

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) MANAGEMENT POLICY

(Effective from 27 July 2022)

Introduction

Our Service has been responding to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic since March 2020 by implementing a range of explicit measures to manage the risk of COVID-19. Our duty of care and responsibilities to children, parents, families, educators and staff to provide a safe environment remain our priority.

The COVID-19 pandemic is still active in Australia, however management of COVID-19 in the community and workplace has changed significantly in each state and territory as the majority of the ECEC workforce is vaccinated and the Omicron COVID-19 variant is less severe than the original Delta strain.

However, Australia is currently seeing a third wave of COVID-19 due to subvariants BA.4 and BA.5. The chances of reinfection of COVID-19 is higher due to these subvariants being better able to evade immunity from vaccination. Vaccination, and booster vaccinations are still recommended to strengthen protection against COVID-19.

This policy has continued to be updated over the past 2 years to reflect current Public Health Orders related to vaccinations, wearing of face masks, self-isolation for close contacts, use of Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) and other COVIDSafe requirements.

As there are NO standard COVIDSafe principles for all states and territories Education and Care Services are required to check with the regulatory authority in their state/territory and implement practices in their setting to limit the spread of transmission of any variant of COVID-19. [All of [The COVID-19 Test and Isolate National Protocols](#) do not apply across all states and territories.]

Recommendations within this policy should be viewed as best practice.

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD (NQS)

QUALITY AREA 2: CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND SAFETY		
2.1.1	Wellbeing and comfort	Each child's wellbeing and comfort is provided for, including appropriate opportunities to meet each child's needs for sleep, rest and relaxation.

2.1.2	Health practices and procedures	Effective illness and injury management and hygiene practices are promoted and implemented.
2.2	Safety	Each child is protected.

EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES NATIONAL REGULATIONS	
77	Health, hygiene and safe food practices
85	Incident, injury, trauma and illness policies and procedures
86	Notification to parents of incident, injury, trauma and illness
87	Incident, injury, trauma and illness record
88	Infectious diseases
90	Medical conditions policy
93	Administration of medication
110	Ventilation and natural light
162	Health information to be kept in enrolment record
168	Education and care service must have policies and procedures
173 (2)(g)	Prescribed information to be displayed- centre based service and family day care service, a notice stating that there has been an occurrence of an infectious disease at the premises or venue

RELATED POLICIES

Control of Infectious Diseases Policy Family Communication Policy Hand Washing Policy Health and Safety Policy Immunisation Policy Incident, Injury, Trauma and Illness Policy Interactions with Children, Families and Staff Policy	Medical Conditions Policy Nappy Change & Toileting Policy Payment of Fees Policy Privacy and Confidentiality Policy Physical Environment Policy Sick Children Policy Work Health and Safety Policy
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PURPOSE

To provide consistency and clarity on the management of COVID-19 in education and care services including preschool, long day care, out of school hours care, vacation care, family day care, mobile and occasional care services.

SCOPE

This policy applies to children, families, educators, staff, management and visitors of the Service.

IMPLEMENTATION

This policy is guided by recommendations and health measures by the Australian Government, local Public Health Units and the Regulatory Authority in [State/territory] to promote evidence-based COVID-safe behaviours to help minimise the community transmission of COVID-19. The *National Guiding Principles for Managing COVID-19 in Schools and Early Education and Care Services* state that ECEC services are essential and should remain open wherever possible in outbreak situations. ECEC workers are designated as ‘essential workers’ in all jurisdictions. [National Return to School Framework \(PDF, 498KB\)](#).

Our Service has a *COVID-19 Safe Plan* in place and a copy is available on our premises at all times.



This policy must be read in conjunction with our other Service policies:

- Sick Children Policy
- Incident, Injury, Trauma and Illness Policy
- Medical Conditions Policy
- Handwashing Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Interactions with Children, Families and staff Policy
- Payment of Fees Policy

Risk Management

Our Service has effective and systematic risk management processes in place to identify any possible risks and hazards to our learning environment and practices related to COVID-19. Where possible, we have eliminated or minimised these risks as are reasonably practicable. Control measures are reviewed in consultation with staff members and effectively communicated with families and visitors. Due to the

constant changes in managing our Service during the pandemic, our approach to risk management is ongoing and fluid.

