

Maintaining a COVIDSafe safe early childhood and education care (ECEC) service

The following is a summary of the Term 4 update from the Acting Victorian Deputy Chief Health Officer. The detailed guidance is available at www.education.vic.gov.au.

An update from the Acting Victorian Deputy Chief Health Officer

As Victoria's Acting Deputy Chief Health Officer, and as a member of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee, the health, wellbeing and safety of Victorian children and early childhood staff remains front of mind.

As you know, early childhood education and care services in metropolitan Melbourne have been open only to children of permitted workers and vulnerable children. This is not because early childhood education and care services are inherently unsafe places for children or staff to attend but because we needed to reduce the movement of children and their families across metropolitan Melbourne to help slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). With falling case numbers and reduced community transmission, I am pleased to advise that all children in early childhood education and care in metropolitan Melbourne can return to onsite learning and care from 28 September (subject to the epidemiology and case numbers at the time). Services in regional Victoria will continue to remain open for all children.

Throughout the pandemic, colleagues and I have closely followed emerging Victorian, Australian and international evidence on transmission of the virus and the efficacy of public health measures in reducing transmission. The available evidence suggests that transmission in early

childhood settings is uncommon when community transmission is low, and the risk to staff and children remains low as long as the health advice is followed.

I am confident that the risk to staff and children at this time remains low and with specific measures in place, I am confident in our ability to identify and respond appropriately if a child or staff member tests positive to coronavirus (COVID-19).

The vast majority of cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) observed in early childhood education and care services involve the child or staff member acquiring the virus in the community, rather than in the early childhood setting. These cases have been well contained though rapid service closures. Reassuringly, evidence also continues to show that children are less impacted by the virus, they tend to have milder symptoms and are less likely to develop severe illness.

I once again thank educators, teachers, other staff and families for their incredible efforts during these challenging times.

Professor Allen Cheng

Acting Victorian Deputy Chief Health Officer



The **COVIDSafe framework for ECEC services** brings together the advice of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee and Victoria's COVIDSafe principles for business while acknowledging that each early childhood setting is unique as both a place of work for staff and a learning environment for children, drawing on emerging local and international literature.

COVIDSafe framework for ECEC services

1. Reinforce COVIDSafe behaviours	2. Create COVIDSafe spaces	3. Promote COVIDSafe activities	4. Respond to coronavirus (COVID-19) risk
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay home when unwell • Actively support and practice good hygiene • Encourage physical distancing between adults • Wear a face mask (adults) when not teaching or caring for children • Avoid interactions in enclosed spaces (adults) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make hand hygiene easy • Keep surfaces clean and implement enhanced environmental cleaning and disinfection • Promote outdoor air ventilation and do not have air conditioners on recirculate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit access to outside visitors, where possible • Reduce mixing between groups • Create workforce bubbles • Adapt, modify or defer higher risk activities • Move activities outdoors where possible, weather permitting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep records and act quickly if someone becomes unwell • Use personal protective equipment • Clean and disinfect appropriately if a staff member or child has been unwell whilst at the ECEC service • Manage individual risk

Items in bold denote Victorian Government [COVIDSafe principle for business](#)



1. Reinforce COVIDSafe behaviours Create COVIDSafe spaces

Activity	Roadmap Second Step	Roadmap Third Step
Temperature checks	OPTIONAL	
	<p>Given the current levels of community transmission in Victoria, mandatory temperature testing of all children on arrival to ECECs will not be routinely required in Term 4, however should community transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19) in Victoria increase significantly once more, it may again be recommended for all ECECs to implement.</p> <p>ECECs can choose to continue temperature screening of children on arrival (following guidance already provided) in recognition that it can serve as a visible reminder to ensure unwell children do not attend the service, and it can detect a symptom that may indicate coronavirus (COVID-19), but they will need to be aware it will not detect all possible cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) and will likely detect fever caused by other illnesses.</p> <p>ECEC will also need to ensure conducting temperature screening does not increase risk to those involved e.g. by causing congregation.</p>	
Face masks when not teaching or caring for children (adults)	YES Single use face masks should not be worn for longer than 4 hours without changing	
Food sharing	NO	
Non-contact greeting between adults	YES	
Parents entering rooms	NO	

2. Create COVIDSafe spaces

Activity	Roadmap Second Step	Roadmap Third Step
Regular environmental cleaning	YES	
Enhanced hand hygiene facilities	YES	
Enhanced ventilation	YES	
Limit where possible staff working across multiple sites	YES	
Children attending more than one ECEC service	YES	

3. Promote COVIDSafe activities

Activity	Roadmap Second Step	Roadmap Third Step
<p>VISITORS</p> <p>Including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allied Health Transition programs 	<p>ESSENTIAL</p> <p>Visitors (other than those currently essential for critical ECEC operations) are not permitted in the Second Step as need to maintain ECEC as controlled environments. Essential includes:</p> <p>Allied health staff to attend on-site for individual assessments of children with a disability who are starting school in 2021, to support enrolment and transition planning.</p> <p>Specialist or allied health (including PSFO, SRF) or service management staff, authorised officers that are undertaking regulatory matters and maintenance workers.</p>	<p>ESSENTIAL PLUS</p> <p>To keep ECEC as controlled environments limit the number of adults onsite at any one time. Prioritise visitors who are most important to meeting children’s learning and development needs, such as:</p> <p>Allied health staff to attend on-site for individual assessments of children with a disability who are starting school in 2021, to support enrolment and transition planning.</p> <p>Onsite Kindergarten transition activities e.g. one foundation teacher to meet preschool teacher in ECEC environment.</p> <p>Health professionals performing dental/hearing checks etc.</p> <p>Specialist or allied health (including PSFO, SRF) or service management staff, authorised officers that are undertaking regulatory matters and maintenance workers.</p>
Parent volunteers onsite		NO
Kindergarten transition programs to schools	NO	<p>LIMITED</p> <p>Small group only (under 10) to meet prep teacher in school environment. No inter-mixing with other students at the school.</p>
Tours for prospective families		NO
Parent information sessions		NO
Photographers		<p>YES</p> <p>Photos are permitted outdoors for metropolitan services and indoors and outdoors for regional and rural services.</p>
Bush & beach kinder programs		YES
Incursions		NO
Excursions	<p>NO - except for walking to the park</p>	<p>LIMITED</p> <p>Exclusive use of a venue by a single ECEC service at a time. Can only be from Third step to Third Step area.</p>
Group singing (and wind instrument use)		NO

4. Respond to coronavirus (COVID-19) risk

Activity	Roadmap Second Step	Roadmap Third Step
Keep visitor records		YES
Maintain appropriate PPE supply		YES