

Reopening Child Care

Frequently Asked Questions

7/27/2020

This document has been prepared by Children's Services and Halton Region Public Health to support child care centres and home care providers in reopening. This document will be updated and distributed, as needed.

If you have questions that are not included below, please send your questions to childcareservices@halton.ca. This account is being monitored regularly.

NEW questions are noted in green font.

Considerations for Reopening Child Care Centres/Homes

1. Will I need to update my current license?
 - Operators should review their current license capacity with the Ministry of Education [guidelines](#) to determine if their license needs to be updated. Operators may require a Director's Approval or a change to the conditions listed on their license, such as approval for family age grouping.
 - Operators can apply for a revision on the Child Care Licensing System. For further assistance, operators can contact their Program Advisor, Child Care Quality and Assurance and Licensing Branch.
2. Will I require additional supplies to reopen my child care centre/home?
 - Operators will require personal protection equipment (PPE) and other supplies to ensure they are providing a safe and healthy environment for children, families and staff. These may include but are not limited to:
 - Latex-free gloves;
 - Medical grade face masks and/or face shields;
 - Chlorine bleach and spray bottles;
 - Disinfectants with a Drug Identification Number (DIN) or low-level hospital grade disinfectant
 - Sanitizer wipes;
 - Hand sanitizer (with 60-90% alcohol content); and
 - Paper towels.

Note: Operators may be required to purchase activities/toys that stand up to additional cleaning.

3. Where can I buy personal protective equipment?
 - Personal protective equipment (PPE) may be purchased from vendors who provide materials and supplies to the child care community. In addition, the Ontario Together Portal has a [Workplace PPE Supplier Directory](#) that lists Ontario businesses that provide personal protective equipment.
 - Should operators have challenges sourcing PPE prior to opening, please contact: childcareservices@halton.ca

4. Are child care centres required to pass an onsite inspection by Halton Region Public Health prior to re-opening?
 - Halton Region Public Health is contacting each licensed child care centre by phone close to the planned re-opening date. An onsite inspection is not mandatory prior to re-opening in Halton.

Centre Operations

1. Can child care centres offer part-time and full-time child care?
 - Operators may provide care to both full-time and part-time children but must follow the Ministry of Education's guidelines for cohort size.
 - A cohort is defined as a group of children and the staff members assigned to them, who stay together for a minimum of seven days.
 - Two part-time children (sharing one child care spot) count as two children in a cohort.
 - Note: As of **July 27, 2020**, child care centres can operate with **cohorts of 15 children plus educators**. Centres must continue to comply with ratios and group sizes outlined in the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*.
2. I noticed Halton passed a mask By-law effective July 22, 2020. Does this By-law apply to child care centres?
 - No; child care centres and day camps are exempt from the By-law. Although child care centres and day camps are exempt from the By-law, operators are reminded to follow guidance from the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education regarding the use of personal protective equipment in child care settings. Additional information about the By-law is available on Halton.ca

Parent Fees

1. Can parents pay fees to hold their children's place until September?
 - As per Ontario Regulation 137/15 under the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*, operators that are reopening are prohibited from charging a fee or deposit if a parent is not offered a spot or chooses not to accept a spot.
2. Can I inform parents that they must make a decision about their child's return to care within 30 days?
 - The 30-day notice period applies **only** to home child care. Child care centres must continue to hold a child's space, without charging fees until the Provincial Government has informed otherwise.
 - Licensed home child care providers must provide parents with 30-days' notice when a spot is available for a child. If after 30 days, parents do not want the space, providers may fill the space. Families on fee subsidy will be placed on a break in service. Halton Region will work with those families to find a new place when they return to care

Policy Updates

1. Are operators required to develop new policies and procedures to open child care centres/homes?
 - In order to reopen child care, current policies may need to be updated and new policies may need to be created to ensure operators are in compliance with the enhanced health and safety requirements. This includes:
 - Health Screening Policy and an Entrance Screening Tool.
 - Refer to [COVID-19 Reference Document for Symptoms](#) to support with the development the Health Screening Policy and Entrance Screening Tool;
 - Sanitary Health and Safety Protocols (e.g. cleaning of classrooms, toys, equipment, diapering, cleaning of children's bedding/cots/cribs);
 - Hand Hygiene Policy and Procedures (e.g. including proper glove use, hand washing and when and how to use hand sanitizer); and,
 - Exclusion Policy (how to exclude children and staff who experience illness and procedures for reporting illness to the Ministry of Education, Halton Children's Services and Halton Region Public Health)
 - Policies and procedures must include:
 - How physical distancing will be encouraged (e.g. set up of outdoor and indoor play space that encourages physical distancing);
 - How staff shifts will be scheduled, where applicable;
 - Scheduling of group events and/or in-person meetings; and,
 - Parent drop off and pick up procedures.