Our Service implements health and safety procedures as stated in the *Staying healthy: Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services* (Fifth Edition) developed by the Australian Government National Health and Medical Research Council as part of our day-to-day operation of the Service. During the pandemic, we have increased our health and safety procedures by implementing a combination of COVID-safe practices including:

- adhering to mandated COVID-19 vaccinations for all ECEC staff and visitors
- maintaining an accurate workplace attendance register for all staff, parents, visitors at all times (including contact phone numbers) as per National Regulations
- wearing of face masks and other PPE (as required)
- reducing mixing of children by separating cohorts
- ensuring staff maintain physical distancing of 1.5m from each other, especially in tea rooms (where possible)
- enhanced personal hand and respiratory hygiene for children, staff and parents (including cough and sneeze hygiene)
- improving ventilation in indoor spaces and adhering to any 'ventilation plans' implemented in schools or buildings as per DHHS advice
- where possible, moving lessons and activities to outdoors to reduce transmission between groups
- managing situations where children are required to queue- waiting their turn to use bathroom for handwashing or toileting, waiting their turn to use a piece of equipment etc.
- full adherence to the NHMRC childcare cleaning guidelines and cleaning and disinfecting high touch surfaces at least twice daily, washing and laundering play items and toys
- restricting the number of visitors to our service
 - using signage and markings on the floor to indicate a 1.5 metre mark for parents/families to use
 - ensuring face masks are worn by staff when engaging with other adults, such as during pick up and drop offs (subject to exemptions)
 - requiring all staff to wear face coverings when not working directly with children in areas of the service
- communicating with parents of children who have chronic medical conditions or immunosuppression as they may be at an increased risk of disease and require additional ongoing support/care

- conducting COVID-safe risk assessments for any group outings to public places (excursions to local shops, schools, libraries)
- conducting COVID-safe risk assessments for any large group celebrations and adhering to Victorian restrictions for groups size, square metre allowance and other measures

Vaccinations for COVID-19 in ECEC settings

As children aged 0-4 years are not currently eligible for COVID-19 vaccination, reinforcing prevention strategies in ECEC settings is a priority. Vaccination is the leading public health prevention strategy to ending the COVID-19 pandemic. Each State/Territory have had their own Public Health Orders related to mandatory vaccinations for education and care services. While no longer mandated, decisions about vaccination can be made at a local level based on the requirements of each service.

Approved Providers are encouraged to review their own COVID-19 vaccination related policies, procedures, work health and safety obligations and risk management strategies.

Handwashing/personal hygiene measures

Effective handwashing remains a vital strategy to help reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Our Service will ensure:

- all employees, parents, children and visitors must wash their hands with soap and water or use the alcohol-based hand sanitiser provided upon arrival to the Service
- educators and staff must adhere to our *Handwashing Policy* at all times
- children are supervised when washing hands
- educators and staff must adhere to effective food preparation and food handling procedures
- educators will wash their hands or use alcohol-based sanitiser, before wearing gloves and wash their hands after wearing gloves
- hands must be washed thoroughly using soap and water before and after using the toilet
- cough and sneeze etiquette must be used- cover your cough and sneeze with your hand or elbow

Managing a positive case of COVID-19

Testing and isolation are no longer mandatory in ECEC settings as per the updated health advice and National Protocols. [[COVID-19 Test and Isolate National Protocols](#)].

To assist our service manage the risk of transmission of COVID-19 (especially the Omicron and other subvariants) management will:

- remind families that any person (employee, enrolled child, parent, caregiver, visitor or contractor) who is displaying symptoms such as: **fever, coughing, sore throat, fatigue and**

shortness of breath, should have a PCR or Rapid Antigen Test and not attend our Service under any circumstance until they receive a negative test result.

In the event of a positive case, management will:

- follow ECEC service actions/guidance provided by state regulatory authority
- ensure daily attendance records for staff, children and visitors are up to date
- provide Health Fact Sheets to families ([NSW Health fact sheet for families](#))
- provide information about [getting tested for COVID-19](#)
- conduct a thorough clean of the service

National Protocols require:

- any person who tests positive to COVID-19 to inform their workplace/employer, school and early childcare facility and any other social contact they have spent time with from the 2 days they started having symptoms or 2 days before they tested positive. COVID-19 can be confirmed by a positive Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) or a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test.
- register positive test results
- anyone who tests positive to COVID-19 to self-isolate for at least 7 days from the day they test positive.

