



Office of Children and Family Services

KATHY HOCHUL

Governor

SHEILA J. POOLE

Commissioner

PLEASE READ: This Letter Contains Changes to Isolation and Quarantine Requirements for Those Who Are Unable to Wear a Well-Fitting Mask

May 31, 2022

Dear Licensed, Registered or Legally-Exempt Group Provider:

This letter contains the most recent requirements regarding COVID-19 protocols required by the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) for your child care program(s).

Effective immediately, individuals previously subject to a 10-day isolation or quarantine due to age, vaccination status and/or inability to reliably wear a mask, may be able to return to their child care program sooner. Please read this guidance carefully. **New or changed information is underlined.**

This letter replaces our most recent COVID-19 guidance, sent to you on March 1, 2022. It is issued consistent with the most recent guidance from the New York State Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and in consideration of the importance of access to learning and care, social and emotional well-being of children, and the needs of the families served when they cannot attend child care programs due to extensive and repeated quarantines.

A. MASKS

Effective March 2, 2022, OCFS no longer requires that masks be worn in child care programs. Nothing in this guidance shall prevent an individual municipality (county/city), federal regulator (if applicable, for example for Head Start), or individual child care program from maintaining a masking requirement if it chooses to do so.

Child care programs are strongly encouraged to review and, as necessary, strengthen all health and safety measures to compensate for the end of universal masking. These include promoting vaccination, encouraging COVID testing, improved ventilation, social distancing, cleaning and disinfection, excluding sick individuals from program, and proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

With the absence of a universal mask requirement, there are still circumstances when masking should be used in child care programs. Children over the age of two, staff, volunteers, etc., in a child care program should still wear a mask, regardless of vaccination status, in the following circumstances:

- When they had **close contact** with someone with COVID-19 (this means when they were within six feet of someone with COVID-19 for more than 15 minutes in a 24 hour period) they **should wear a mask, if over the age of two, for 10 days whenever feasible;**
- If they are moderately-to-severely immunocompromised and have discussed the need to mask with their healthcare provider(s);
- If they feel more comfortable wearing a mask for personal reasons;
- If they are required to mask by the child care program or by their municipality (city/county);
- If required to mask by any relevant federal licensure or regulator (for example, for Head Start);
- **If they have returned to program after a 5-day isolation or quarantine, masks should be worn by anyone over age two, whenever feasible, on days 6-10.**

To the extent that persons are expected or required to mask, masks may be removed when eating, drinking, singing, napping, going outside, or playing a wind instrument. When masks are removed for these purposes, maximize social distancing as much as possible (ideally six feet or more).

Additionally, programs should expect and plan for the presence of masked people in child care programs working and learning alongside unmasked people. As such, it is essential that child care programs establish “mask positive” environments so those who choose to or are expected or required to mask feel comfortable.

B. ISOLATION

Isolation is for individuals who have been infected with COVID-19, even if they don't have symptoms. Isolation is also for people who are suspected of having COVID-19 because of the symptoms they exhibit. You isolate in order to prevent spreading the virus to others. Below answers how long to isolate depending on your circumstances:

<p>If the person is:</p> <p>A child of any age or adult who has symptoms of COVID-19 and is waiting for a test result, regardless of vaccination status</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 must stay out of the child care program for 5 days OR until they receive a negative COVID-19 test (whichever is first). • If test is negative and symptoms are improving they can come back to the child care program • If test is positive, follow isolation rules for a COVID positive (next section).
<p>If the person is:</p> <p>A child of any age or adult who tests positive for COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anyone with a positive COVID test must stay out of the child care program for at least 5 days. • Anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19 and who is not experiencing symptoms must isolate for 5 days. After 5 days, they may return to program. Day 1 of isolation for someone not experiencing symptoms is the first full day following a positive test. Day zero is the day you test positive. <u>A well-fitting mask <i>should</i> be worn by anyone over the age of two, whenever feasible, on days 6-10.</u> • Anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19 and who is experiencing symptoms must isolate for <i>at least</i> 5 days. Day 1 of isolation for someone who is experiencing symptoms is the first full day following the day symptoms first began. Day zero is the first day symptoms began. They may return to the child program after 5 full days AND must be fever-free for 24 hours without medication AND must have improving symptoms before returning to program. <u>A well-fitting mask <i>should</i> be worn by anyone over the age of two, whenever feasible, on days 6-10.</u> • Anyone hospitalized with COVID-19 or immunocompromised must isolate for at least 10 days and consult a doctor before returning to the child care program. • Pursuant to DOH guidance, those under 2 and those who cannot wear a well-fitted mask must continue to isolate as otherwise required outside of the child care setting for days 6-10

