

Clarification on Health Guidance for Public and Private Prekindergarten Education Programs

Guidance Rescinded

This guidance was issued/updated September 11, 2020 and is rescinded as of June 16, 2021. It is no longer in effect. Please see [COVID-19 Guidance for Vermont Schools](#) for current guidance related to the COVID-19 pandemic emergency.

Purpose

This guidance highlights and clarifies the similarities and differences between [Health Guidance for Childcare and Out-of-School-Time Care](#), issued by Vermont Health Department and Department for Children and Families (DCF), and [A Strong and Healthy Start: Safety and Health Guidance for Reopening Schools, Fall 2020](#), issued by Vermont Health Department and Agency of Education (AOE), relative to public and private Prekindergarten Education Programs (PreK). This supplemental guidance also addresses [Addendum 2 to Governor Scott's Executive Order 01-20](#), issued July 24, 2020.

Which Health Guidance Pertains to my PreK Program?

Private PreK Programs

Prequalified private PreK education programs in community based settings should follow VDH/DCF [Health Guidance for Childcare and Out-of-School-Time Care](#), as well as refer to the Agency of Human Services and Child Development Division [Child Care and Afterschool Licensing Frequently Asked Questions](#) guidance for further clarification and adherence to childcare licensing regulations.

Private PreK Programs Located in a School Building

Given contractual agreements between the private PreK program and the school, the childcare program director should meet with the school building administrator to review the school's plan and prepare to implement and follow [A Strong and Healthy Start](#).

Public PreK Programs

Prequalified public school PreK education programs should implement requirements and recommendations as stated in [A Strong and Healthy Start](#). All public and private PreK programs must maintain and adhere to childcare licensing regulations through the Agency of Human Services Child Development Division (CDD). Please refer to the [Child Care and Afterschool Licensing Frequently Asked Questions](#) for further information.

Health Screening Guidance

Public PreK Programs

[A Strong and Healthy Start](#) states that all children, their families, and staff should conduct daily monitoring for COVID-19 exposure and symptoms.

- Public PreK programs may choose to ask children, families and staff to do symptom monitoring at home or upon boarding the bus or prior to entering the school building.
- Public PreK programs should conduct temperature screening of students at the first point of contact. If it is not feasible to do so on the bus, then temperature screening should be conducted on entrance to the program, as determined by the SU/SD.

Private PreK Programs

[Guidance for Child Care](#) states all children (or their parents/caregivers on their behalf) and staff should conduct daily monitoring for COVID-19 exposure and symptoms.

- Programs should develop processes to receive parental/caregiver and staff reports regarding exposure and symptoms.
- Programs may choose to ask children and staff to do symptom monitoring at home or prior to entering the school building. (Note: Family childcare providers are required to conduct this daily health check on themselves before the first childcare child arrives):
 - Children who have arrived from school or children who are arriving via Specialized Child Care Transportation Vendors are not required to have a daily health check, as this would have already occurred.
- Childcare and out-of-school-time care should conduct temperature screening of children and staff. This should occur at the first point of contact. Programs should use the protocol provided. If staff conduct temperature screening at home, they should report this information daily.

Which Facial Coverings Guidance Pertains to my PreK program?

The [Governor's executive order](#) states as of Saturday, August 1, 2020, Vermonters must wear masks or cloth facial coverings over their nose and mouth any time they are in public spaces, indoors or outdoors, where they come in contact with others from outside their households, especially in congregate settings, and where it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of at least six feet.

Given this executive order and for the sake of clarity, the requirements for masks or facial coverings or permitted alternatives in specific circumstances shall continue to apply as set forth in [A Strong and Healthy Start](#) and [Guidance for Child Care](#) health guidance as clarified below.

Private PreK Programs

[Guidance for Child Care](#) strongly recommends that children over the age of two wear face coverings when it is developmentally appropriate. Measures for developmentally appropriate include whether or not a child is able to independently put on, take off, and not touch or suck

on the covering. Face coverings may not be appropriate if a child's stage of development would make wearing a face covering difficult.

- Children should wear facial coverings upon arrival and pick-up.
- Children should not wear facial coverings while sleeping, eating, swimming or when they would get wet.
 - Encourage physical distancing from children and other adults during these times.
- Adults doing drop-off and pick-up are required to wear facial coverings.

