

August 27, 2021

Early Childhood Division
Q&A - Child Care and COVID-19

Q1. Are child care providers required to exclude a child from care who has tested positive for COVID-19?

Yes. COVID-19 is on the list of reportable infectious diseases, as published in the ND Department of Health "[Child Care and School Infectious Disease Exclusion Guidance](#)." Any child who tests positive for COVID-19 is subject to the program's policies related to exclusion and return.

Q2. Are child care providers required to exclude a staff person from care who has tested positive for COVID-19?

Yes. The ND Department of Health Child Care and School Infectious Disease Exclusion Guide states that both children and staff should be excluded and may return 10 days after symptoms have passed.

Q3. Are child care programs required to notify the ND Department of Health if they know of a COVID-19 infection in the child care setting?

Yes. Licensed Child Care programs are required, as per ND Admin Code, to have a plan for excluding children who are known to have a communicable disease from the child care setting, and to notify the ND Department of Health.¹

Q4. Are child care programs required to notify parents of a COVID-19 infection in the child care setting?

No. There is no requirement that a child care program notify parents of the presence of positive COVID-19 cases or exposures in their child care setting. However, as ND Department of Health is not conducting comprehensive contact tracing, DoH and DHS strongly encourage programs to be transparent in sharing information with families to allow everyone to make the decisions they need to, as per their individual situation.

The DHS Early Childhood division is strongly encouraging programs to proactively notify

¹ NDAC 75-03-10-26(9). "Establish and implement practices in accordance with guidance obtained through consultation with local or state department of health authorities implemented regarding the exclusion and return of children with infectious or communicable conditions. The program may obtain this guidance directly or through current published materials regarding exclusion and return to the child care center."

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families when there is a communicable disease present in their program, and to share information about actions the program is taking to maintain standards for health/safety and infection protocols. Programs can use this [notice template](#).

Q5. Are child care staff required to be vaccinated before they are allowed to work in a child care setting?

There is no licensing requirement for child care workers related to required vaccinations. A child care program may have requirements that exceed licensing as each program has the ability to establish its own employment policies and practices.

Q6. Can a child care program require children to wear a mask?

Yes. Each child care program establishes their own health and safety protocols and so can set expectations around prevention practices according to their own policies.

Child care programs are encouraged to follow CDC guidance for child care and school settings, which recommends everyone 2 years and older should wear a mask covering their mouth and nose when around people who do not live in their household, except when eating or sleeping. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-childcare.html>

Q7. What is the difference between COVID-19 and other common illnesses?

The overlap between COVID-19 symptoms with other common illnesses means that some people with symptoms of COVID-19 could be ill with something else. This is even more likely in young children, who typically have multiple viral illnesses each year.

Although COVID-19, colds, and flu illnesses have similar symptoms, they are different diseases. Children who have symptoms of infectious illness or certain symptoms of COVID-19 should not attend your early childhood program. Encourage your families to be on the alert for signs of illness in their children and to keep them home when they are sick. Parents should pay particular attention to:

- Fever (temperature 100.4 °F or higher)
- Sore throat
- New uncontrolled cough that causes difficulty breathing (for a child with chronic allergic/asthmatic cough, see if there is a change from their usual cough)
- Diarrhea, vomiting, or stomachache
- New onset of severe headache, especially with a fever

People who have a fever of 100.4 °F (38.0 °C) or above or other signs of illness should not be admitted to your facility.

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The length of time the child should stay out of child care depends on whether the child has COVID-19 or another illness. In most instances, those who have COVID-19 can be around others after

- 10 days since symptoms first appeared and
- 24 hours with no fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and
- Other symptoms of COVID-19 are improving.

Common Questions about Health, Safety and Infection Control

Q8. What is the difference between cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting?

Cleaning with soap and water should always be the first step prior to sanitizing or disinfecting. Cleaning uses soap and water and accomplishes the removal of dirt and impurities, including germs, from surfaces which will enable the sanitizer or disinfectant product to properly work. Cleaning alone does not kill germs, but it decreases their number.

