



# Office of Children and Family Services

KATHY HOCHUL  
Governor

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Commissioner

## **PLEASE READ: This Letter Contains New COVID-19 Information and Changes to Mask Requirements**

March 1, 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 March 2, 2022, OCFS is no longer requiring that masks be worn in your child care program. You may continue to require masks and children or staff should continue to be encouraged to wear a mask if they prefer to do so. Please review Section A below, as it contains all new information.**

This letter replaces our most recent COVID-19 guidance, sent to you on February 4, 2022. It is issued in consideration of the most recent guidance issued by the New York State Department of Health and by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) related to school age children and child care settings. Providers are encouraged to read the CDC Guidance, as it contains a lot of information on COVID-19 prevention strategies specific to child care settings and young children. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/child-care-guidance.html>.

### **A. MASKS**

Effective March 2, 2022, OCFS is no longer requiring that masks be worn in child care programs and will be not be enforcing our emergency regulations until they expire. The decision to end the child care mask requirement is based on several factors including greatly reduced COVID-19 case rates compared to the heights of the 2021-2022 winter surge. 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 must wear a mask for 10 days;
- 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 completed a minimum 5-day isolation period because of a COVID-19 infection and have returned to program, masks must be worn 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**

Individuals who have close contact with someone with COVID-19 are still required to isolate/quarantine, pursuant to the guidance issued by the Department of Health (DOH). A lot of 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>.

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><u>If the person is:</u> A child of any age or adult who has <b>symptoms of COVID-19 and is waiting for a test</b>, regardless of vaccination status</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anyone with <b>symptoms</b> 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).</li> <li>• If test is negative and symptoms are improving they can come back to the child care program</li> <li>• If test is positive, follow isolation rules for a COVID positive (next section).</li> </ul>
<p><u>If the person is:</u> A child of any age or adult who <b>tests positive</b> for COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anyone with a positive COVID test must stay out of the child care program for at least 5 days.</li> <li>• Anyone who has <b>tested positive</b> for COVID-19, and who <b>is not experiencing symptoms</b> must isolate for 5 days. After 5 days, they may return to program if they are age 2 or older and can consistently wear a well-fitting mask at program for days 6-10 (masks required for days 6-10). 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.</li> <li>• Anyone who has <b>tested positive</b> for COVID-19 and <b>who is experiencing symptoms</b> 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 and day zero is the first day</li> </ul>

	<p>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. They must wear a well fitting mask for days 6-10.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anyone under age 2 or anyone over age 2 but who cannot reliably wear a well-fitted mask for any reason, who has tested positive for COVID-19, must stay out of program for a full 10 days.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>
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**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 has to quarantine following close contact with COVID-19 and for how long:

<p><u>If the person:</u></p> <p>Has received all recommended vaccine doses, including boosters (if eligible)</p> <p><b>OR</b></p> <p>Had confirmed COVID-19 within the past 90 days (tested positive using a viral test)</p> <p><b>OR</b></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"> <li>• No quarantine is required before they may return to program.</li> <li>• They do not need to stay out of the program unless they develop symptoms.</li> <li>• <i>If a person under quarantine develops symptoms, they must follow the isolation guidance that starts on page 1 before returning to program.</i></li> <li>• They should wear a well-fitting mask around others for 10 days.</li> <li>• If they haven't had confirmed COVID-19 in the last 90 days, testing is encouraged on day 5 when possible.</li> </ul>
<p><u>If the person:</u></p> <p>Has <b>not</b> received all recommended doses of the vaccine, including boosters (if eligible)</p> <p><b>OR</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adults and children over the age of 2 years (who are not attending school) may return to the child care program after <u>5 days</u> if they are able to wear a well-fitting face mask <b>AND</b> if they are not</li> </ul>

is completely unvaccinated

experiencing symptoms. Masks must be worn at program for days 6-10.

- Children under the age of 2 years, as well as any child who cannot reliably wear a well-fitting mask for any reason, must remain out of the child care program for a full 10 days. They may return to program after 10 days provided they are not experiencing symptoms.
- *If a person under quarantine develops symptoms, they must follow the isolation guidance that starts on page 1 before returning to program.*
- If a person under quarantine has not had confirmed COVID-19 in the last 90 days, testing is encouraged on day 5 when possible.

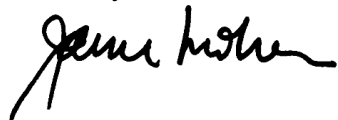
**For home-based programs**, if any person (provider, staff, household member) is quarantining in the home they must be completely separated from the child care program while it is operating. If complete separation is not possible, the program must temporarily close.

### **Other Information**

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,



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