Public PreK Programs

[A Strong and Healthy Start](#) guidance requires all staff and students to wear facial coverings while in the building, as well as outside where physical distancing cannot be maintained.

PreK students require special consideration regarding age and child development.

- Special considerations for each and every child should be taken into account, planned for and addressed.
- Parents and school staff should discuss specific needs and circumstances of each child and their family.
 - Parents can consult with their health care provider as necessary (e.g., for allergies, asthma or other related health conditions) to determine if their child can safely and consistently wear a face covering.
- Children who have relevant medical or developmental concerns should not be required to wear a facial covering.
- Children should not wear facial coverings while sleeping, eating, or swimming or when they would get wet.
 - Educators should encourage physical distancing during these times.
- Staff may take off their facial covering in select circumstances when physical distancing cannot be maintained, such as when a parent/caregiver is hearing impaired and reads lips to communicate.
- Staff who work with students unable to control their secretions should wear a surgical mask and eye protection (either goggles or a face shield) for added protection. If surgical masks are not available, staff may use a KN95 mask if available.

Shield Guidance

Public and Private PreK Programs

[A Strong and Healthy Start guidance](#) and [Guidance for Child Care](#) state that in some situations, teachers and staff may prefer to use clear face coverings that cover the nose and wrap securely around the face. Teachers and staff who may consider using clear face coverings include:

- Those who interact with students or staff who are deaf or hard of hearing, per the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- Teachers of young students learning to read
- Teachers of students in English as a Second Language classes

- Teachers of students with disabilities

The use of clear facial shields for adults that cover the eyes, nose, and mouth is less preferable, but allowable. Face shields must meet all of the health guidance requirements of the Vermont Health Department. Face shields should extend below the chin and to the ears laterally, and there should be no exposed gap between the forehead and the shield's headpiece.

Staff that work with children unable to control their secretions should wear a surgical mask and eye protection (either goggles or a face shield) for added protection. If surgical masks are not available, staff may use a KN95 mask if available. *A KN95 mask is different from the U.S. style mask (N95), as are the loops that attach the mask to the face. These masks are not fit tested.*

Hand Washing Guidance

Public and Private PreK Programs

[A Strong and Healthy Start](#) and [Guidance for Child Care](#) provide specific implementation of practices to ensure effective hand hygiene which include:

- Programs should ensure that all staff receive education/training on proper hand hygiene.
- Staff and Family Child Care Providers should teach/assist children in hand hygiene.
- If hands are not visibly dirty, alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol can be used if soap and water are not readily available.

Private PreK Programs

Additionally, [Guidance for Child Care](#) requires:

- Hand washing/sanitizing stations must be set up on the playground.
- Children **must** wash hands before and after outside play.

Considerations for Staff who May be at Higher Risk of Severe Illness

[A Strong and Healthy Start](#) and [Guidance for Child Care](#) provide a list of individuals of all ages who might be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19. Staff members, teachers or household members who are older or considered high risk because of serious underlying health conditions are encouraged to talk to their healthcare provider to assess their risk and to determine if they should avoid in-person contact where physical distancing cannot be maintained.

Children or Staff Exhibiting Symptoms

Public and Private PreK Programs

[A Strong and Healthy Start](#) and [Guidance for Child Care](#) require children or staff to be excluded from in-person activities if they:

- Show symptoms of COVID-19

- Have been in close contact with someone with confirmed COVID-19 in the last 14 days
- Have a fever (temperature greater than 100.4°F)
- Additionally, [Guidance for Child Care](#) requires children and staff to be excluded if they have consulted with their healthcare provider about current symptoms, COVID-19 testing was recommended and they are awaiting test results.
- If any person (staff member or child) exhibit the above signs and symptoms, they **must** be sent home as soon as possible.
- PreK programs should keep sick children separate from well children and limit staff contact as much as reasonably possible, while ensuring the safety and supervision of the sick student(s) until they leave.
 - Children and staff should be excluded from the program until they are no longer considered contagious.
 - Materials, toys and furniture touched by the child who is sent home should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.
- If a family based, private PreK provider has any of the above signs and symptoms, she/he must arrange for children to be picked-up as soon as possible and keep as much a distance from the children while they are waiting to be picked-up.
- Children who arrive from out-of-state must follow [Agency of Commerce and Community Development \(ACCD\)](#) and [Health Department guidance](#) around quarantine. This includes travel out-of-state at any point during the year.
- Healthy children and staff with documented allergies who display allergy symptoms with no fever that cause coughing and clear runny nose, and children with well-controlled asthma should not be excluded from in-person school activities.
 - A child with a new diagnosis of asthma during the school year requires written confirmation from the student’s healthcare provider.

