

# Back to School and Early Childhood Education and Care Plan



# Kim Little, Deputy Secretary

Early Childhood Education  
Department of Education and Training

Details on the Back-to-School and ECEC Plan to keep children and staff as safe as possible, and enable early childhood services to stay open.



# FREE RAPID ANTIGEN TESTING

**WHEN** The twice-a-week testing is voluntary but strongly recommended encouraged for face-to-face ECEC staff during the first four weeks of Term 1 2022.

**WHO** staff employed by providers of sessional kindergarten, long day care, family day care, occasional care and outside school hours care. Kits can be provided to KIS funded additional assistants.

The Department will supply the rapid antigen tests direct to ECEC service sites and FDC providers to the NQAITS-listed service street address and is expected to commence from Thursday 27 January and progress as quickly as possible on the business days in the first week of Term 1.

**Please monitor the email address entered as your 'Service Email' in NQAITS (as at 19 January), as updates on delivery of rapid antigen tests will be sent to this address.**

**RECORD KEEPING** Services are not required to see or record the result of staff rapid antigen tests

**POSTIVE RAT** A staff member who tests positive must tell their employer, isolate for 7 days and report their result to the Department of Health online or call centre on 1800 675 398.



# REQUIRED THIRD DOSE VACCINATION

All staff are **required to have received three doses of a COVID-19** vaccine unless a medical exemption applies, by the relevant deadline:

- For workers who received their second dose of a COVID-19 vaccination on or before 25 October 2021, the deadline is 25 February 2022.
- For workers who received a second dose of a COVID-19 vaccination after 25 October 2021, the deadline is 15 March 2022.

## Required vaccination after contracting COVID-19

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) advises that a previous COVID-19 infection is not a contraindication to COVID-19 vaccination, and vaccination can occur post a COVID-19 infection and there is no requirement to delay vaccination after recovery from acute illness. Further information is available in the FAQs at [Worker vaccination requirements | Coronavirus Victoria](#)

- Staff are required to show **evidence of vaccination status**.
- Providers are asked to exercise maximum flexibility in enabling staff to make and attend vaccination appointments.
- Providers have been provided with communications to support the promotion of third dose vaccinations and vaccinations for 5- to 11-year-olds at school pop ups.





## MASKS

Under the pandemic orders, staff must wear face coverings at all times when in service. There is an exemption from this requirement if they are actively teaching and clear enunciation or visibility of their mouth is essential.

- **Staff are however recommended to wear masks at all times** – especially indoors – in February, in light of the unvaccinated status of children in early childhood services and high current infection rates.
- N95 or similar masks are not required and nor are surgical masks. DET will have some supply of surgical masks available, and will advise on timing shortly – noting that this would be a contribution only and services and staff should work on the basis of using their own masks as their primary supply.

# VENTILATION

- Good ventilation, together with other mitigation strategies is important to reduce risk of COVID-19 infection and spread.
- Many ECEC services are already well placed to create environments that enable good ventilation, simply by keeping doors and windows open, and maximising existing outside spaces.
- The Victorian Government is helping kindergarten services to keep children and staff COVIDSafe with grants of \$4,500 to keep communities protected to support additional ventilation and air purification measures.
- The online Outdoor Pedagogy Portal for Victorian Educators - includes a professional learning module, online books and case studies on outdoor learning. The portal is available for free for all Victorian educators.
- DET Factsheet - Maximising outdoor learning

Fact sheets and information on how to effectively use air purifiers and promote air flow is available in the COVIDSafe ECEC Settings Guide at [COVIDSafe settings guidance for early childhood education and care](#) [Coronavirus Victoria](#)

### Ventilation Advice for Early Childhood Education and Care Services

Published and correct as of 11/05/2020

- Conduct learning outdoors as possible
- Open windows and doors to maximise ventilation
- Open windows and doors on opposite sides of the room, where possible, to create cross-ventilation
- Keep windows open, if unoccupied, as much as possible
- Maximise air movement on ceiling fans or use pedestal fans
- For thermal comfort, air conditioning systems should be used in conjunction with natural ventilation

### Air Purifier Advice for Early Childhood Education and Care Services

Published and correct as of 11/05/2020

If a service is utilising air purifiers, this fact sheet provides additional guidance for room placement.