Close Contacts

Updates have been made to the 'close contact' requirements in most states and territories [May 2022].

Close contacts are required to:

- wear a face mask at all times when outside the home
- undertake rapid antigen tests on 5 during the 7 days after exposure OR test for COVID-19 if symptoms develop
- not attend vulnerable settings for 14 days unless in exceptional circumstances
- work from home where possible
- notify employer, early childcare setting or education setting
- children who are close contacts may be required to submit negative RAT tests to attend an education and care service [Check your state/territory for further clarification]

STATE SPECIFIC INFORMATION

VICTORIA	Managing a confirmed case of COVID-19 in early childhood education and care services Current COVIDSafe settings for business and industry in Victoria
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Unwell children at our Service

As per our *Sick Child Policy* we reserve the right to refuse a child into care if they:

- have a contagious illness or infectious disease
- have been in close contact with someone who has a positive confirmed case of COVID-19 and display COVID symptoms
- are unwell and unable to participate in normal activities or require additional attention
- have had a temperature/fever, or vomiting in the last 24 hours
- have had diarrhoea in the last 48 hours
- have been given medication for a temperature prior to arriving at the Service

What happens if our Service is forced to close?

The current health advice is that ECEC services should continue to remain open unless otherwise directed with risk mitigation measures in place. (DESE, 2022). Any decision to temporarily close our Service will be made in collaboration with our Regulatory Authority and all families will be notified immediately via email and/or phone.

The Approved Provider must notify the [Regulatory Authority](#) within 24 hours of any closure via the [NQA IT System](#) and the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) via the [Provider Entry Point \(PEP\)](#) or your third-party software provider.

Allowable Absences from childcare

For the 2021-22 and 2022-23 financial year, all Australian families can access 10 extra allowable absence days per child in this current financial year (i.e., 52 days) due to COVID-19.

These extra absences are to help services and families affected by COVID-19 but can be used for any reason. They will be applied automatically.

Waiving of gap fees

The gap fee is the difference between the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) the Government pays to a service and the remaining fee paid by the family. Until 30 June 2023, Evoke Early Learning **will not** waive the gap fee and receive Child Care Subsidy (CCS) if a child is unable to attend care because:

- they, or a member of their immediate household, must isolate due to COVID-19.
- the service, or a room at the service, is closed on advice from the state or territory government due to COVID-19. This includes where:
 - a Family Day Care or In-Home Care educator isn't able to provide their usual service because they, or a member of their immediate household is quarantining or isolating
- the state or territory has restricted access to childcare in a region due to COVID-19.

Services must keep a record of the advice by a state or territory authority advising that they close and accurately reflect waived gap fees in the fee statements provided to parents. Check the [Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment website](#) for further information regarding gap fee waiving general information. **Services are not obligated to waiver gap fees. This is a business decision for each service to consider.**

Caring for a family member or emergency

If an employee cannot attend work due to caring for a family member due to COVID-19, they are entitled to take paid carer's leave. Casual employees are eligible to have 2 days unpaid carer's leave per occasion. See [Fair Work Act](#) for entitlements for casual, part time and full-time employees. Reasonable evidence is required to justify the absence.

Pandemic Leave Disaster Payment

This lump sum payment is available for people who can't work and earn an income due to:

- Self-isolation or quarantine due to COVID-19
- You are caring for someone who has to self-isolate or quarantine due to COVID-19.

From 10 January 2022 Services Australia will accept both Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) and Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) results. See: [pandemic leave](#) for further information.

Pandemic Leave is only available until 30 September 2022.

Waivers

The Approved Provider may apply to the Regulatory Authority for waivers for staff qualifications to minimise disruptions to our provision of care. Waivers for ratios will only be considered in exceptional circumstances. Waivers will be considered on a case-by-case basis. see: [NGA ITS Portal Emergency Management Help Guide](#)

Talking to children about COVID-19

As per our *Interactions with Children, Families and Staff Policy*, our Service is committed to maintaining positive interactions and relationships with children and their families. Information provided to children about COVID-19 will be age appropriate and sensitive to their emotional wellbeing. Educators will both acknowledge children's concerns and be open to discussions about COVID-19.

