying fees to attend.

Please note this funding is for the service – a flat subsidy is provided where a child is not attending OR not paying fees to attend.

The requirement of this funding is different to the funding offered to four-year-old funded kindergarten - If full fees have already been paid for Term 3, the full amount should be refunded in a timely way.

11. What if we get JobKeeper but not for the 3-year-old staff?

DET information states to be eligible for the funding services must not be receiving Jobkeeper payments.

Please contact det on 1800 338 663 to clarify your particular circumstances.

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12. If we are receiving JK do we have to provide free kinder for three and four-year-old kindergarten.

If you are receipt of Jobkeeper for the kindergarten staff – there is no requirement documented that states that you must provide a free kindergarten program.

13. If our funding is based on the data collected in April, will DET backpay us for children that have enrolled or started after the data was collected?

Any changes to your enrolments should be noted on the KIM.

Please contact DET on 1800 338 663 to clarify your particular circumstances.

STAFF

14. If we have staff not working at the kindergarten - CoM have put them on Leave without pay, is it appropriate for the CoM to pay them some hours to coordinate this from home?

Services in metropolitan Melbourne and Mitchell Shire

To be eligible for the four-year-old funding, services must:

- not be receiving JobKeeper payments (for staff delivering the program at that service)
- provide a free 15-hour program for all enrolled children
- be open (unless instructed by the Department of Health and Human Services to close)
- **maintain pay and conditions for regular staff delivering the funded kindergarten program.**

Services in all other areas

To be eligible for the funding, services must:

- not be receiving JobKeeper payments (for staff delivering the program at that service)
- pass on the full \$230 as a fee reduction for eligible families
- charge less than \$1,000 a term for a 15-hour program
- be open (unless instructed by the Department of Health and Human Services to close)
- maintain pay and conditions for regular staff delivering the funded kindergarten program

The payment of an above award payment is at the discretion of the employer.

In making any decisions, the impact on the organisations budget needs to be considered. ELAA also recommends that the payment be for limited time and reviewed at the end of this time.

The payment should be documented and recorded on the employees personnel file.

15. If you run a LDC and you are directed to close by DHHS due to a confirmed or close contact and given now you are not paying JK, do we stand down the staff for the deep clean (not pay them) or do we still pay their normal wage due to CCS funding?

Standing down employees may be done in exceptional circumstances and ELAA is available to advise members on a case by case basis.

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16. Our committee want to allocate some additional leave, but we wanted to check if it should be covered under VECTEA.

Approved Providers should be familiar with the leave provisions as documented in the staff instrument of employment, as the award or agreement details the leave available to employees. An Agreement or Award includes minimum wages and conditions so employers may grant additional benefits however there may be obligations to consult with staff in accordance with relevant Agreement or Award provisions. It is strongly recommended you seek the advice and assistance of ELAA in such circumstances.

OPERATIONAL

17. Can we get someone in for class photos?

Can incursions go ahead?

Can Allied service staff come onsite?

Can we run tours outside of kinder session times with only one or two parents attending (no children)?

The Victorian Chief Health Officer has advised that due to the main risk of transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the early learning environment is between adults, it is important that visitors to early childhood services are limited to those delivering or supporting essential services and operations.

In the current stage 3 stay at home restrictions there are only 4 reasons to leave home;

- Shopping for food and supplies
- Medical care and caregiving
- Exercise and recreation
- Study and work – if you can't do it from home

Visitors may include allied health staff (including those providing programs through School Readiness Funding), specialist or service management staff, and maintenance workers.

When deciding what visitors are essential to the delivery of your program, we encourage you to consider whether an on-site visit is needed to achieve the intended learning and development outcomes for children.

During this time, services should continue to access the range of support provided by the Department, such as those provided through SRF and the Kindergarten Quality Improvement Program. For circumstances where an on-site visit is not essential, the Department has worked with many providers to develop remote delivery options to ensure your staff and children can continue to be supported.

Any visitors who attend services should ensure appropriate hand hygiene and other risk-mitigation measures are followed.

If you have any questions, please contact your local [regional office](#).

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18. Will application for second year preschool change?

As advised previously, families need to know that attending on-site is available and supported. This is the best way to support children's learning and development, especially for vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Feedback shows that many families did engage effectively with kindergarten programs in Term 2 either on-site, through learning from home, or a mix of both.

In the vast majority of cases, it is appropriate for a child to transition to school after their year of four-year-old kindergarten. Schools welcome and support children at diverse stages in their growth and development.

A second year of funded four-year-old kindergarten should only be considered where the kindergarten program is deemed to be the most appropriate learning program and environment for the child given their developmental status, and that the child will achieve better outcomes at kindergarten than if they go to school. Requests for a second year of funded kindergarten should not be based on missed on-site or learning from home program time.

The process and requirements for a second year of funded kindergarten are unchanged this year.

DET have developed a [factsheet to provide to families](#).

For more information, visit the Department's website

19. What about children of essential workers? Do we need relief staff to cover them?

The following students are able to attend school for on-site supervision, but will also undertake the remote learning program:

- **children of parents/carers who cannot make suitable arrangements to supervise children at home**, including children of teachers in government schools who are required to return to work on-site
- vulnerable students
- students with disabilities who choose to attend on site.

20. Can we still schedule Pupil Free days in future weeks if this becomes appropriate?

In metropolitan Melbourne and Mitchell Shire, under Stage 3 Stay at Home restrictions, there was five pupil-free days for schools from Monday 13 to Friday 17 July, with some students attending (including those whose parents or carers cannot work from home), and all teaching staff on-site.

The extra time was provided as it limited a significant number of people moving about these communities, giving health experts additional time to assess the local situation.

Some sessional kindergarten services in these areas also considered including a child-free day/days to support staff to plan programs for children and families at this difficult time.

It is up to each provider to make decisions about a selected child-free day or days, talking to and working with staff and their community.

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Taking a small number of child-free days is entirely consistent with the conditions attached to both normal and additional sessional kindergarten funding provided by the Victorian Government, which requires services to be open for families who wish to attend.

As previously advised, the Department has relaxed the requirement to deliver 600 hours across the year, so this is not an obstacle to a small number of additional child-free days for improving delivery and support.

It is recommended that you contact DET if you have considered this or are considering this.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

21. Is Coronavirus covered under the Infectious Disease leave under VECTEA?

No! The clause details the prescribed infectious diseases of German Measles, Chicken Pox, Influenza, Measles, Mumps, Scarlett Fever, Whooping Cough, Rheumatic Fever and Hepatitis.