Air purifiers do not replace natural and mechanical ventilation but complement them. Air purifiers are recommended for use in rooms where there is a reduced mask use when eating, higher levels of exertion and aerosol projection, and areas of lower ventilation and possible illness. Some examples include staff rooms and learning areas with limited ventilation.

- Place the air purifier in the front of the room, so you can place it against a wall
- You can also place a corner unit with 20-30cm around the sides and top
- Air purifiers are portable and can be moved to wherever considered most necessary

### Ventilation Advice for Early Childhood Education and Care Services

Published and correct as of 11/05/2020

- When not required for thermal comfort, operate split system air conditioners on the fan only setting to increase air movement
- Ventilate rooms during non-learning times
- Increase outdoor learning opportunities
- Re-imagine outdoor learning environments

### Maximising outdoor learning in early childhood settings during COVID-19

In line with current Victorian Chief Health Officer's advice, early childhood education and care (ECEC) services are encouraged to consider how programming for children can be offered outdoors. This factsheet provides service leaders and educators with information and ideas for planning increased outdoor learning in Term 4, 2020 and beyond.

#### Key messages

- Early childhood services are encouraged to operate their educational programs outdoors where possible to ensure optimum ventilation and reduced risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission.
- Increasing time spent outdoors means that children and families may notice differences in how their educational program is presented. Educators are encouraged to communicate with families about these changes and the many advantages and rich learning opportunities of outdoor play.
- Increased outdoor learning should be considered as a continuation of your current program in line with your existing educational program goals.
- Critical reflection on outdoor programming with your team will ensure you are supporting positive learning and development outcomes for children at your service.

#### Re-imagining outdoor learning environments

Many services already operate indoor/outdoor programs and/or nature-based programs. Services are not being asked to redesign programs or philosophies to be nature-focused, but rather to increase the amount of time children spend outdoors and provide a stimulating program that can support long periods of time outside.

Think about how you can use your existing outdoor resources in new and flexible ways to make your space work most effectively. Natural loose materials such as mud, dirt, clay, stones, sand, branches, bark, seed pods and leaves can be used as part of your existing learning program. Loose parts are full of open-ended play opportunities and can be transferred across different outdoor play spaces to suit varying learning experiences.

Critical reflection as a team can support educators to consider new ways in working towards the goal of spending as much time outside as possible. As a first step, you may like to consider implementing an indoor/outdoor program. If this is not already in place at your service.

Following time together as a team, involve children in the planning of the outdoor learning space. Ask them for their ideas on what experiences and activities could be done outside. The outdoors often provides more opportunities than indoor areas for children to change and adapt spaces.

Consider and reflect on the following questions:

- How could you adapt your current indoor activities to the outdoor environment and work together to plan, support and share outdoor spaces?
- Are there any areas in the outdoor environment that are not currently well utilized? How could you change these to maximise their potential or encourage children to explore them more?



# SUPPORTS FOR MANAGING STAFFING AND ENROLMENTS

Department of Education and Training (DET) recognises that ECEC services may face challenges in operating programs in early 2022 whilst managing expected staff absences

Options available include:

- **Waivers (all ECEC services)**
- **Funding in exceptional circumstances (funded kindergarten)**
- **Managing and prioritising enrolments:**
  1. Children at risk of abuse or neglect, or whose immediate wellbeing will otherwise be at risk if they are not attending
  2. Children of essential workers including:
    - a. healthcare workers, aged care, disability, emergency services, education, critical utilities, custodial facilities, transport and freight, food production and distribution workers (this can be one parent only, does not have to be both parents). A full list of essential workers exempt from household isolation requirements is available at: [Checklist for COVID contacts | Coronavirus Victoria](#)
  3. Other vulnerable or disadvantaged children, as defined in the Victorian kindergarten priority of access guidelines
  4. Once these groups of children have been accommodated, in the above order, services should consider sharing available places between remaining children. For example, if the kindergarten program is normally run across two sessions but there are insufficient places for all children to attend both as usual, remaining children could be allowed to attend one out of the two sessions.
- **Consolidation of services**

