

Childcare Guidance in Response to COVID-19

March 14, 2020

Childcare programs provide an essential support for working families. At this critical time, we must ensure these vital resources withstand a pandemic while keeping children and their families safe.

The Department of Human Services (DHS) does not recommend preemptive childcare closure at this time, and, in fact, stands ready to address childcare shortages created by any school closure.

Should local officials, employers or parents call your center seeking openings due to a COVID-19 closure, please visit www.iowaccrr.org/families or call 1-855-244-5301 to help coordinate alternate sites.

To ensure these vital services remain in place, while balancing safety DHS recommends that childcare centers employ the following mitigation strategies depending on associated risk in their area.

Mitigation practices ALL centers should start today:

1. Implement common-sense practices for preventing disease spread, such as: covering a cough, staying home when sick, and washing hands.
2. Insist parents drop-off children at the front door, limiting adult entry to the facility.
3. Talk with your staff and parents about travel plans to affected areas so you are able to assess any potential risk. Visit the CDC's [Information for Travel](#) page for the most up-to-date alerts.
4. Ensure that employees and children are not admitted to a childcare center when ill. If you suspect a child or individual is ill, send them home and have them call their primary healthcare provider. Healthcare practitioners are equipped to screen individuals and to refer for additional testing, if needed.
5. Cancel or reduce large events and gatherings, such as field trips.
6. Use spring break, while some children may be away, as an additional opportunity to conduct a deep-clean; disinfecting surfaces and objects that are high touch areas.
7. Implement regular deep-clean practices at the end of week or over the weekend, while continuing daily cleaning as normal.
8. Coordinate with local public health officials and your local emergency management coordinators.

Mitigation practices for childcare centers with community-spread in your area:

1. Put your infectious disease outbreak plan into action.
2. Ask that staff practice social distancing (remaining out of congregate settings, avoiding mass gatherings, and maintaining approximately 6 feet of distance from others when possible).
3. Avoid mixing children across classes and stagger passing times.

4. Limit visitors and deliveries from outside vendors who typically interact with children, and assess all campus visitors for illness and risk of exposure.
5. Consider dismissals if staff or child absenteeism impacts the ability to remain open. Short-term closures may also be necessary to facilitate public health investigation and/or cleaning, if a case is diagnosed in a child or staff member.
6. Prior to any short-term closure, for disease containment, please coordinate with Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH).

The health and safety of children, staff and administrators are of the utmost importance.

Employee Health: Centers must be flexible with staff who report illness or are caring for ill family members. We recommend contingency plans for staff shortages.

Child Health: Communicate with parents immediately to address vulnerable students with health conditions that may place them at risk.

The following guidance is designed to help childcare centers determine when, or if, it is in the best interest of the public to consider closing centers to mitigate substantial spread of COVID-19.

Containment Decision Making Process:

What risks may be eliminated by closing centers for disease containment?

- Exposure to COVID-19 through high-touch surfaces, spread through indirect exposure, and risk of exposure for susceptible children and adults.

What risks may be enhanced by closing centers?

- Loss of child care and financial strain to individuals and communities.

When should centers close?

- Closure may be recommended when the Iowa Department of Public Health has identified large-scale community spread of COVID-19 in your childcare community and has assessed public risk for exposure would be greater than the benefit of remaining open.

When should centers reopen?

- After implementing recommendations of containment and receiving approval from Iowa Department of Public Health based on data available by national and state health departments.