Note: Support for required policies and procedures can be found in the Ministry of Education guidelines. Halton Region provided sample policies as an attachment to the memo dated Friday, June 12, 2020.

Note: Policies and procedures related to COVID-19 must be shared with families for their information and to ensure they are aware of expectations, including keeping children home when they are sick. Staff must be trained on the policies and procedures. There is a [resource document for child care providers](#) that includes guidance on how to safely conduct daily screening and keep daily attendance records that may inform policy and procedures.

2. When do I report a serious occurrence related to COVID-19?
 - If a child or staff exhibits symptoms of COVID-19, they should be excluded and referred to Public Health. Public Health will recommend whether the individual should get tested for COVID-19 or not. If the individual reports 2 or more symptoms and is referred for testing, a serious occurrence should be reported. If a child or staff member has two symptoms of COVID-19, but is not referred for a test, it is not a reportable serious occurrence.
3. What is the recommended exclusion time for a symptomatic child or staff member?
 - Always contact your Public Health Department if a child or staff member presents with symptoms of COVID-19. Follow direction from Halton Public

Health. The Ministry of Education advises that symptomatic individuals are to be referred for testing. If the individual tests negative, they may return to the child care setting 24 hours after symptom resolution. If the individual tests positive, they must be excluded from the program for 14 days from the onset of symptoms or until clearance has been received from Halton Public Health.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

1. How can operators maintain the health and safety of their child care program/home?
 - To maintain the health and safety of the program, operators and providers should ensure that all current infection prevention and control practices are adhered to. This includes, but is not limited to:
 - Ensuring all toys used at the centre are made of material that can be cleaned and disinfected (i.e., avoid plush toys);
 - Increasing the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting objects, toys and frequently touched surfaces;
 - [Frequently touched surfaces](#) are most likely to become contaminated, including doorknobs, light switches, toilet handles, and tabletops, and must be disinfected at least twice a day;
 - Using only disinfectants that have a Drug Identification Number (DIN). Low-level hospital grade disinfectants may be used;
 - Checking expiry dates of products and always following the manufacturer's instructions;
 - Performing proper hand washing (including assisting children with hand washing); and
 - Incorporating additional hand washing opportunities into the daily schedule.
 - Only one cohort should use the bathroom at a time and the bathroom must be cleaned in between cohorts.
 - It is recommended that operators keep a hard copy of a daily cleaning and disinfecting log to track and demonstrate cleaning schedules.
2. How can operators clean and disinfect surfaces or items?
 - When cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and/or items remember to:
 - **Clean.** It is important to clean articles first with soap and warm water to remove any visible dirt before using the disinfectant.
 - **Rinse.** Rinse items with clear water. Disinfectants do not work effectively unless soap or detergent is removed.
 - **Disinfect.** A commercial disinfectant or household bleach may be used to kill viruses.
 - **Contact time.** Contact time is the amount of time that a product must remain on the surface in order to kill the virus. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for recommended contact time.

- **Wash hands.** After cleaning and/or removing gloves, wash hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with 60 – 90% alcohol.
3. How can operators clean toys to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus?
 - Toys that have been mouthed should be washed and disinfected between users. Toys that come in contact with children’s mouths should be rinsed after disinfecting.
 - Wash, then disinfect hard surfaced toys (plastic, rubber) with either a commercial disinfectant or chlorine bleach solution.
 - Toys that are dishwasher-safe may also be cleaned in the dishwasher.
 4. What other steps can operators take to help stop the transmission of COVID-19?
 - Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub with 60-90% alcohol;
 - Cough and sneeze into your sleeve or tissue;
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth without having washed your hands;
 - Stay at home if ill; and,
 - Frequently clean commonly touched surface.

