



## Updated COVID-19 Guidelines for Child Care Programs

October 15, 2021

This document provides updated guidelines for child care centers and family day homes. These guidelines supersede previous guidelines issued on August 13, 2021 by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and all child care guidance previously issued by the Virginia Department of Social Services.

### Important Notes

- This document reflects guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Virginia Department of Health (VDH), and is generally consistent with guidelines for K-12 schools.
- The VDOE strongly recommends that programs use the guidelines to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.
- Guidelines should be considered “best practice” and **are not subject to enforcement** by the Office of Child Care Health and Safety.

The VDOE will continue to inspect regulated and licensed programs for health and safety requirements based on the [Code of Virginia](#) and in [regulation](#) (8VAC20-770 through 8VAC20-850, as appropriate). Exempt programs are subject to inspections as allowed by the Code of Virginia. Licensed and regulated programs are subject to health, sanitation, exclusion, and infection control requirements as described in the appropriate regulation or requirements or any executive or public health orders.

### Guidelines for Child Care Programs

Following public health guidance remains critically important, especially noting that emerging data show that the Delta variant is much more contagious. Here are the key guidelines for child care programs in Virginia:

#### Face Masks (**Revised October 15, 2021**)

- On August 12, 2021, the state health commissioner issued an [order](#) that requires **all individuals** ages two and older to wear masks when indoors in public and private K-12 schools. **This includes child care and afterschool programs operating at K-12 public and private schools.** This does NOT include freestanding child care or afterschool programs.



- Pursuant to current guidance from the CDC and VDH, VDOE **strongly recommends** that all staff and children ages two and older wear masks when indoors, regardless of vaccination status, to the extent practicable.
  - **For staff: Mask requirements depend on vaccination status and level of community transmission of COVID-19. Note that** masks are **strongly recommended** for all staff in childcare settings, regardless of vaccination status.
  - Providers should review the revised Virginia Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI) revised [standards](#) to understand which staff are required to wear masks or face coverings.
    - Regardless of the level of community transmission of COVID-19, unvaccinated employees and “otherwise at-risk employees (because of a prior transplant or other medical condition)” must wear masks while indoors.
    - In areas of “[substantial or high community transmission](#),” vaccinated employees must wear masks while indoors.
    - Exceptions to mask requirements in the workplace (for example, when alone in office or when eating/drinking while distanced) are provided in the standard. For more information and exceptions from masking requirements, please visit the [DOLI website](#).
  - **For children:** Masks are **strongly recommended** for children ages 2 and older when indoors, including while on transportation, regardless of vaccination status. Face masks should NOT be put on babies and children under age two because of the danger of suffocation. Face masks are NOT recommended for any child who is eating, drinking, sleeping, has trouble breathing, or is unable to remove the cover without assistance.
- Providers should also be aware of the CDC Order related to face masks on public transportation, which includes school buses. Please visit the [CDC website](#) for more information.

### Physical Distancing and Cohorting

- Programs should facilitate physical distancing indoors while still allowing for the care and developmental needs of children. Programs should generally maintain 3 feet of distance between individuals to the extent practicable and appropriate.
- Practicing **cohorting**, or placing children and staff into distinct groups that stay together from day to day and limiting mixing between groups, can help limit the spread of COVID-19. To the extent practicable and appropriate, programs should try to keep



groups of children together with consistent staff and maintain at least 6 ft distance between cohorts to limit impact in case of exposure.

### COVID-19 Testing and Symptomatic Individuals (Revised October 15, 2021)

- Testing staff and children can help reduce outbreaks. VDH has a [testing site locator](#) which may be helpful for providing referrals to testing. Note that [at-home tests](#) may also be purchased and provided to staff and/or families. Families can also use at-home tests with children as young as two years old; checking product labels is advised. Programs may use testing as a screening tool (i.e., testing individuals regardless of symptoms) or a diagnostic tool (i.e., testing symptomatic individuals or individuals with known close contact to a person with COVID-19).
- Notify the [local health department](#) and your licensing inspector of outbreaks and report employee COVID-19 cases using VDH [online reporting portal](#). This portal ensures case reports will meet VDH and DOLI reporting compliance.
- Encourage staff and children to stay home when sick and have a plan to isolate children or staff that display [symptoms of COVID-19](#) or other illnesses.
- Facilities with a confirmed case of COVID-19 among children or staff should contact the local health jurisdiction to follow [local health department](#) guidelines.
- [Template letters](#) for COVID-19 cases, exposure, and outbreaks available in the [Updated VDH COVID-19 Interim Guidance for Child Care Facility Collaboration with the Local Health Department](#).

### Vaccinations (Revised October 15, 2021)

President Biden's [COVID-19 Action Plan](#) announced vaccination requirements that will impact child care programs in Virginia in the future. These requirements are still in development and have not yet been published.

- The federal Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is developing a rule that will require all employers with 100 or more employees to ensure their workforce is fully vaccinated or require any workers who remain unvaccinated to produce a negative test result on at least a weekly basis.
- Staff in Early Head Start/Head Start programs will be required to be vaccinated. This will include Early Head Start and Head Start programs in Virginia public schools as well as community-based Head Start programs.

Everyone ages 12 and older is eligible to receive a free COVID-19 vaccine in Virginia. Vaccines are safe, effective and widely available. All child care staff are encouraged to get vaccinated, especially as young children are not yet eligible to be vaccinated.



- [Data](#) shows that unvaccinated Virginians account for nearly everyone who is now being hospitalized or dying from COVID-19. Visit <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/covid-19-vaccine/> for information.

### **Revised DOLI Standards (Added October 15, 2021)**

All providers are encouraged to review the revised [Standards for Infectious Disease Prevention of the SARS-CoV-2 Virus that Causes COVID-19](#). Note the DOLI website also provides [training materials and other resources](#).

### **Family Access to Child Care Facilities**

As a reminder, Virginia law states that parents or guardians cannot be prohibited from entering a child care facility when their child is present under [Section 22.1-289.054](#). Providers may recommend or require parents or guardians to maintain a certain distance and/or wear masks while picking up or dropping off their children or visiting the facility.

### **Additional Resources for Child Care Operations**

- [Guidance, resources, and data](#) on COVID-19 from VDH
- [Resources for child care and camps](#) from VDH
- CDC's [COVID-19 Guidance for Operating Early Care and Education/Child Care Programs](#)
- [Local health department](#) for guidance on specific situations and/or how to respond to a confirmed case of COVID-19
- Free print and digital resources on CDC's [communications resources](#) main page

We encourage you to review information from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), the [Virginia Department of Health \(VDH\)](#), and other sources of reliable public health information for guidelines and recommendations for child care programs.

Programs should contact their assigned licensing inspector or the [Office of Child Care Health and Safety](#) in their region with questions.