



## Guidance and Recommendations for Child Care Operating in Austin-Travis County during the COVID-19 Response Period Updated 4/7/2020

Child care providers are working to provide a critical service during the COVID-19 response. The City of Austin and Travis County wish to express their appreciation for your work. We also would like to help child care programs navigate through the many changes impacting families and child care facilities. This document is intended to provide answers and guidance based on the questions we received during the webinar on March 25, 2020 hosted by the Austin-Travis County COVID-19 Child Care Task Force. It is also meant to assist child care providers in understanding the guidance and recommendations from different entities – to help you and the children you care for stay safe and healthy during the COVID-19 response period.

### Austin/Travis County Stay Home-Work Safe Order

Child care is an important asset during the emergency response. For this reason, under the Austin-Travis County [Stay Home-Work Safe Order](#) issued on March 24, home and center-based child care is included as an *Essential Business* and allowed to continue operating to provide services that enable individuals exempted in the Order to work as permitted. The intent of the Order is that child care providers will only serve children of those exempted individuals during this COVID-19 response period. While the Stay Home-Work Safe Order encourages each essential business to remain open, it is up to each individual provider whether they will remain open while continuing to follow guidance to prevent the spread of illness. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides a [CDC School Closure Decision Tree](#) that can be used to help schools determine which set of mitigation strategies may be most appropriate for their current situation.

Per the Order, exempted individuals are those who work in one of three exempted categories- Essential Businesses, Critical Infrastructure, or Essential Government Functions. These categories are described and defined in the Order and [this site](#) also lists industries, business types and specific jobs that are permitted to remain open under the order.

Child care centers and homes should show parents/guardians the Austin-Travis County [Stay Home-Work Safe Order](#) and ask the parent or guardian if they are employed in one of the three exempted categories. If the answer is 'yes,' the center can provide care to the child. It is suggested, though not required, that providers seek this information in writing and rely on the person answering to tell the truth. Child care centers and homes are only permitted to provide care to children of exempted individuals under the City/County Order. Please note, this control order is from Austin-Travis County and is not related to Child Care Regulation (Licensing). However, according to Child Care Regulation, child care providers may enroll new children to provide care for exempted individuals.

Additional documentation beyond regular ID requirements for transportation is not necessary for travel to essential activities or businesses. Therefore, child care staff do not need any special documentation for travel to and from work. Austin Police Department's priority is to keep the public safe through

education and awareness. The goal is to gain voluntary compliance, however, if necessary, officers may issue warnings, and as a last resort, citations.

The Stay Home-Work Safe Order was issued to reduce the substantial risk of harm to the public by slowing the spread of the coronavirus. [This link](#) has information about the importance of social distancing in “flattening the curve” from researchers at the University of Texas at Austin and Dell Medical School. The Stay Home-Work Safe Order is in effect until April 13, unless terminated or modified by a subsequent control order. All changes and updates to control orders are immediately posted on [www.austintexas.gov/covid19](http://www.austintexas.gov/covid19).

## General Guidance

Exclude children, staff, parents and guardians from child care sites if they are showing symptoms affiliated with COVID-19 (i.e. cough, fever, shortness of breath), have been in contact with someone with a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the last 14 days, or are at high risk due to underlying health conditions. Limit outside visitors.

### People at Increased Risk for Serious Complications of COVID-19

Persons who are older, pregnant, or who have underlying health conditions, including those with compromised immune systems or respiratory conditions like severe asthma, are at higher risk to develop complications from this virus. These individuals should not provide child care or visit child care facilities.

### Health Screening at Entry

Per [HHS COVID-19 Guidance to Childcare Providers](#), before allowing entry into the operation, screen all of the individuals, including taking the temperature of each person upon arrival at the operation each day. The CDC does not specify the use of a particular type of thermometer. The CDC recommends that thermometers be thoroughly cleaned in between each check. If non-contact thermometers are used, they should be cleaned routinely as recommended by CDC for infection control.