# FUNDED KINDERGARTEN PROVIDERS

For funded kindergarten services, consistent with the Kindergarten Funding Guidelines, services will continue to provide face-to-face learning for as many enrolled children as possible. Pre-emptive or blanket closures by services are not consistent with funding requirements.

If your service needs to close or restrict face-to-face delivery to a subset of children (i.e. essential worker and vulnerable children) for more than three days you must contact your local DET area office to discuss this and seek approval.

No funded kindergarten service should be closing the service for some or all children, or moving to learning from home, without this discussion and approval from DET.



## NOTIFICATION

ECEC provider or nominated supervisor to submit a notification through National Quality Agenda IT System (NQAITS) as soon as they become aware that a child, parent, contractor, or worker has been onsite but only in the 48 hours prior to the onset of symptoms consistent with COVID-19 or test collection date if asymptomatic (no symptoms).

## RESPONSE

ECECs must notify the ECEC community through a daily email (where applicable) when a child or staff member has (or multiple children or staff members) have returned a positive COVID-19 test result and had attended the service. The notification should include:

- Dates of attendance
- Affected age group room / program room
- The notification can be provided to only the affected age group room / program room or to the whole service

## OPERATIONS

There is no requirement for the service to close. The decision to continue operations after a confirmed or probable case has been identified will depend on whether the service can continue to meet their regulatory obligations under the National Law.

Symptomatic persons are required to use an at-home RAT immediately. Two RATs are available from state testing sites (or if not available undertake a PCR test)

- If a positive result is received, parents and guardians must notify the ECEC service and the confirmed or probable person/child must isolate for 7 days.
- Notify the Department of Health via the online form of their positive RA test

OR

Asymptomatic persons can attend ECEC services but should monitor for symptoms. If symptoms develop, isolate and get a test (RAT or PCR).

The service must submit an outbreak notification when five or more cases over a seven-day period. Outbreak notifications may trigger the provision of written guidance from the Department of Health or relevant Local Public Health Unit with active outbreak management only occurring in certain circumstances.

# TESTING & QUARANTINE REQUIREMENTS

Scenario	Required actions for the staff and child/family
A child or staff member tests positive to COVID-19, either through RA test or PCR test	<p>Isolate for 7 days (inclusive of weekends) and do not attend ECEC during this period.</p> <p>Inform the ECEC that they have tested positive to COVID-19</p> <p>A negative test is not required to return to ECEC following completion of 7 days of isolation.</p> <p>Follow the <a href="#">Checklist for COVID cases</a></p>
<p><u>A child or staff member is a household contact or house-like contact.</u></p> <p>You have spent more than four hours with someone who has COVID-19 inside a house, accommodation, or care facility. <u>This includes family day care</u></p> <p>Contact at all other ECEC services is not included in this definition</p>	<p>Notify the service that they are a household or household-like contact.</p> <p>Follow the <a href="#">Checklist for COVID contacts</a></p> <p>The child must quarantine for 7 days (inclusive of weekends) and must not attend ECEC during this period.</p> <p>Staff members must quarantine for 7 days (inclusive of weekends) and must not attend ECEC during this period unless a <b>critical work exemption</b> has been agreed</p> <p>* If another person in your household tests positive during your 7 day quarantine period as a household contact (in addition to the initial case) your 7 day period doesn't start again.</p>
A child or staff member has been in contact with a case of COVID-19, including at ECEC or at work.	<p>If asymptomatic, children and staff should continue to attend ECEC and monitor for symptoms. Parents/carers can attend State testing centres and receive a PCR or rapid antigen test.</p> <p>If symptomatic, all children/staff must stay/return home. Parents/carers can attend State testing centres and receive a PCR or rapid antigen test.</p> <p>Follow the <a href="#">Checklist for COVID contacts</a></p>