Communicating with families

Our Service will continue to provide regular communication with families and share information about COVID-19 as required. Due to the fluid nature of COVID-19 and the necessity for some staff members to be absent to care for their own children, our Service will endeavour to inform parents and families of any staff changes on a daily basis.

Caring for our community

Our Service is committed to continue to provide quality education and care to all children and support families responsibly during these unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Knowing how to look after yourself, and others is very important during this crisis.

We will promote a safe and supportive environment by:

- reassuring children they are safe
- acknowledging and listening to children's questions
- promoting and implementing hygiene routines for handwashing and cough and sneezing
- keeping regular and familiar routines within our Service
- ensuring children eat well throughout the day
- engaging children in play, games and other physical activities
- being alert to children's level of anxiety and provide quiet and relaxing activities
- ensuring children are provided with rest and sleep when needed
- providing information to families and support services as required

Disclaimer

The information contained in this 'draft' policy is based on current information from the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Australian Government Department of Health, Australian Government- The Treasury, Family Assistance Law and Fairwork Ombudsmen (27 July 2022)

Information and resources

National Coronavirus (COVID-19) Health Information Line	1800 020 080 Call 131 450 for translating and interpreting service
Health Direct	1800 022 222
Public Health Unit- Local state and territory health departments	

Australian Government Department of Education Skills and Employment- [absences from child care due to local emergency](#)

Beyond Blue [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Supporting educators, children and young people](#)

CCS Helpdesk 1300 667 276

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) resources Australian Government](#)
[COVID-19 Infection control training](#)
[Emerging Minds Community Trauma Toolkit](#)
[Fairwork Australia- Coronavirus and Australian workplace laws](#)
[Healthdirect Coronavirus hub](#)
[Information on Social distancing](#)
[Local state and territory health departments](#)
[NSW Department of Education. \(March 2022\). COVID safety in early childhood education and care services: Guidance.](#)
[NSW Department of Education COVID-19 Management of confirmed case in early childhood education and care services NSW Department of Education](#)
[Queensland Department of Education. COVID-19 Confirmed case management process- early childhood education and care services. QLD Department of Education](#)
[Raising Children](#)
[Safe Work Australia](#)

State and Territory specific information

[Victorian Government Department of Health and Human Services – Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#)

Source

Australian Council of trade unions Coronavirus (COVID-19) Privacy at work <https://www.actu.org.au/coronavirus>
 Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority. (2014).
 Australian Government Department of Health *Health Topics*
 Australian Government Department of Health Coronavirus (COVID-19)
 Australian Government Department of Health. (2022). COVID-19 Test & Isolate National Protocols
 Australian Government Department of Health. Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) statement on COVID-19, schools and early childhood education and care ([15 November 2021](#)).
 Australian Government Fair Work Ombudsman *Coronavirus and Australian workplace laws* (updated 13 March 2020)
 Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment
 Australian Government Department of Health
[Education and Care Services National Regulations](#). (2011).
 Fair Work Ombudsman Coronavirus and Australian workplace laws (2020)
<https://coronavirus.fairwork.gov.au/coronavirus-and-australian-workplace-laws>
 National Health and Medical Research Council. (2012). *Staying healthy: Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services*.
 NSW Government. Department of Education. (2021). COVID safety in early childhood education and care services: Guidance.
Public Health Act 2010
Public Health Amendment Act 2017
 Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2019 Victoria
 The Australian Parenting website Raisingchildren <https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/a-z-health-reference/coronavirus-and-children-in-australia>
 Revised National Quality Standard. (2018).
 Safe Work Australia (2020)

REVIEW

POLICY REVIEWED	JULY 2022	NEXT REVIEW DATE	As required
JULY 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy reviewed • Mandated vaccination information removed • Links to state specific information checked and links repaired • Extension of Pandemic Leave • Extension of additional absences (DESE) 		
MAY 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy update • Changes to close contact rules • Repeal of mandatory vaccinations (NSW) • Broken links fixed • Updated state by state information on managing COVID-19 in workplace 		
JANUARY 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-write of Policy to reflect COVID-19 National Protocols and changes to managing a positive COVID-19 case in education and care settings • Update of WA links to Regulatory Authority • Policy Version 31 available in COVID-19 Archives 		
16 MARCH 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • original policy drafted 		