For home-based programs, if any person (provider, staff, household member) is isolating in the home, they must be completely separated from the child care program while it is operating. If complete separation is not possible, the program may not have any unrelated children in care. If complete separation is not possible, the program must temporarily close.

C. QUARANTINE

Quarantine is for someone who has had **close contact** with someone who tested positive for COVID-19 but **who does not have any symptoms** of COVID-19 and has not tested positive COVID-19. A close contact is someone who was less than 6 feet away from an infected person for 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period. Below answers who have to quarantine following close contact with COVID-19 and for how long:

<p>If the person:</p> <p>Has received all recommended vaccine doses, including boosters (if eligible)</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Had confirmed COVID-19 within the past 90 days (tested positive using a viral test)</p> <p>OR</p> <p>An unvaccinated child who is attending school and who also attends a child care program part of the day</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No quarantine is required before they may return to program. • They do not need to stay out of the program unless they develop symptoms. • <i>If a person under quarantine develops symptoms, they must follow the isolation guidance that starts on page 1 before returning to program.</i> • <u>Anyone over the age of two should wear a well-fitting mask around others for 10 days whenever feasible.</u> • If they haven't had confirmed COVID-19 in the last 90 days, testing is encouraged on day 5 when possible.
<p>If the person:</p> <p>Has not received all recommended doses of the vaccine, including boosters <u>for anyone ages 12 and older</u> (if eligible)</p> <p>OR</p> <p>is completely unvaccinated</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adults and children may return to the child care program after 5 days if they are not experiencing symptoms. <u>A well-fitting mask should be worn by anyone over the age of two whenever feasible on days 6-10.</u> • Programs should ensure that children and adults who are returning after quarantine for days 6-10 are screened daily for COVID-19 symptoms. • <i>If a person under quarantine develops symptoms, they must follow the isolation guidance that starts on page 1 before returning to program.</i> • Pursuant to DOH guidance, those under 2 and those who cannot wear a well-fitted mask must continue to quarantine as otherwise required outside of the child care setting for days 6-10 • If a person under quarantine has not had confirmed COVID-19 in the last 90 days, testing is encouraged on day 5 when possible.

For home-based programs, if any person (provider, staff, household member) is quarantining in the home they must be completely separated from the child care program while it is operating. If complete separation is not possible, the program must temporarily close.

Other Information

Helpful information about how to isolate or quarantine, as well as what to look out for, is available on DOH's website: <https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/new-york-state-contact-tracing>.

For all other COVID precautions, please review the recommendations in the CDC's COVID-19 Guidance for Operating Early Care and Education/Child Care Programs (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/child-care-guidance.html>). The CDC regularly updates this guidance as new information becomes available, so please review it often. This CDC guidance outlines strategies for child care programs to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and maintain safe operations. Many child care programs serve children who are not yet eligible for vaccination. Therefore, the CDC guidance emphasizes using multiple prevention strategies together, including vaccination of staff, families and eligible children, to protect people. The guidance is intended to help programs select appropriate, layered prevention strategies.

Remember that vaccination is currently the leading public health prevention strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic. Promoting vaccination among all eligible individuals can help child care programs protect staff and children in their care, as well as their families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Janice Molnar". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Janice M. Molnar, Ph.D., Deputy Commissioner
Division of Child Care Services