Sanitizing is the use of a product that reduces but does not eliminate germs on inanimate surfaces to levels considered safe by public health codes or regulations. A sanitizer may be appropriate to use on food contact surfaces (dishes, utensils, cutting boards, highchair trays) and toys that children may place in their mouths. Sanitizing for these purposes must always be done with a product that has been labeled for this purpose and all manufacturer's instructions should be followed.

Disinfecting is the use of a product that destroys or inactivates germs (but not spores) on an inanimate object. A disinfectant may be appropriate to use on hard, non-porous surfaces such as diaper change tables, counter tops, door & cabinet handles, and toilets and other bathroom surfaces. **Disinfectants should not be used on food contact surfaces or mouthed toys.** Disinfecting must always be done with a product that has been labeled for this purpose and all manufacturer's instructions should be followed.

Utilize this link from the CDC regarding cleaning and disinfecting your facility:
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fprepare%2Fdisinfecting-building-facility.html

Q9 Are there alternatives to chlorine bleach?

A product that is not chlorine bleach can be used in childcare settings IF:

- It is registered with the EPA (<https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>).
- It is also described as a sanitizer or as a disinfectant.

Check the label to see how long you need to leave the sanitizer or disinfectant in contact with the surface you are treating, whether you need to rinse it off before contact by children, for any precautions when handling, and whether it can be used

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on a surface that may come in contact with child's mouth or food.

Q10 Can hydrogen peroxide be used instead of chlorine bleach?

You can use products with hydrogen peroxide as the active ingredient instead of chlorine bleach, however, check to see if the product has an EPA registration number and follow the manufacturer's instructions for use and safe handling.

Remember that EPA- registered products will also have available a Safety Data Sheet (SDS) that will provide instructions for the safe use of the product and guidance for first aid response to an accidental exposure to the chemical.

Q11 How do I safely prepare bleach solutions?

- **Follow the manufacturer's instructions for dilution and contact time, bleach concentrations normally range from 5.25 to 8.25% active sodium hypochlorite and this will determine how to correctly mix the solution.**
- Protect yourself from exposure to bleach (wear gloves, eye protection, and make sure the room is ventilated)
- Dilute bleach with cool water
- Add bleach to the water rather than the water to bleach to reduce fumes
- Never mix any other chemicals with bleach
- Bleach solution must be mixed fresh daily to be effective
- Label the solution container (bleach sanitizer or bleach disinfectant) and the date mixed
- Never mix or store ammonia with bleach or products that contain bleach.

A. Preparation for Sanitizing:

- Prior to mixing the solution you must determine the concentration of the bleach product. Recipes for the most common concentrations are below, please confirm the concentration of sodium hypochlorite on your product prior to mixing.
- Sanitizer solution for use on food contact surfaces and mouthed toys must be made with unscented regular bleach formulas and should be 50-100 ppm but no greater than 200 ppm as measured by test strips.

| Amount of Water | Amount of Bleach Product by Concentration | |
|-----------------|---|------------------------|
| | 5.25 % | 8.25 % |
| 1 gallon | 1 Tablespoon | 1 teaspoon |
| 1 quart | $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon | $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon |

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B. Preparation for Disinfecting:

- Prior to mixing the solution you must determine the concentration of the bleach product. Recipes for the most common concentrations are below, please confirm the concentration of sodium hypochlorite on your product prior to mixing.
- Disinfection solution should be used for high touch surfaces such as light switches, door handles, railings, desks, chairs, sinks, faucets, bathrooms, and diapering surfaces.

| Amount of Water | Amount of Bleach Product by Concentration | |
|-----------------|---|-----------------|
| | 5.25 % | 8.25 % |
| 1 gallon | 5 Tablespoons (1/3 cup) | 3 ¼ Tablespoons |
| 1 quart | 4 teaspoons | 2 ½ teaspoons |

Q12 How do I safely use bleach solutions?

