Exempt Emergency Child Care Program

Guidance for Parents

Emergency child care programs are reserved for families who require emergency, back-up child care. Emergency child care programs are for when all other non-group-care settings have been exhausted and families have no other options. In light of the March 23 order from the Governor designating certain "Essential Workforces," EEC is now modifying its guidance to explain that priority access to emergency child care shall be given to vulnerable children, and the children of families designated as "COVID-19 Essential Workforces," with emphasis on those in the health care, public health, and human services and law enforcement, public safety, and first responder fields. Please see EEC's Emergency Child Care Policies for more information on how eligible families will be prioritized as businesses begin going back to work. **Parents working from home are not a priority for emergency child care services.**

To slow the spread of coronavirus, Governor Baker issued an emergency order on March 18 temporarily closing all early childhood education programs across the State of Massachusetts. This will remain in effect through Phase 1 of reopening and may be extended as needed. This closure applies to all center-based and family child care programs. It does not apply to residential schools, community group homes, temporary shelters, transition-to-independent living facilities, teen parent programs, and DYS secure facilities.

> **Exempt Emergency Child Care Programs (EECCPs) will be the only child care programs that are allowed to operate during this time.** These programs—authorized through a unique request and approval process—will support **essential workers** and **vulnerable families** that have **no other option for childcare services** (e.g., family members). All others must abide by social distancing standards laid out by the CDC and the Commonwealth. This prioritizes public health and safety while maintaining critical services.
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> For further guidance regarding the definition of essential workers, please see COVID-19 Essential Services issued by the Governor.

Children involved with DCF should be working with their case worker to identify the need for emergency child care services during this public health emergency.

Information for parents and guardians about EECCPs:

- EECCPs are required to prioritize attendance based on the guidance issued by the Governor in COVID-19 Order No. 13

- In addition to COVID-19 Essential Services, EECCPs will prioritize attendance to vulnerable children and families, such a homeless families. Families with active DCF cases should contact their caseworker or other DCF contact to identify appropriate supports throughout the State of Emergency.

- Parents, including those identified as priority above, should use these services only in case of emergency where no alternative non-group care access is available. Parents and guardians working from home are not a priority for emergency child care

- Children who are sick should NOT be allowed to utilize these services. Providers should ensure that parents have abided by all the health and safety protocols set forth in the guidance provided by DPH and EEC posted on the website

- Families will not pay enrollment fees for emergency child care services. Programs may allow for donations, but may not penalize any family who does not make a donation nor provide any preferential treatment for families that make a donation. In rare circumstances, programs that have an existing relationship with an employer of essential services may be allowed to continue charging normal fees with an exemption from EEC.

- Parents are responsible for contacting the EECCP providers to identify available capacity and confirm a slot during the day and time needed. Parents who show up for EECCP care without calling in advance will not be guaranteed a child care slot.

- With revised information from the Governor, EEC is encouraging families to be planful about their child care needs for the duration of the emergency closure. Parents may request slots for EECCP care up to one week in advance, provided there is space available and slots reserved for child care remain open. It is at the EECCP's discretion if they are able to accommodate requests made in this time frame.

- Parents are encouraged to use the same EECCP for the duration of the State of Emergency, subject to the EECCP's availability.

- Parents are responsible for notifying the EECCP in advance if care is no longer needed. Failure to adhere to these guidelines may limit EECCPs ability to serve the family going forward.

- A directory of all approved EECCPs will be regularly maintained on EEC's website. Families should utilize the search feature of the tool in order to find their nearest EECCP at https://eeclead.force.com/EEC_ExemptEmergencyChildCare.

- Services will be on a temporary basis only to accommodate emergency back-up child care needs and will not be operating under current childcare enrollment processes.

- Families will be required to fill out the EEC Enrollment Form provided on the website, along with any other documentation requested by the EECCP.

- EECCPs will determine their own hours and should be contacted directly to learn more around flexibility to meet parents' specific needs.

- Families are responsible for checking the EEC website to find EECCPs operating in their area.

- Transportation will not be provided to EECCPs.

- Families must pick up their children at the agreed-upon time each day.

- Providers may or may not be able to accommodate children with special needs. Please contact the EECCP provider directly to ensure the specific needs of your children can be addressed by the provider.

- To help slow the spread of COVID-19 and to ensure spots are left available to parents needing emergency care, utilization of EECCP child care should be minimized to the extent possible.

Frequently asked questions can be found on the EEC emergency child care website:
https://eeclead.force.com/apex/EEC_ChildCareEmergencyProcedure