Per HHS guidance, deny entry to any person who meets any of the following criteria:

- A temperature over 99.6°F (Note, while HHS guidelines specify 100.4°F or above, operators should follow the 99.6°F temperature threshold set by the City of Austin Health Authority). Ask if medications were used to lower an individual’s temperature and if there are any household members with COVID-19.
- Signs or symptoms of a respiratory infection, such as a cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, and low-grade fever;
- In the previous 14 days has had contact with someone with a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19; is under investigation for COVID-19; or is ill with a respiratory illness; or
- In the previous 14 days has travelled internationally to countries with widespread, sustained community transmission. For updated information on affected countries, visit: [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/travelers/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/travelers/index.html).

Governor Abbott issued an executive order requiring airline passengers from New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Miami, Atlanta, Detroit, Chicago, and Washington State to self-quarantine 14 days upon

arrival in Texas. The order also states people driving or flying from New Orleans into Texas must self-quarantine for 14 days.

### **Social Distancing**

Reduce group sizes to no larger than 10 people total, including children and adults (e.g. one adult and nine children, two adults and eight children, etc.). If more than one group of children is cared for at one facility, each group must be in a separate room. Keep groups together throughout the day and do not combine groups (e.g. at opening and closing) or have children change from one group to another. To the degree possible, maintain the same groups from day to day, per the Austin-Travis County [Stay Home-Work Safe Order](#). This will help reduce potential exposures and may prevent an entire program from shutting down if exposure does occur.

Child care centers can assign more than one teacher to a group of children to accommodate teacher breaks. It is also fine for one group of 9 children to be cared for by two teachers with different shifts. Home-based providers must comply with the same requirements in the Austin-Travis County [Stay Home-Work Safe Order](#) as child care centers.

Incorporate social distancing within groups to the degree possible, aiming for six feet between children and minimizing the amount of time children are in close contact with each other. Not all strategies will be feasible for all child care settings. Administrators are encouraged to think creatively about all opportunities to increase the physical space between children and limit interactions.

Suggestions include:

- Limit the number of children at each learning center or station in the classroom to one or two at a time, if possible.
- Incorporate more individual work into the classroom.
- Increase the distance between children in circle time, meals and snacks, or during table work
- Plan activities that do not require close physical contact between individual children
- Increase spacing between nap mats to six feet if possible. If that is not possible, space nap mats as far apart as possible and place children in a toe-to-toe or head-to-toe arrangement
- Adjust the HVAC system and open windows to allow for more fresh air to enter classrooms.
- Eliminate large group activities.
- Limit the number of children in each program space.
- Limit item sharing, and if items are shared, remove, and clean and disinfect the items before returning them for use with the children. Remind children to not touch their faces and wash their hands after using these items.
- In infant rooms, use a separate blanket to hold each baby and use individual blankets on the floor. Avoid getting close to babies' and toddlers' faces when holding them.
- Limit use of water or sensory tables and wash hands immediately after any use of these tools.
- Minimize time standing in lines for children, such as during bathroom breaks or lunch lines.
- Avoid gathering in larger groups for any reason. Outside time and lunch should be taken with a stable, consistent small group (no large gathering or combining groups).
- Restrict field trips.
- Restrict trainings, staff meetings and gatherings.

## Cloth Face Coverings

See [CDC recommendations on the use of cloth face coverings](#) in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain. According to [CDC information on the use of cloth face coverings](#), they should not be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance

## Transportation

- Programs may consider discontinuing transportation during COVID-19 response to reduce close contact as seating on buses may make person-to-person transmission more likely. Contact Child Care Regulation at [MSC@hhsc.state.tx.us](mailto:MSC@hhsc.state.tx.us) if you need guidance.

## Outside Play

- Offer outdoor play in staggered shifts. If multiple groups are outside at the same time, they should have a minimum of six feet of open space between outdoor play areas or visit these areas in shifts, so they are not congregating. Always wash hands immediately after outdoor play time.
- Incorporate additional outside time.
- Encourage physical activity that allows for adequate social distancing and doesn't rely on materials that will need disinfecting.

