

# COVID-19: Public health guidance for childcare settings

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This document provides guidance on the prevention and management of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in childcare settings. Childcare settings include both licensed and unlicensed facilities that provide care and education to children from infant to preschool age, and that provide before and after school care for school-aged children.

**The COVID-19 pandemic is evolving rapidly. This guidance is subject to change. Please visit the Middlesex-London Health Unit website (<https://www.healthunit.com/news/novel-coronavirus>) regularly for updates and additional guidance.**

## Deciding to continue operations

- It is critical that we keep COVID-19 out of childcare settings. The Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario has [declared immediate closure of all licensed childcare programs](#), and requested immediate closure of all unlicensed programs.
- If you decide to remain open, the Middlesex-London Health Unit recommends that all children, staff, and visitors be screened for symptoms and a history of any international travel that may be related to COVID-19.
- To help decide whether or not to continue operations, complete a risk assessment of your program using the [decision-making framework](#) provided by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC).

## When to cease operations

- If greater than 20% of staff and/or children within a classroom or the facility have symptoms of respiratory illness within a 48-hour period.
- If there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 identified among a staff or child.
- If directed by public health.

## Active screening

- At the beginning of each day, all children, staff, and visitors should be asked the following questions upon arrival at the facility. Anyone who answers “Yes” to one or both of these questions should be advised that they cannot attend. Those who answer “No” to both questions are eligible to attend for the day.
  1. Do you have any of the following symptoms: fever/feverish, or new or existing cough, or difficulty breathing
  2. Have you travelled outside of Canada in the past 14 days?
- Please refer to the [MLHU's COVID-19 Active Screening Tool](#) for guidance on active screening.

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) has developed [guidance on the prevention and management of COVID-19 in schools \(K-12\) and childcare settings](#). Some key recommendations from the guidance document are highlighted below.

### **Infection prevention and control strategies**

- Ensure consistent practice of good respiratory etiquette (e.g., sneezing/coughing into tissue or elbow) and hand hygiene (e.g., frequent hand washing with plain soap and water).
- Reinforce “no food sharing” policies.
- The use of surgical masks is not recommended. In young children, masks can be irritating and there is a potential risk of infection due to improper mask fit, use, and disposal.

### **Communication**

- If any child is seriously ill and in need of immediate medical attention, call 911.
- Keep parents/guardians informed of what the facility is doing to protect their children and what they can do at home (e.g., reinforce good respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene).
- Ensure protocols are in place to notify parents/guardians if any child begins to show symptoms of COVID-19, including the need for immediate pick up.

### **Management of individuals who develop symptoms of possible COVID-19**

- Separate a child, staff, or visitor who shows symptoms of COVID-19 (e.g. fever, cough, difficulty breathing) immediately from others in a supervised area until the person can go home.
- Anyone required to provide care to a symptomatic individual should maintain a distance of two meters from the child, if possible. If this is not possible, contact Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 or the Health Unit at 519-663-5317 for further assessment and guidance.
- Once the individual has left the day camp, clean and disinfect the space where the person was separated. Refer to [MLHU Guidance on Environmental Cleaning for Non-healthcare Public Settings](#).

### **Maintain cleaning and disinfecting policies**

- Facilities should follow their standard protocols for routine cleaning and disinfection, especially for high-touch surfaces such as doorknobs, hand rails, light switches, toilet handles, and faucet handles.
- Commonly used cleaners and disinfectants are effective against COVID-19.
- Toys should be routinely cleaned and disinfected as per standard procedures. Toys that are difficult to clean, such as plush toys, should be avoided.
- Water fountain mouthpieces should be regularly cleaned and disinfected according to the manufacturer’s recommendations.
- In addition to standard cleaning protocols, clean and disinfectant high-touch surfaces throughout the day and as needed.

### **Psychosocial considerations for children**

- Pay attention to children’s feelings and reactions, and let them know that it is okay to be concerned.
- Reassure children about their personal safety and health, and the many things that can do to stay healthy (e.g., hand washing, cough/sneeze etiquette, stay home when sick, keep clean).
- Let children know they can ask questions and make sure that the information provided is suitable for their age level.
- Maintaining routines can help to reinforce the sense of security of children.
- The World Health Organization has developed a [resource to help children cope with stress during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

## References

Public Health Agency of Canada. Public health guidance for schools (K-12) and childcare programs (COVID-19) [Internet]. 2020 [last updated 2020 Feb 28; cited 2020 Mar 4].