

# Fact sheet

## Family Day Care: Enhancing safety and wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic

### Purpose and background

This fact sheet provides current research about the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and practical guidance and advice for family day care providers to enhance the safety and wellbeing of children and support staff within their service.

### What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a new virus. Symptoms can include fever, cough, a sore throat, and shortness of breath. The virus can spread from person to person, but good hygiene, cleaning and physical distancing can help to prevent infection.

### Health and safety

The Department of Health has advised that it is safe for family day care providers in the NT to remain open and for children to attend.

To date, there has been a low number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the NT and no evidence of community spread. This places the NT in a different position to other states and territories that may have higher infection rates, and therefore have different measures in place.

Family day care providers are an essential service, and all parents and families needing access during this time can be reassured that their children are being cared for in a safe and supported manner.

Family day care plans regarding work health and safety must meet or exceed the requirements of the National Quality Standards Quality Area 2, the relevant legislated workplace health and safety requirements and the requirements of the Commonwealth and NT health authorities. At no point can any decisions supplant any workplace health and safety laws or the most recent Department of Health advice on COVID-19.

Department of Education advice provided to family day care providers will continue to be informed by advice from the Australian Government and the (NT) Department of Health.

### Help stop the spread and stay healthy

There are a range of actions that family day care providers can take to reduce COVID-19 transmission.

The information below provides guidance on a range of actions to be considered, implemented and adapted as necessary according to the education setting and the individual needs of the staff and children in attendance. It is understood that not all strategies may be appropriate nor possible in every service.

Family day care providers are exempt from many of the directions of the NT Chief Health Officer, including those regarding mass gatherings (internal and external). Where the NT Chief Health Officer or the Australian Government issue a direction that applies to family day care, providers will be required to comply. These directions will be communicated to you if they arise.

There are a range of practices that can be put in place for family day care providers and educators to further support the safety of children and people residing in the home. There are four elements to these practices:

1. unwell children and parents must not attend family day care. If children or spouse of a family day care educator are ill, the provider must notify all relevant parties
2. improved physical distancing
3. improved hygiene
4. environmental cleaning.

## Workplace precautions

Providers, educators and parents both share responsibility for ensuring that infections are not brought into the home of a family day care educator. It is strongly recommended that the strategies outlined below are implemented within your service to minimise cross contamination.

To protect both children and co-workers, the following recommended procedures should be employed, wherever possible:

1. all staff must wash their hands for at least 20 seconds upon arrival and departure from the service and at regular intervals throughout the day
2. staff must not work if they are unwell and should not go to work if they have a fever or respiratory symptoms (e.g. cough, sore throat, shortness of breath)
3. staff should be sent home if the nominated supervisor suspects that they may be unwell
4. ensure families apply hand sanitiser or wash their hands prior to signing their children out. Centres may also decide to undertake this process themselves as per regulation 158 1 (c) (i) (ii) of the Education and Care Services National Regulations.

## Exclusions and infection

1. Staff or children who are unwell with the following symptoms will be excluded from entering family day care:
  - a) respiratory symptoms including cough, shortness of breath and sore throat
  - b) a fever or history of fever (e.g. night sweats, chills)

The following people, including children, should be in quarantine and should not attend family day care:

- c) anyone who has been outside of Australia within the last 14 days
- d) anyone who has returned from interstate within the last 14 days
- e) anyone who has been identified as a close contact of a person who is a confirmed case of COVID-19.

If any person residing at the home of a family day care educator has any of the above, the provider must cease the service and notify the Department of Health and Quality Education and Care NT.

Risk minimisation strategies must be implemented for staff who are defined as vulnerable or have care responsibilities for a vulnerable person. Vulnerable is defined as:

- i. suffering from a chronic medical condition;
  - ii. suffering from a chronic autoimmune condition
  - iii. aged 70 years or older;
  - iv. pregnancy.
2. The following rules apply if a child or staff member who is currently attending family day care, has been diagnosed as a **confirmed case** of COVID-19. Currently attending is defined as a person who has attended the service in the last 14 days.

### **The case must be confirmed by the Department of Health before action is taken and when directed:**

- a) all parents of enrolled children and persons residing in the house must be informed immediately
- b) the service must be closed immediately while contact tracing is completed
- c) all relevant departments and regulatory bodies must be notified, including the Department of Education (Quality Education and Care NT)
- d) a complete clean of the facility must be undertaken in line with Department of Health factsheets. <https://coronavirus.nt.gov.au/community-advice/resources>
- e) the provider must comply and follow the advice of the Department of Health.

## Physical distancing

This guidance recognises that the general advice for the Northern Territory public to maintain a physical distance of 1.5 metres from others will not always be practical in education settings, notably settings that work with younger children.

Services are encouraged to employ strategies that reduce families' interactions with staff to less than 15 minutes. This will help reduce the risk of any person to person transmission. Only one family member can attend the home of the family day care at a time unless that family member is collecting multiple children and requires assistance.

Practices relating to physical distancing should be applied where practicable to both children and staff.