## Meals and Snack Time

- Meals and snacks should be provided in the classroom if possible, to avoid congregating in large groups.
- If meals must be provided in a lunchroom, please stagger mealtimes, arrange tables to ensure that there is six feet of space between groups, and clean tables between lunch shifts.
- Eliminate family style meals.

## Drop-off and pick-up

Per [HHS COVID-19 Guidance to Childcare Providers](#), pick up and drop off of children must occur outside of the operation, unless you determine that there is a legitimate need for the parent to enter. If the center is located within another building, pick up and drop off should take place outside of the building. Drop off on the playground could pose difficulties in meeting the requirements of ensuring children remain in stable groups of no more than ten persons and that groups do not mix.

- Do not combine groups in the morning or afternoon.
- You may wish to alternate drop off and pick up times for each small group if possible, to avoid a large number of people congregating outside the facility to pick up.
- Wash hands or use hand sanitizer before and after signing children in and out each day. Do not share a common pen. Parents should use their own pen if possible. If check-in is electronic, try to provide alcohol wipes and frequently clean the screens or keyboards. Wipe down any swipe cards used.

## Hygiene Practices

- Practice frequent hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, and require handwashing upon arriving at the center, when entering the classroom, before meals or snacks, after outside time, after going to the bathroom and prior to leaving for home. Help very young children to ensure they are handwashing effectively.
- Adults may use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, but this substance is very toxic if consumed by children.
- Advise children, families and staff to avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover coughs or sneezes with an elbow or a tissue. Throw tissues in the trash and then clean hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer (if soap and water is not readily available).
- Keep hand sanitizers safely away from young children to avoid consumption or inappropriate use.
- Provide adequate supplies for good hygiene, including clean and functional handwashing stations, soap, and paper towels.

## Emotional Support

- **Please watch the stress level of caregivers, parents and children at this time.** This unprecedented time has added stress to many households and programs may want to increase active supervision by the center leader and create some processes that staff could temporarily “tap out” of classroom duties if needed.
- Child care staff should remember they are mandatory reporters in Texas and follow all guidance on abuse and neglect concerns even during the COVID response period.
- Consider changing up the curriculum to have more emotionally supportive activities or introduce more “quiet areas” with comfort items for children who may benefit from private time.

## Actions to Consider if a Child, Staff or Child’s Household Member Develops COVID-19 or Similar Symptoms:

- **Call 9-1-1 for medical emergencies** including chest pain, seizure, difficulty breathing, etc
- Staff or children with fever (higher than 99.6°F per the City of Austin Health Authority’s threshold), cough, or shortness of breath should be excluded from entry to child care facilities and stay away from others. If in the facility, please separate the individual from all others until the ill individual can leave the facility. The ill individual (if a child, the child’s parent or guardian) should contact their health care provider for immediate assistance. Children with household member(s) with confirmed COVID-19 should also be excluded from the child care facility.
- If a child or staff member develops symptoms of COVID-19, immediately separate the individual from others and send the ill person home. Other employees and children should be monitored to see if they develop any symptoms. [Exhibit A of the Stay Home-Work Safe Order](#) provides specific requirements for those individuals suspected to have COVID-19. Follow [CDC guidance for schools and child care](#).