Recommended Response in the Event of a Confirmed Case of COVID-19 in a Public or Private PreK

[A Strong and Healthy Start](#) and [Guidance for Child Care](#) state that if there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 in a public or private PreK program, the following steps should be taken:

- Close off areas used by the child or staff member and do not use these areas until after cleaning and disinfecting. If possible, wait 24 hours or as long as practical before beginning cleaning and disinfecting to allow droplets to settle.
 - Family Childcare Providers should clean the room immediately.
- Anyone diagnosed with COVID-19 should self-isolate according to guidelines set forth by the Vermont Health Department
- Programs should participate in contact tracing as requested by the Health Department.
 - When there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 in a public or private PreK program, a member of the contact tracing team will reach out to the staff or family of the child to identify close contacts. The contact tracing team will apprise school administrators or program director of the situation.

- Program staff should maintain confidentiality while communicating with other staff members and parents/caregivers.

Contact Tracing

Public PreK Programs

[A Strong and Healthy Start](#) guidance states that when there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the school or program, contact tracing will be used to identify people who have been in close contact with a person who has tested positive to help prevent further spread of the virus.

- A member of the contact tracing team will reach out to the case to identify close contacts. The contacting tracing team will also reach out to school administrators to determine next steps.
- School or program staff should coordinate with their district leadership to participate in contact tracing as requested by the Health Department.
- School or program staff should coordinate with their district leadership to communicate with staff and parents/caregivers with information while maintaining patient confidentiality.
- Identification of a student or adult with COVID-19 in the school is not an indication to close the entire school. The Health Department is developing materials and algorithms to use with schools to support response actions and decisions.

Private PreK Programs

- [Guidance for Child Care](#) states If COVID-19 is confirmed in a child or staff member, work with the Health Department to determine next steps. Identification of a child or adult with COVID-19 in the program is not an indication to close the entire program. The Health Department is developing materials and algorithms to use with programs to support making decisions on how best to respond.
- The private PreK program should be prepared to provide the following information to the Health Department:
 - Provide the name and contact number of the Primary Contact for the program/childcare center for when a family (or staff) has a positive COVID-19 case. The Health Department can use this information to notify the program in off hours and share with the contact tracing team.
 - Attendance records should be kept for a minimum of 14 days to ensure that contact tracing and case investigation can happen thoroughly. After 14 days, licensed child care programs are required to follow their licensing regulations for keeping attendance records.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

Public and Private PreK Programs

[A Strong and Healthy Start](#) and [Guidance for Child Care](#) state, at a minimum, common spaces and frequently touched surfaces and doors should be cleaned and disinfected at the beginning, middle and end of each day.

- Ensure safe and correct use and storage of cleaners and disinfectants, including storing products securely away from children.
- Follow the product's usage directions

As a reminder, VDH/DCF definitions are found in childcare regulations for regulated programs or in [Caring for Our Children](#).

Food Service Safety Guidance

Public PreK Programs

[A Strong and Healthy Start](#) requires public PreK programs to continue to follow all food safety requirements in the Vermont Food Code.

Private PreK Programs

[Guidance for Child Care](#) requires private PreK programs to follow routine food service practices.

Public and Private PreK Programs

[A Strong and Healthy Start](#) and [Guidance for Child Care](#) both say that key areas to address in food service preparation are:

- Correct dishwasher temperatures for sanitization
- Employee handwashing
- Cleaning and sanitizing surfaces

Food Programs and Assistance Guidance for Public PreK Programs

The [Strong and Healthy Start](#) guidance emphasizes the importance of ensuring that children have uninterrupted access to adequate nutrition through the food service program.