Staffing

1. Can staff work in more than one classroom?
 - To limit the spread of COVID-19, staff should limit their work to one classroom. Children and educators together are to form one cohort, with no more than 15 children and the staff members assigned to them, for a minimum of 7 days. Staff should work at only one location.
 - Supervisors and/or designates should limit their movement between rooms.
2. Can a supply staff work with different cohorts during the week?
 - No. One supply teacher can be part of only one cohort for a minimum of seven days. Changes to the cohort should be minimized wherever possible.
3. Are mixed age groupings allowed?
 - Mixed age groupings are permitted as set out in the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*, where a Director’s Approval has been granted and is identified on the centre license.
4. Have ratios changed?
 - Ratios have not changed and must be maintained as set out under the *Child Care and Early Years Act (CCEYA), 2014*.
 - In accordance with [Ministry of Education Operational Guidance from July 22, 2020](#), the maximum cohort size per classroom will be at no more than 15 children and the staff assigned to them, space permitting.
 - Reduced ratios are permitted as set out under the CCEYA provided cohorts are not mixed with other cohorts. Groups of children cannot be combined at the beginning and/or the end of the day. Children and staff must remain with their cohort for a minimum of seven days.
 - Reduced ratios are not permitted at any time for infants.

5. Can Director Approvals for staff be transferred from one child care centre to another child care centre that is operated by the same licensee?
 - Yes, if operators have a Director's Approval for staff at one centre, and wanted the specific staff member to work at another location, operators are not required to submit a new Director's Approval request to the Child Care Licensing System.
 - Operators should inform their Program Advisor, Child Care Quality and Assurance and Licensing Branch, if they would like to have staff work at an alternate location.
6. Will a staff who covers another staff during a lunch or break also be considered part of the cohort?
 - No. Cover offs can happen although they should be avoided. Due to the shorter duration of time for coverage, staff should be able to maintain physical distancing. Physical distancing and masks are recommended for staff who are covering these periods of time.
7. When will the cohorting restrictions change?
 - The Ministry of Education has advised that there are plans to review the guidelines in August.
8. Can an assistant help support children in different cohorts, if necessary, provided the assistant is wearing appropriate personal protective equipment?
 - Yes, however, the assistant should limit their movement between rooms. When providing coverage for brief periods, physical distancing and masks are recommended for staff who are covering these periods of time.
9. My staff's first aid expired during the closure. What can I do?
 - The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board has advised that all First Aid/CPR certificates that expired after March 1, 2020 have been extended to **December 31, 2020** (previously extended to September 30, 2020). Operators are encouraged to monitor the WSIB website for any updates on First Aid/CPR certificate extensions for any staff, home child care providers or in-home service providers whose certification would have expired after March 1, 2020.

Screening

1. Who should be screened before entering the child care centre?
 - All individuals, including children, parents/guardians, staff and essential visitors must be screened upon arrival.
 - Parents /guardians should drop-off and pick up their child outside the child care setting unless it is determined that there is a need for the parent/guardian to enter the setting.
 - There should be no non-essential visitors in the centre.

2. When conducting an in-person screen, do staff need to wear personal protective equipment?
 - Yes. Screeners should be wearing personal protective equipment such as, surgical/procedure mask; and eye protection (goggles or face shield). A gown and gloves could also be worn for additional protection.
 - Screeners should take appropriate precautions when screening, including maintaining a distance of at least two meters (6 feet) from those being screened, or being separated by a physical barrier (such as a plexiglass barrier).
 - Operators and providers are required to keep attendance records of arrival and departure times of all people entering the centre.
3. Who should be denied entry to the child care setting?
 - Children, staff, and essential visitors who fail the entrance screen are not allowed into the child care setting/home.
 - Do not permit children, staff, or essential visitors who are ill to enter into the child care setting.
4. What are the requirements for screening maintenance and cleaners who are on site after hours?
 - The Ministry of Education guidelines address attendance records, noting that daily records for anyone entering the facility must be maintained. Some centres have established protocols whereby the after-hours maintenance or cleaners complete the screening via telephone with centre staff. Each centre is encouraged to establish its own protocol for maintaining records and screening of everyone on premise.
5. Can I use an electronic or email screening tool?
 - Yes, operators are encouraged where possible, to conduct daily screening electronically prior to arrival. Temperature checks should be included as part of screening, where feasible. Parents and guardians should be reminded of the screening requirements at time of registration and through visible signage at the entrance of the child care centre/home.
 - Records must be kept of all daily screening results, whether screening electronically or in person.