- If a teacher develops symptoms of COVID-19 while caring for children, another teacher or substitute should provide care so the ill teacher can immediately leave the facility.
- Facilities experiencing a confirmed case of COVID-19 among their population should consider closing temporarily (as advised by local health officials). The duration may be dependent on staffing levels, outbreak levels in the community or severity of illness in the infected individual. Symptom-free children and staff should not attend or work at another facility, which could potentially expose others. Facilities should undergo a thorough cleaning and disinfecting and continue to monitor for ill individuals. The [CDC has guidance on cleaning and disinfecting](#) facilities with suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19.
- If the infected individual with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 spent minimal time (i.e. 10 minutes or less) in close contact with those in the child care facility, the facility may consider closing for 2-5 days to do a thorough [cleaning and disinfecting](#) and to continue to monitor for ill individuals.
- For any of these circumstances, the child care program should notify parents of other children at the facility of the situation, describe how the program is responding and continue to communicate updates to families.
- **Questions?**
  - Call 3-1-1 for general questions.
  - Contact your Licensing Inspector for guidance if needed. If you do not know who your inspector is, email [MSC@hhsc.state.tx.us](mailto:MSC@hhsc.state.tx.us).
  - For questions about suspected cases of COVID-19, child care center directors can call the Austin Public Health Nurse Line at 521-972-5560

## Returning to a child care facility after suspected COVID-19 symptoms

If a staff member or child has symptoms of COVID-19 or is a close contact of someone with COVID-19, they can return to the child care facility if the following conditions are met:

- If individuals have fever, cough or shortness of breath and have not been around anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19, they should stay home away from others until 72 hours after the fever is gone and symptoms resolve. If the person's symptoms worsen, they should contact their healthcare provider to determine if they should be tested for COVID-19.
- If an individual is diagnosed with COVID-19, they must remain out of the facility for a minimum of 7 days after the onset of first symptoms. They may return under the following conditions:
  - If they had a fever, 3 days after the fever ends AND they see an improvement in their initial symptoms (e.g. cough, shortness of breath);
  - If they do not have a fever, 3 days after they see an improvement in their initial symptoms (e.g. cough, shortness of breath);
  - OR
  - 7 days after symptom onset
- If an individual believes they have had close contact with someone with COVID-19 but are not currently sick, they should monitor their health for fever, cough or shortness of breath during the 14 days after the last day they were in close contact with the sick person with COVID-19. They should not go to work or school and should avoid public places for 14 days.

## Cleaning and Disinfecting Procedures

Continue with your normal cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting procedures throughout the day following licensing guidance, but increasing the frequency of cleaning/disinfecting high touch surfaces. Conduct thorough cleaning and disinfection of high touch surfaces each night after the children leave.

Current [CDC guidance for environmental cleaning and disinfection](#) specifies that disinfectants used should be registered by the EPA for emerging pathogens (a list of products that are EPA-approved for use against the virus that causes COVID-19 is available [here](#)). Or, if a bleach water mixture is used, the disinfectant (green label) should be mixed at a concentration of 4 teaspoons per quart. This higher level of bleach disinfecting solution can replace the normal diapering/bathroom solution at this time. The disinfectant should be used on high touch surfaces throughout the day when children are not in the immediate area and when proper ventilation can be ensured.

Increase the frequency with which you clean toys, manipulatives, equipment and surfaces, especially doorknobs, high-touch surfaces, check-in counters and restrooms. Use alcohol wipes to clean keyboards and electronics and wash hands after use. Minimize the potential for the spread of germs in the program space by temporarily removing toys that are not easily cleanable (such as stuffed animals and pillows) and rotate the toys that are out at any time so that they can be adequately cleaned and sanitized.

If groups of children are moving from one area to another in shifts, cleaning measures must be completed prior to the new group entering this area.

Staff cleaning should follow the disinfectant manufacturer's instructions:

- Use the proper concentration of disinfectant. Proper use of bleach with water and spray bottles may be a reasonable solution if unable to locate your typical disinfecting products. For more information please visit [Bleach Solution Fact Sheet](#)
- Follow child care licensing rules for disinfecting.
- Take care to keep cleaning materials away from young children at all times.
- Follow the product's hazard warnings and instructions for personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves, eye protection and adequate ventilation.

### **“Deep” Cleaning:**

Extra cleaning may be required if a COVID-19 case has been confirmed in your facility. Please follow CDC guidance for deep cleaning.