Use of home-based play equipment by children can continue, however, educators should clean play equipment daily and ensure children wash their hands or use alcohol-based sanitiser before and after using play equipment.

Do not hold events or activities that are in addition to regular operational activities

## Hygiene

Everyone must practice good hygiene to protect against infection and prevent the virus spreading.

Hand hygiene, cough etiquette and environmental cleaning are effective ways to enhance safety for children and staff.

### Handwashing

Good handwashing practices should be implemented and hands should be washed with soap and running water for 20 seconds, particularly before and after eating and after going to the toilet. Educators should also:

- ensure liquid soap and running water, or alcohol-based hand sanitiser, are available in their home
- be encouraged, as well as children, to regularly perform hand hygiene, including on arrival to the service and before and after meals. You are a good role model for the children and their parents/carers, so actively talk about why everyone needs to wash their hands and the importance of everyone doing this
- direct and supervise hand washing at a minimum of before and after eating food and going to the toilet, either through washing hands with soap and water or use of hand sanitiser according to need
- provide hand sanitiser in every occupied room where soap and water are not readily available, and actively encourage children to use this. Educators and children unable to use hand sanitiser should be encouraged to wash their hands more regularly.

### Cough and sneeze etiquette and face touching

Encourage and promote good practices, i.e. "catch coughs and sneezes with your elbow or in a tissue that you put straight in the bin" and discourage face touching, particularly eyes, nose and mouth.

### Water bottles

Parents are encouraged to provide their children with labelled and named personal water bottles. These water bottles must not be shared.

### Food preparation areas

In accordance with the *Australian and New Zealand Food Safety Standards* all food preparation and serving equipment including crockery and cutlery must be cleaned and sanitised before use. Where possible the use of a dishwasher is preferred.

### Meal times

- Sharing of food should be actively monitored and discouraged.
- Look at your space when children are eating. Consider having less children at each table and using more tables to allow more space between children.
- Where appropriate, educators and children should be encouraged to keep as much distance between them as possible and developmentally appropriate between each other when eating, noting that some children will require assistance with feeding (see routine care).
- Ensure the highest hygiene practices among food handlers as per National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) guidance, [Preventing Infectious Diseases in Early Childhood Education and Care Services](#).

### Routine care

In supporting young children or children with additional needs, particularly where bodily fluids may be encountered, standard precautions are advised:

- wash hands with soap and water and dry on single use paper towel or use hand sanitiser before and after performing routine care
- when coming into contact with someone for the purpose of providing routine care and/or assistance, for example, the use of gloves for nappy changing, toileting and feeding. Also see NHMRC guidance [Preventing Infectious Diseases in Early Childhood Education and Care Services](#)
- use gloves, remove them safely after use and dispose of them immediately in a rubbish bin which is regularly cleared

- wipe all surfaces and equipment after single use with disinfectant
- continue to follow adjustments documented in plans for individual students
- additional Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as medical face masks, is not required unless such precautions are usually adopted in the routine care of an individual or young person. Non-medical face coverings are not recommended as their use has the potential to create more harm than good.

## Management of an unwell child or staff member

- Unwell staff members and any person residing in the home who have symptoms of coronavirus should immediately self-quarantine. They should seek advice from their GP on if they need testing for COVID-19. Alternatively they can call the NT COVID-19 testing hotline on 1800 008 002.
- Unwell children with symptoms of coronavirus should be isolated with appropriate supervision until they are collected by a parent/carer to go directly home. The parent/carer should then seek medical advice from their GP or the NT COVID-19 testing hotline on 1800 008 002 on behalf of their child.
- In the situation, where staff or children are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, important actions to take include hand hygiene, physical distancing and where possible putting on a face mask.
- Face masks should not be used in situations where an individual is unable to safely or practically tolerate a mask, for example, a child with complex medical needs, including existing respiratory needs and younger children. Standard protocols apply for anyone who is unwell but not suspected of having coronavirus.
- Urgent medical attention should be sought where indicated.
- Children's health care plans should be up-to-date and provide additional advice, where required, on monitoring and identification of the unwell child in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Follow cleaning guidance according to the situation of the case. If a child spreads droplets, for example, by sneezing, coughing or vomiting, clean surfaces immediately with disinfectant wipes.

## First Aid

Standard precautions should be adopted when providing first aid, for example, use gloves and an apron when dealing with blood or body fluids/substances. Always wash hands with soap and water or use a hand sanitiser before and after providing first aid.

Additional PPE, for example, face masks, is not required to provide standard first aid on children or staff who appear to be well. Hand hygiene, cough etiquette and environmental cleaning are more important for reducing risk.

## Other practices

To further enhance hygiene practices, services may also choose to sign students both in and out each day, as per regulation 158 (1)(c)(i) (ii) of the Education and Care Services National Regulations.

## Support

To support these hygiene practices, ensure there are adequate supplies of soap and running water, toilet paper and tissues and hand sanitiser. Hand sanitiser should be available at the entrance of the service. Ensure tissues, cleaning supplies and rubbish bins are available with frequent waste disposal taking place; display promotional materials and teach practices.