Classroom Programming

1. How can operators encourage physical space between children?
 - It is difficult to encourage physical distancing with young children. However, there are different activities operators and providers can undertake to support physical distancing, such as:
 - Spreading children out into different areas, particularly at meal and dressing time;
 - Incorporating more individual activities or activities that encourage more space between children (for example prepare separate art kits for each child);

- Using visual cues to promote physical distancing (for example tape markings with arrows/circles on the floor, signs promoting physical distancing);
 - Where possible, offer more activities outside to allow for more space.
 - In shared outdoor space, cohorts must maintain a distance of at least 2 meters between groups and other individuals outside of the cohort.
2. What types of activities should operators avoid?
 - Operators and providers should avoid activities to reduce the spread of COVID-19 such as:
 - Do not use water or sensory tables or outdoor sandboxes;
 - Avoid singing activities indoors; and,
 - Do not use community playgrounds; however outdoor play at licensed child care sites is encouraged in small groups to support physical distancing.
 3. Can centres continue to offer extra activities provided by external, contract staff, such as Music, French and Art?
 - No. As noted in the Ministry of Education guidelines, there should be no non-essential visitors at the program.
 4. Do children need to maintain physical distancing when they are playing outside?
 - Yes. Children in a cohort should be encouraged, where possible, to physically distance in both the indoor and outdoor learning environments. Physical distancing between children in child care may be difficult. Centres are encouraged to maintain a welcoming and caring environment for children.
 5. Do children need to wear a mask when moving from one room to another?
 - No, children are not required to wear masks in the centre unless they have COVID symptoms, are over the age of two and will tolerate wearing a mask.
 6. Are there new requirements for meal time?
 - Yes. There are new requirements for mealtime. If meals or snacks are provided, operators must ensure each child has their own individual meal or snack. Children are not permitted to self-serve; meals should be served in individual portions to children. Additionally,
 - Multi-use utensils must be sanitized; and
 - “No food sharing” policies should be reinforced.
 - Children must not be allowed to share soothers, bottles, sippy cups, toothbrushes, facecloths, etc. Label these items with the child’s name to discourage accidental sharing.
 7. Can children bring their own lunch and snacks?
 - As noted in the guidelines from the Ministry of Education, families are prohibited from providing food outside of the established meal provision.

Exceptions may be made where required, with precautions in place for safe handling and serving of food.

8. Are there new requirements for rest time?
 - Yes. At rest times operators and providers should increase the distance between cribs and cots, if possible. If space is tight, children can be placed head-to-toe or toe-to-toe.
 - Operators should consider removing cribs or placing infants in every other crib to support physical distancing. Cribs and cots should be disinfected after each use. Please refer to section 4 of the [Ministry of Education's Child Care Centre Licensing Manual \(September 2019\)](#) for more information.
 - Linens must be laundered on a daily basis.
9. Can children continue to bring their own linens? How often should they be laundered?
 - Linens should be washed every day. Children may continue to bring their own linens, although washing linens on site is preferred.
10. Can educators pick up and/or soothe children?
 - Yes, educators can still pick up and soothe children to support a nurturing environment. When holding infants and toddlers, blankets or cloths should be used over child care providers' clothing. The blankets or cloths should be changed between children.
 - Educators should try to avoid getting close to faces of all children, where possible.
11. Is it mandatory for educators to wear personal protective equipment during class time?
 - No. Educators are not required to wear personal protective equipment during class time when they are with their cohort. Personal protective equipment should be worn by staff who are screening and when caring for a child with COVID symptoms. Float staff are encouraged to maintain physical distancing and wear a face mask when providing coverage.
12. Can different cohorts share a washroom?
 - Yes. Shared spaces, including washrooms, must be thoroughly cleaned between groups. Only one cohort should use the washroom at a time.
13. Can I put more than one cohort in a room?
 - Each cohort must be separated by a physical barrier indoors. The physical barrier must begin at the floor and reach a minimum height of 8 feet to ensure that it will always be 12 inches taller than the tallest person in the facility. It must be as wide as the space/room will allow.

Supporting Families with the New Normal

1. How should operators communicate with families?

- When communicating with families, be respectful of their current realities. For example, some families may not have time to chat at drop-off, or some might be later than usual picking up their child(ren). It is important with the changes that families will experience during re-opening, that they continue to feel that they belong, can contribute to their children's learning, and are engaged in meaningful ways with the child care centre. Consider reaching out to your families in a virtual manner to keep them connected with the centre.
 - Communication about the child's health is crucial. If a child is feeling unwell or showing symptoms, be sure to follow protocols when a child or staff/home child care provider has symptoms of illness or becomes sick [Ministry of Education Operational Guidance During COVID-19 Outbreak](#) (page 12). Communicate all relevant information with families as soon as possible.
2. What supports can operators offer to families?
 - Get to know new families to the best of your ability and build respectful and responsive relationships, as you normally would.
 - Be there to support children and families, while remembering that we are not the experts on what is unfolding with the pandemic nor are we experts on mental health.
 - Refer a child or family that is struggling to [Reach Out Centre for Kids](#) (ROCK), if the child and family would benefit from some additional support.
 3. Can child care centres offer tours to parents?
 - As noted in the Ministry of Education guidelines, there should be no non-essential visitors at the program. As an alternate to onsite tours, some centres are offering virtual tours or using pictures of the centre to help parents visualize the space.