### **Carpets:**

Disinfecting carpets is not necessary or recommended for respiratory viruses. Viruses do not live long on soft surfaces. Please follow current child care licensing and your facility standards for carpets.

## Shared Hands-On Teaching Materials:

These items need to be cleaned at the end of the day. Soap and water is the first step. Some items could then be sanitized. Playdough cannot be cleaned or sanitized, so consider individual containers for each child with names on labels or discontinue use. Facilities should consider removing water tables, sensory tables, etc. from use for the period of COVID response. Limit shared teaching materials to those that can be easily cleaned and disinfected at the end of the day and more often as needed.

Follow [CDC Guidance](#) on hygiene, sanitation, and disinfecting.

## What Government Entities are Guiding Child Care?

Child care programs operating in Austin-Travis County should follow the guidance from the following entities:



### CDC:

The [Centers for Disease Control & Prevention \(CDC\)](#) nationally is providing guidance to the federal government and to the states. They are a trusted source of information on health and safety. Specific guidance was issued to child care and schools

ENGLISH: [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html)

SPANISH: [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index-sp.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index-sp.html)

### HHSC - CHILD CARE REGULATION:

For licensed and registered facilities operating in Texas, [Texas HHSC-Child Care Regulation](#) continues to be a primary source of regulation and guidance. Licensing regulations have not been waived statewide during this period, but additional guidance has been issued by Child Care Regulation.

**Child Care Regulation (Licensing) Impact Survey** - Required if your operation status changes:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CCLCOVID19>

This survey is designed to allow you to determine any impact on your operation by COVID-19.

Please complete all information so Child Care Regulations/Licensing can account for your



operation's status and share information with our state and federal partners.

**You may request the following changes to your operation through your online Child Care Licensing Account or by contacting your licensing inspector including the following:**

- o Adding services like night time care
- o Changing your hours or the days you are operating
- o Changing the ages served
- o Moving to a temporary location

**CONTACT EMAIL: If you have a specific question for Child Care Licensing: [MSC@hhsc.state.tx.us](mailto:MSC@hhsc.state.tx.us)**  
**[COVID-19 Guidance to Child Care Providers](#)**

Updated Guidance on March 27: [Guidance Letter for Child Care Providers about Variances](#)

#### TEXAS WORKFORCE COMMISSION AND WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS CAPITAL AREA:

For up-to-date guidance, visit:

[www.wfscapitalarea.com/Child-Care-Services/COVID-19-Resources-for-Providers-Parents](http://www.wfscapitalarea.com/Child-Care-Services/COVID-19-Resources-for-Providers-Parents)

#### **Texas Frontline Child Care Availability Portal:**

Many Texans working in sectors critical in the battle against COVID-19 (coronavirus) are looking for child care. A new support will be available soon to help parents: the official statewide Frontline Child Care Availability Portal. This website will allow parents to search for available child care near their home or work, and it will display a map of licensed child care centers, licensed homes, and registered homes. It will show each facility's operating hours, along with the number of open seats for each age group at the facility. After searching, families will need to contact the child care facility directly to enroll their child.

If you are willing to provide child care to our COVID-19 essential workforce, we want to list you on this website. Complete [this initial form](#), indicating the number of child care seats for each age group you currently have available.

Please complete [this form](#) before 8:00pm on **Tuesday, March 31**. This is not a regulatory requirement, though we would like to publish accurate information listed for your child care operation in the upcoming Frontline Child Care Availability Portal. While you can continue entering information after this deadline, this portal will be launched for parents the evening of April 1, and we want parents to have accurate information.

If you have any challenges logging in, please visit [this link](#) to find instructions for how to log in for the first time.

If you are currently a Child Care Services (CCS) provider, information will be provided to you by Workforce Solutions Capital Area with guidance to be able to near-term provide subsidy assistance to essential workers.