Additional Objectives for Public and Private PreK Programs

Because households are increasingly likely to be facing food insecurity this year, public and private PreK programs should consider referring households to:

- Public school meal programs which provide a safe and nutritious source of food and can make school meal applications available to households throughout the year.
- Eligible public or private nonprofit or qualifying for-profit childcare centers, Head Start programs, and other institutions that are licensed or approved to provide child care

services. These institutions may participate independently or as sponsored centers in the AOE Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).

- [Additional forms for food assistance](#), including:
 - PEBT
 - WIC
 - 3SquaresVT
 - Meal Programs for Older Vermonters
 - Vermont Foodbank Network

Additional Resources for PreK Programs

Supporting Emotional Wellness, Relationship Building and Communication

- [Feeling Faces: This is how I feel today!](#). National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI).
- [Tips for Helping Your Child During the Pandemic](#). NCPMI.
- [Helping Children Cope with Emergencies](#). Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- [Emergencies and National Disasters: Helping Children and Families Cope](#). NCPMI.
- [Trauma Signs and Symptoms](#). Center for Early Childhood Mental Health and Consultation.
- [Some Starters for Giving Positive Feedback and Encouragement](#). NCPMI.
- [Johns Hopkins Children's Center Covid-19 Activity Book](#). Johns Hopkins.

Health Screenings

- [Health Check Poster](#). Vermont Agency of Human Service, Health Department, and Department for Children and Families.
- [CDC Readiness and Planning Tool to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 in K-12 Schools](#). CDC.
- [Getting My Temperature Taken: A Social Story](#) Vermont Agency of Education.

Facial Coverings

- [Face Coverings for Children](#). Vermont Health Department.
- [Wearing Mask](#). NCPMI.
- [Why Are People Wearing Masks? Answering Your Child's Questions](#). Public Broadcasting Service (PBS).
- [Help your Child Feel Good about Using and Seeing Others Wearing Face Masks](#). Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.
- [Wearing a Mask to School-Social Story](#) Autism for Little Learners
- [Wearing a Mask Helps Stop the Spread of Germs-Video](#). PBS.
- [Helping Children Understand Emotions When Wearing Masks](#). NCPMI.

Handwashing

- [I Can Be Safe and Healthy by Washing My Hands!](#). NCPMI.

- [CDC-Handwashing Posters](#). CDC.
- [Handwashing](#). PBS.

Staff Development and Family Engagement

- [Connecting with Families](#). NCPMI.
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Prevention: General Requirements and Prevention Ideas for Workplaces](#). CDC
- [Supporting young children’s learning and well-being at home: A COVID-19 resource for teachers, parents, and caregivers](#). Institute of Education Sciences.
- [Building Bright Futures Child Care Reopening: Resources to Support Social Emotional Needs](#). Building Bright Futures.
- [Taking Care of Yourself](#). NCPMI.
- [Providers: Taking Care of Ourselves](#). NCPMI.
- [People of Any Age with Underlying Medical Conditions](#). CDC
- [Key Times to Practice Social Distancing](#). CDC

Staying at Home When Sick

- [My Teachers Want to Know](#). NCPMI.

Cases of COVID-19 in Schools/Programs and Contact Tracing

- [Quarantine If You Might Be Sick](#). CDC.
- [Contact Tracing Resources](#). CDC
- [Contact Tracing: Do your part to keep your family, friends, and community safe](#). CDC.
- [Health & Safety Guidance for Childcare & Summer Programs FAQ](#). Vermont Health Department.
- [3 Key Steps to Take While Waiting for Your COVID-19 Test Result](#). CDC

Cleaning and Disinfecting

- [Cleaning and Disinfecting your Facility](#). CDC
- [List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2 \(COVID-19\)](#). CDC
- [CDC/EPA Cleaning & Disinfecting Guidance](#). CDC
- [Coronavirus Disease 2019: Protect Yourself](#). CDC
- [Caring for Our Children](#). National Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education.

Food Service Safety Guidance/Food Programs and Assistance

- [Apply for Free and Reduced Lunch](#). VT Agency of Education.
- [Feeding Your Family during the Novel Coronavirus/COVID-19 Outbreak](#). Hunger Free Vermont
- [Health Regulations for Food Service Establishments](#). Vermont Health Department.
- [Food Safety in Schools](#). Institute for Child Nutrition.
- [Child Care Centers in the CACFP](#). Vermont Agency of Education.

