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**Guidance for childcares**

Child care and early learning serve a vitally important function in allowing parents to continue working, which has essential public health, economic and social impacts. We recommend that childcares are not required to close, but that we offer some considerations for childcare operators to make about whether they can operate safely. We suggest that child care providers be given flexibility to make decisions about whether and for how long to operate a child care, but overall strongly urge child care providers to follow national guidelines from Child Care Aware and consider closure to limit the spread of COVID-19 if not serving families with essential workers.

We recognize that social distancing is a key concept to stopping disease transmission but is likely extremely challenging for young children and those who care for them.  This makes it even more critical to undertake efforts to keep sick staff and children at home and to clean regularly.

We recommend the following principles to guide these decisions:

* Ensure where possible that children are kept in cohorts, keeping the same children together and avoiding groups/cohorts contacting one another. Whenever possible, keep the number of children and providers in each group at 10 or less. Where possible, prioritize keeping family units in the same group (i.e. an infant, 2 yr old and 4 yr old from the same family would be in the same group). Where possible, limit the total number of children in any one facility to 24.
* Adhere to Montana Child Care Licensing ratio standards at all times and ensure active supervision of children.
* Take decisive and proactive steps to ensure that children and staff with a fever or persistent cough are sent home; Keep anyone sick separate from well students and staff until the sick person can be sent home, while also ensuring that all children are supervised at all times. As children enter the child care setting each day it is recommended that a staff person wearing gloves checks the temperature of each child and adult, and asks if the child or anyone in the home has had a fever, cough, shortness of breath, flu like symptoms or have been around anyone with COVID-19. If the family answers yes to any of these questions, it is recommended that they are required to leave the day care pending assessment by their medical provider and local public health officials.
* It is recommended that families who have been traveling outside of Montana not bring their child into the child care setting for 14 days after the family last traveled.
* Develop a plan to clean and disinfect more frequently; Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces; and wash hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Wear gloves when changing diapers or wiping noses and ensure that gloves are changed after each individual use and wash hands before putting on the next pair of gloves. Always wash hands with soap and water if they are visibly dirty. Remember to supervise young children when they use hand sanitizer to prevent swallowing alcohol.
* 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 that they are not congregating. Avoid use of play structures. Always wash hands and any items used (i.e. balls) immediately after outdoor play time.
* Encourage and allow staff who are over the age of 60 or who have compromised immune systems to leave the workplace
* When possible, prioritize care for parents or caregivers who work in essential occupations such as health care, first responders, public health, grocery store and gas station workers, and other child care functions.
* Advise families and clients to avoid moving child care responsibilities to people over 60 (i.e. grandparents) or other friends and family that are in the high risk population.
* Adapt drop off and pick up processes (such as signing in and out) to support social distancing and decrease shared surface touches and the spread of infection.
* If a community experiences wide spread COVID-19 infections it is recommended that child care settings close to all families with non-essential occupations.
* When possible, communicate with families about ways to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and the importance of doing so to all families and staff involved in the child care provision.

Further guidance may be found at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-schools.html>