

Q: What is the health and safety advice for early childhood in the context of coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Early Childhood Education and Care services continue to be open for all children.

The Acting Victorian Deputy Chief Health Officer has stated, the health and safety measures recommended for early childhood focus on the strategies that are recognised as being most effective. These include hand hygiene, enhanced cleaning and physical distancing between adults.

Decisions regarding the types of activities that take place should take account of the potential risk associated with the activity, the level of community transmission, and available modifications to minimise risk.

Services should note the following;

- **A COVIDSafe framework for ECEC services has been developed that brings together the advice of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee and Victoria's COVIDSafe principles for business.**
- **Single use face masks should not be worn longer than 4 hours without changing.**
- **Temperature screening is not currently mandatory for early childhood settings. Although ECEC's can choose to continue with temperature screening of children on arrival.**
- **Visitors to services**

Activities that attract greater risk include those that involve the congregation of large numbers of staff and children, close contact between individuals and mixing of individuals outside the early childhood education and care (ECEC) community, and activities conducted indoors in enclosed spaces. Singing in a group and wind instrument playing can also be associated with increased risk.

Therefore, services should limit the number of visitors, focusing on essential services and operations as much as possible.

Essential visitors may include allied health staff (including those providing programs through School Readiness Funding), specialist or service management staff, authorised officers that are undertaking regulatory matters and maintenance workers.

Health professionals undertaking assessments for Program for Students with Disabilities may also visit services to assess children and meet with staff.

Services should use phone or teleconference if parents need to have longer conversations with educators or teachers about their child.

Incursions are not considered to be essential visitors.

- **Reduce mixing**

Reducing mixing between different age or room groups is recommended to minimise risk of spread of transmission and aid containment in the event of a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) on-site. I

It is acknowledged that staff may need to move between rooms to support breaks and, in these situations, staff should be reminded of the importance of hand hygiene, physical distancing between themselves and other staff, and mask wearing when not directly caring for or teaching children.

Services should

- Implement small group play, staggered mealtimes and indoor/outdoor play opportunities whenever possible.
- Consider the setup of the room and the placement of the activities and limit the number of whole group activities. A greater range of activities will encourage children and staff to spread out more broadly.

Rather than having group times where everyone is sitting on the mat, consider using informal opportunities to engage with the children/read books/do storytelling with small groups of children at a time.

For younger children, particularly, consider the rotation of toys more often and increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfection of toys. Sharing of toys that have been placed in mouths should be monitored and avoided.

- **No parent volunteers on site**
- **Tours for prospective families**

Onsite tours for prospective families must not occur during normal service operating hours but can occur when the service is not operating, for a maximum group size of 10 people and should be scheduled to occur with the service prior to the tour.

However, in exceptional circumstances, families may visit a service during normal operating hours to support the potential enrolment of a child for Term 4, or where a visit is essential to support the educational and wellbeing planning for children with a disability or complex needs.

Where visits are conducted under these very limited circumstances, the group size is limited to a single family. Physical distancing, hand hygiene and face masks are strictly required. Families are not permitted to access indoor learning areas. Cleaning of touch points should occur after the visit.

It is intended that tours during operating hours for children starting at the service in 2021 will be able to recommence when Victoria reaches the Last Step in the [roadmap to reopening](#) in line with public health advice.

- **Bush kindergarten and Beach kindergarten programs can occur**
- **Large gatherings**

Avoid large gatherings such as information sessions and ceremonies, particularly those that involve mixing of different groups of children and their families or those conducted indoors.

Music classes or groups that involve singing, or wind instruments should not be held onsite at ECEC services at this time.

School transition programs are limited to small groups only (under 10) with no inter-mixing with students at the school.

- **Excursions**

Where ECEC services have exclusive use of a venue, excursions may be undertaken, either indoors or outdoors, where the activity is part of an agreed program of early years education.

There is no gathering limit to the number of children. Any excursions outside of these arrangements are not recommended, other than to local parks.

ECEC services should not visit residential aged care facilities until further notice. This will help minimise the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) infection to vulnerable Victorians.

- **Services must keep visitor records and maintain appropriate PPE.**

Please remember;

<p>Reinforce COVIDSafe behaviours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay home when unwell • Actively support and practice good hygiene • Encourage physical distancing between adults • Wear a face mask (adults) • Avoid interactions in enclosed spaces (adults) 	<p>Create COVIDSafe spaces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make hand hygiene easy • Keep surfaces clean and implement enhanced environmental cleaning and disinfection • Promote outdoor air ventilation and do not have air conditioners on recirculate
<p>Respond to coronavirus (COVID-19) risk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep records and act quickly if someone becomes unwell • Use personal protective equipment • Clean and disinfect appropriately if a staff member or child has been unwell whilst at the ECEC service 	

Detailed guidance is available by [CLICKING HERE](#)

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact ELAA at member memberservices@ela.org.au