- Use only on hard non-porous surfaces in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
- Protect yourself from exposure to bleach (wear gloves, eye protection and make sure the room is ventilated) when using bleach solution.
- Apply the bleach dilution after cleaning the surface with soap or detergent and rinsing with water if visible soil is present.
- If using a spray bottle, adjust the setting to produce a heavy spray instead of a fine mist.
- Allow for the contact time specified on the label of the bleach product.
- Apply when children are not present in the area.
- Ventilate the area by allowing fresh air to circulate and allow the surfaces to completely air dry or wipe dry after the required contact time before allowing children back into the area.
- Store all chemicals securely, out of reach of children and in a way that they will not tip and spill.

Remember that any cleaning, sanitizing or disinfecting product must always be safely stored out of reach of children. Always follow the manufacturer's instruction for safe handling to protect yourselves and those in your care.

Q13 How do I clean and sanitize toys?

- Toys that cannot be cleaned and sanitized should not be used.

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- Toys that children have placed in their mouths or that are otherwise contaminated by body secretion or excretion should be set aside until they are cleaned by hand by a person wearing gloves. Clean with water and detergent, rinse, sanitize with an EPA-registered disinfectant, and air-dry or clean in a mechanical dishwasher. Be mindful of items more likely to be placed in a child's mouth, like play food, dishes, and utensils.
- Machine washable cloth toys should be used by one individual at a time or should not be used at all. These toys should be laundered before being used by another child.
- Do not share toys with other groups of infants or toddlers, unless they are washed and sanitized before being moved from one group to the other.
- Set aside toys that need to be cleaned. Place in a dish pan with soapy water or put in a separate container marked for "soiled toys." Keep dish pan and water out of reach from children to prevent risk of drowning. Washing with soapy water is the ideal method for cleaning. Try to have enough toys so that the toys can be rotated through cleanings.
- Children's books, like other paper-based materials such as mail or envelopes, are not considered as a high risk for transmission and do not need additional cleaning or disinfection procedures.

Q14 How should I care for items such as nap items (sheets, pillows, blankets, etc.) and bibs?

- Keep each child's nap items separate, storing in individually labeled bins, cubbies, or bags.
- Nap items should be laundered weekly, sooner if soiled.
- Labeled cots/mats should be cleaned weekly, sooner if soiled. Unlabeled cots/mats should be cleaned daily.
- Bibs should be laundered after every use.
- Do not shake dirty items to minimize the possibility of dispersing the virus through the air.
- Wash items as appropriate in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
- Items should be laundered in the warmest appropriate water setting and dried in a dryer completely.
- Store clean items away from any soiled items that have not yet been laundered or cleaned.

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Common Questions about Screening

Q15 Should I still be using screening questions for my program?

As a general principle, during a period of high community transmission of an infectious disease, it is advisable to limit access to the childcare facility as much as possible. As such, child care programs should consider screening employees and children (ask the parent/guardian) entering the childcare facility each day upon arrival using the following questions.

COVID-19 Screening Questions:

1. Have you had any **known contact** with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 or is a close contact with symptoms in the last 14 days?
2. Have you had **any new symptoms** you feel are consistent with COVID-19 virus such as fever (100.4°F or higher) **OR** loss of taste and/or smell two **OR** two or more of the following symptoms: fatigue, headache, muscle/body aches, chills, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, congestion/runny nose, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain

If a thermometer is not available, ask:

Have you ever felt feverish within the last 24 hours?

3. Have you been **tested for or diagnosed with** COVID-19 in the last 14 days? If the answer to all 3 screening questions is “no”, the adult and child can enter the facility. If the answer to any of the 3 screening questions is “yes”, the person should be directed to call their health care provider, if ill, or visit the ND Department of Health website for further guidance.

Q16 My program already utilizes a daily health check process as per licensing requirements. Is that sufficient?

For any child that enters the child care facility, programs should continue to utilize the modified “[Daily Health Check](#)” procedure for children.

If a child exhibits one or more of the indicated symptoms or screened “yes” to the facility screening questions, the child should not be allowed to remain at the child care facility.

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