If you would like to sign up to become a CCS provider in order to provide child care for essential workers and receive subsidy funding for this care, please proactively contact Workforce Solutions Capital Area to begin an expedited process of signing up. Please contact Workforce Solutions CCS at 512-597-7191 or [providerservices@wfscapitalarea.com](mailto:providerservices@wfscapitalarea.com)

On March 27, [Texas Workforce Commission \(TWC\)](#) issued additional recommendations to Workforce Boards across Texas, including Workforce Solutions Capital Area. On March 30, 2020, the County and City officials are recognizing these TWC recommendations for all licensed and registered child care providers operating in the Capital Area Workforce Board region:

[www.twc.texas.gov/files/policy\\_letters/attachments/07-20-att-1-twc.pdf](http://www.twc.texas.gov/files/policy_letters/attachments/07-20-att-1-twc.pdf)

We know there are a lot of questions about CCS as policies are changing to help ensure response to COVID-19 does not negatively impact a CCS child care provider and does not negatively impact families receiving child care subsidy assistance. Additionally, there is NEW funding being made available in Texas to provide CCS subsidy for COVID-essential personnel.

[gov.texas.gov/news/post/governor-abbott-announces-new-processes-to-preserve-and-extend-child-care-capacity-for-front-line-workers](http://gov.texas.gov/news/post/governor-abbott-announces-new-processes-to-preserve-and-extend-child-care-capacity-for-front-line-workers)

**The Texas Workforce Commission is also a central source of information for employers:**

[www.twc.texas.gov/businesses/mass-claims-unemployment-benefits](http://www.twc.texas.gov/businesses/mass-claims-unemployment-benefits)

#### AUSTIN-TRAVIS COUNTY- AUSTIN PUBLIC HEALTH:

During a period of emergency response, the local authorities such as Austin Public Health, City of Austin and Travis County may also provide requirements or recommendations.

Austin-Travis County is currently operating under a Stay Home-Work Safe Order through April 13, 2020. Please continue to monitor as this deadline could be extended. [www.austintexas.gov/COVID19](http://www.austintexas.gov/COVID19)

**Austin Public Health has convened the Austin-Travis County COVID-19 Child Care Task Force that includes members from Child Care Regulations/Texas Health and Human Services Commission, Travis County, Workforce Solutions Capital Area, United Way for Greater Austin, and other key early childhood stakeholders.**

The Task Force recognizes that child care providers caring for the children of employees who must continue working during this crisis are on the front line of our community's response. As well, the Task Force understands that the crisis has caused some providers to close temporarily, and those which remain open are facing an array of challenges.

Therefore, the Task Force is seeking a more comprehensive picture of how child care providers in our community are being impacted by COVID-19 and what needs providers currently have. This information will be useful as we work together to explore potential supports for child care providers. Austin Public Health and the Austin/Travis County COVID-19 Child Care Task Force are doing all we can to provide child care centers and homes in Travis County needed supplies, however we cannot guarantee that we can meet all the needs. For example, national shortages are currently making it difficult for us to source hand sanitizer, and at this time, Austin Public Health does not have non-contact thermometers, but may have access to limited quantities of thermometers with disposable plastic sleeves.

**Supply needs survey:** [www.surveymonkey.com/r/COVIDNeeds](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/COVIDNeeds)

\*Please note, we cannot guarantee fulfilling these needs but will do our best.

**The City of Austin Small Business Program** may have helpful resources and support for child care owners. Consider subscribing to the email list.

[www.austintexas.gov/department/small-business-program](http://www.austintexas.gov/department/small-business-program)

**Please continue to visit [www.austintexas.gov/covid19](http://www.austintexas.gov/covid19) for additional guidance and answers related to our webinar that are not covered by this document.**

Guidance for child care providers is located in the **Information for Businesses and Industries** section. Please refer to contacts mentioned in the guidance document for agency-specific answers. For any other questions please send an email to [SuccessBy6@uwatx.org](mailto:SuccessBy6@uwatx.org) and we will help you connect to an appropriate resource.