

COVID-19 Advisory Memorandum

TO: Child Care and Out-of-School-Time Operators

FROM: Sean Brown, Commissioner Department for Children and Families

SUBJECT: COVID-19 Prevention Measures for Fall 2021

DATE: August 18, 2021

Background

As a state, we are extremely proud of the programs and services that continued to operate during the COVID-19 pandemic. These programs filled a gap that was essential to the emergency response and were critical to the health and well-being of many children and families.

As we enter into the Fall 2021, our goal is to ensure child care and out-of-school-time programs continue to provide high quality in-person programming for families. Vermonters have achieved among the highest rates of vaccinations against COVID-19 in the world, and the vaccines have proven to be very effective at preventing cases and reducing the severity of COVID-19 when the occasional “breakthrough” case does occur in a vaccinated individual. We are therefore confident this goal is achievable, provided the strong vaccination uptake continues among the eligible population, and we see a similar rate of uptake among children younger than 12 years of age when vaccines are approved for this age group.

However, it is important to acknowledge that COVID-19 cases and clusters will continue to occur in Vermont and elsewhere. Thankfully, the science is clear:

vaccines are very effective at preventing cases and even more effective at preventing hospitalization or worse outcomes.

Since it appears, based on the current data, that a state of emergency will not be justified this year, we will issue a series of advisory memos instead of formal guidance documents. These advisory memos may be updated in response to changing operating conditions.

This first memo is to guide decision making for programs effective September 1.

COVID-19 Prevention Strategies for the Opening of Schools

Stay Home When Sick

Children and staff who are sick should stay home. This is the most important prevention message. Child care and out-of-school-time operators should partner with pediatric providers and families to guide medical decision-making.

All children and staff should stay home if they:

- Show symptoms of COVID-19;
- Have a fever (temperature greater than 100.4°F); or
- Are currently in quarantine due to close contact with an individual with COVID-19 or in isolation due to testing positive for COVID-19.

If symptoms begin while at school, the child or staff member should be sent home as soon as possible, and the individual should be isolated from other staff and children until they can go home.

Additional tools on return to child care/out-of-school time care is expected in the next couple of weeks.

Masks

Due to the fact that the population of children in child care and out-of-school time care is generally not yet eligible for vaccination, programs should require universal masking for *all* children and staff when indoors (with exceptions below).

Children under 2 years of age **must not** wear masks. Masks are developmentally appropriate when children can properly put on, take off, and not touch or suck on the covering. Children who have a medical or behavior reason for not wearing a facial covering should not be required to wear one. These decisions should be made in partnership with the child's parents/caregivers and health care provider. [Guidance on Mask Exemptions in Children and Adolescents](#) provides guidance for the conditions that allow children to qualify for a mask exemption.

Masks should not be required outdoors.

Masks, when required, may be removed when needed for instructional or operational purposes.

Guidance will be updated when vaccine eligibility expands. It is anticipated that once 80% of all children in a child care or out-of-school-time program are vaccinated, masks could be removed.

Masks are currently required for *all* passengers on buses per federal regulation,

regardless of age or vaccination status.

Contact Tracing

Child care and out-of-school-time programs should continue to participate in contact tracing as requested by the Health Department.

More information on What to do when COVID-19 is in PreK-12 School, Child Care, Camps and Out of School Programs and contact tracing can be found on the [Vermont Department of Health website](#).

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