Before and After School

1. What information is available to support before and after programs for school aged children?
 - The Ministry of Education has advised that operational guidelines for before and after school programs will be available in time for September.

Summer Day Camps

1. What guidelines would operators follow to operate a Summer Day Camp?
 - The Ministry of Health released a [COVID-19 guidance document for summer day camps](#). The guidance includes requirements for health and safety, screening, management of participants with COVID-19 symptoms, testing for COVID-19, and occupational health and safety.

Services for Children with Special Needs

Inclusion supports with a resource consultant will be phased in slowly and services provided will be based on the advice of Public Health and Ministry of Education

guidelines. As child care centres reopen, services will be virtual to limit contact and transmission. If a centre requires support for a returning child, they can reach out directly to their resource consultant or the agency supervisor. New referrals to inclusion services can continue to be made by calling 311.

1. Will the resource consultant that was working with us prior to the closure contact us to start visiting again?
 - In the initial phase of re-opening of child care, any requests for support should be initiated through the supervisor of the agency your centre has been working with. Given the lower enrolment numbers across the region and smaller class sizes, operators may find that they don't require immediate support.
2. A child who was receiving support from a resource consultant has returned to the centre and is struggling with the transition back into child care. We would like the resource consultant to assist us with this. How do we arrange for support?
 - The supervisor of the childcare centre should contact the supervisor of the inclusion agency they have been working with. The inclusion supervisor will have the appropriate resource consultant contact the centre to provide consultation.
3. When I call the resource consultant we have worked with there is a message to say they are not available or they are working limited hours. How do we get the support we need?
 - Resource consultants will gradually return as the number of centres re-opening increases and the requests for consultation increase. Please contact the inclusion supervisor of the agency you have worked with and you will be connected with a resource consultant. There may be situations when it will not be the same resource consultant you worked with prior to COVID-19, but you can be confident you will receive the support you require
4. Should we be asking parents to call the resource consultant they had been working with if their child is returning to care?
 - No. Through the closure resource consultants continued to communicate with families. The resource consultants have explained the reopening process to families and indicated that the centre will initiate consultation with the resource consultant when they feel it is required.
5. We know that a family called to make a referral to inclusion services prior to the COVID-19 closure. The child has started back at the centre and we need some support. Can we get support if there was not a resource consultant assigned to the child prior to the closure?
 - Yes, if a child was referred prior to COVID-19, contact the supervisor of the inclusion agency you work with and a resource consultant will be assigned to support you. New referrals are also being accepted by calling 311.

6. There are a number of children struggling with the transition back to child care. We would like some support to make this a positive experience for the children. Who can provide us with that?
 - We recognize this may be difficult transition for children and parents/caregivers. A resource consultant can work with you to support a successful transition back to child care for all children. Contact the supervisor of the inclusion agency you work with and a resource consultant will be assigned to support you.
7. The consultation with the resource consultant has been helpful but we need someone to observe the child in the classroom.
 - Inclusion supports with a resource consultant will be phased in slowly and services provided will be based on the advice of Public Health and Ministry of Education guidelines. As child care centres reopen, services will be virtual through use of phone, e-mail and the Zoom platform to limit contact and transmission. Prior to implementing a virtual approach, it is important to meet all aspects of confidentiality and make sure the approach is feasible for the child care staff to participate in.

If you have any questions related to inclusion services, please contact the supervisor of the agency that provides support to your centre:

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Useful links:

- ****NEW**** [Halton Region COVID-19 \(Public Health Guidelines: Child Care Settings \(July 7, 2020\)\)](#)
- [Halton Region COVID-19 \(2019 Novel Coronavirus\)](#)
- [Government of Canada Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\): Outbreak update](#)
- [Ministry of Health COVID-19 Reference Document for Symptoms](#)
- [Ministry of Education Operational Guidance During COVID-19 Outbreak - Child Care Re-Opening](#)
- [Ministry of Health COVID-19 Provincial Testing Guidance Update](#)
- [Government Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\) Directory](#)
- [ROCK Resource Kit for Families Ages 0-6](#)
- [Zero to Three At-Home Activity Guide](#)
- College of Early Childhood Educators [COVID-19 heroes: RECEs in emergency care](#)
- College of Early Childhood Educators [COVID-19 FAQs for Members](#)