# ADDRESSING STAFFING CHALLENGES

## Workforce exemptions (excluding FDC)

- Workers in early childhood education (and primary, secondary and specialist schools) are **eligible for an exemption from close contact home isolation requirements**, to allow attendance at the workplace to support the delivery of essential services.
- ECEC staff who are **asymptomatic close contacts may return to work** under certain conditions. Both the staff member and their employer must agree to the staff member returning to the workplace. Employers must respect the individual rights of workers and not direct their workers to attend work if they don't consent

## COVIDSafe requirements for exempted staff

- Undertake a **daily rapid antigen test (RAT) for five days** and return a negative result prior to attending work each day.
- **Always wear a mask**, including while teaching and in the company of others, except for when eating or drinking. **P2/N95 mask or TGA-approved P2-equivalent mask use is preferred**
- Do not enter shared break areas including staff rooms.
- **Work in areas where transmission risk is lower** (outside where possible, or in large, well-ventilated spaces)
- Isolate in accordance with public health requirements when not attending the workplace.
- Notify your employer if, at any time, you **develop symptoms or test positive on a RAT**.

# COVIDSafe ECEC SETTINGS GUIDE

An updated COVIDSafe ECEC Settings Guide is available to support COVIDSafe steps in ECEC.

Please ensure that you are across your services COVIDSafe Plan

- ✓ Stay home when unwell
- ✓ Practise good hygiene
- ✓ Ensure physical distancing between adults
- ✓ External drop off and pick up, where practical
- ✓ Contactless check in
- ✓ Increased ventilation and outdoor programming
- ✓ Wear a mask (recommended)
- ✓ Reduce mixing, where possible



# ECEC COVIDSafe Steps Summary

Key actions for ECEC	January and February
Cleaning	<b>Yes</b> - Services are to implement routine cleaning
Visitors (working close or near children and/or staff)	<b>Additional risk mitigation</b> strategies recommended
Visitors (Parents / Carers) including Orientation	<b>Additional risk mitigation</b> strategies recommended
Health, wellbeing, inclusion visits	<b>Yes</b>
Student placements	<b>Yes</b>
Working across multiple sites	<b>Limit</b> where possible
Bush / Beach / Nature Kinder	<b>Yes</b>
Other activities – such as tours, events/gatherings, excursions, incursions, photographers, as well as music and the performing arts.	<p><b>Additional risk mitigation strategies recommended</b></p> <p>ECEC services should consider whether the activity can be delayed or restructured. ECEC service must conduct a risk assessment and determine the additional risk mitigation measures required.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limiting activity to outdoor spaces</li> <li>• Holding the activity as infrequently as possible</li> <li>• Consider the non-participation of persons (staff or children) at higher risk of progression to severe disease (e.g. who are immunocompromised or have significant coexisting medical conditions)</li> <li>• Staggering of groups who participate in the activity</li> </ul>



A photograph of three young children sitting together and smiling. The child on the right is a girl with dark hair in pigtails, wearing a white shirt. The child in the middle is a boy with light brown hair, wearing a blue and white plaid shirt. The child on the left is a girl with light brown hair, wearing a pink shirt. They are all looking towards the camera with joyful expressions. The background is slightly blurred, showing colorful objects on shelves.

# Thank you

**TO ASSIST THE**

**DEPT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING &  
DEPT OF HEALTH**

**TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS AND RESOURCES  
PLEASE SEND ANY COMMENTS, QUESTIONS OR  
FEEDBACK TO**

**[COVID.EARLY.CHILDHOOD@EDUCATION.VIC.GOV.AU](mailto:COVID.EARLY.CHILDHOOD@EDUCATION.VIC.GOV.AU)**