Family day care educators are required to have: running water and soap or hand sanitiser; tissues and rubbish bins that are cleared, at a minimum, daily; and personal cleaning supplies, for example, to wipe down resources between each use such as surface disinfectant and paper towels, or disinfectant wipes.

## Cleaning

Frequently cleaning and disinfecting surfaces reduces the risk of diseases spreading.

Services should maintain full adherence to the NHMRC childcare cleaning guidelines, in addition:

- clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces at least daily, for example, play gyms, tables, hard-backed chairs, doorknobs, light switches, remote control devices, handles, desks, toilets and sinks
- wash and launder play items and toys including washable plush toys as appropriate in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. If possible, launder items using the warmest appropriate water setting for the items and dry items completely.

## Learning and other accessible spaces

- Assess your routine environmental cleaning and increase frequency to include progressive cleaning throughout the day, particularly for high-touch surfaces.
- Windows should be open during the day to promote air flow where possible.
- Hand sanitisers (or soap and water) and tissues should be made available in all accessible spaces.
- Consider the setup of the room and the placement of the activities and limit the number of whole group activities. Where possible, children should be physically distanced as much as practicable. For table activities, set up activities only at each end of the table.
- Set up more individual activities throughout the room.
- For younger children, particularly consider the rotation of toys more often and increase the frequency of cleaning toys. Sharing of toys that have been placed in mouths should be monitored and avoided.
- Look at the spacing of cots and highchairs, keeping them well apart.

## Outdoor play

- Wherever possible, for example, weather dependent and where enough staff are available for adequate supervision, consider operating an indoor/outdoor program for the full day/session. This naturally provides for more space for the children and the setup of more activities for children to engage in.
- If you are not able to run an indoor/outdoor program, consider spending more time outdoors, consider the placement of activities and the amount of activities in the outdoor space. A greater range of activities will encourage children to spread out more broadly.
- Excursions should not be undertaken and public playground equipment should not be used.

## How to make up a bleach solution

Bleach solutions should be made fresh daily as they become less effective over time.

Bleach is available in a variety of strengths. Check the product label for the concentration of active ingredient – hypochlorous acid – or strength of the bleach.

The recommended concentration of available chlorine for routine disinfection of cleaned surfaces is 1000ppm as this concentration has been shown to be effective against the majority of microbial pathogens.

The following table provides guidance as to how to make up a 1000ppm chlorine solution

Strength of bleach	Dilution to achieve 1000ppm available chlorine		Volume of bleach to be added to 10L bucket of cold water
	Parts of bleach	Parts of water	
4%	1	39	250ml
5%	1	49	200ml

When using bleach, providers need to be aware of and take into consideration children with asthma or other respiratory conditions.

## Information for cleaning (provider or staff)

COVID-19 spreads mainly from person to person:

- between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 1.5 metres)
- through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Droplets can enter via your mouth, nose or eyes.

Cleaning within the home of a family day care setting, and where someone suspected to have, or have been diagnosed with COVID-19, does not pose a major risk if standard work health and safety practices are followed.

When cleaning, educators should wear disposable gloves and may also wish to wear a surgical mask and eye protection while cleaning.

They should avoid touching their face, especially their mouth, nose and eyes when cleaning. Cleaners should use alcohol-based hand sanitiser before putting on and after taking off gloves and other protective equipment.

## Rubbish disposal

Rubbish bins must be emptied prior to service commencement and at the end of each day.

Disposable gloves, surgical masks and other contaminated items should be placed in rubbish bags before disposing of them with other domestic waste.

Hands should be washed with soap and running water immediately after handling these items. Alcohol-based hand sanitiser can be used as an alternative, however, soap is the preferred and most effective option.

## **Washing towels and linen (where applicable)**

It is recommended that linen and towels be laundered in accordance with *AS/NZS 4146:2000 Laundry Practice*. In general, laundry should be washed and dried with the warmest temperatures recommended on the label. The *Public and Environmental Health Regulations* require that at a minimum sheets be changed on a weekly basis.

## **Transport**

Transport, including buses and minivans, must be cleaned thoroughly daily, in accordance with the high touch cleaning advice above. This should include handles, handrails, seats and other commonly touched surfaces. However, should you be transporting children with additional needs or those who mouth items, they should be cleaned twice daily.

## **In the event of a suspected/confirmed case**

Where there is a suspected or confirmed case, family day care providers should contact the NT COVID-19 hotline on 1800 008 002 for further advice.

## **Communication**

Continuing clear and consistent communication will help children, parents and people residing in the home understand we all have a part to play in slowing the spread of COVID 19.

Families who require longer conversations regarding their children's care should be contacted by phone, email or video. A separate area for families who need to complete additional documentation such as medication forms, should be made available. Alternatively forms can be sent electronically.

Family day care providers and educators should continue to keep parents informed about actions their service is taking through their normal channels of communication and display age-appropriate materials in designated spaces with key messages relating to physical distancing and hygiene.