

Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care Reopen Approach

Frequently Asked Questions on the Revised Minimum Requirements for Health and Safety

August 21, 2020

What changed from the June 12th version?

While much of the content in the Minimum Requirements is the same, one big change that took place since June 12th was reformatting of the entire document to make it easier to use and understand. Sections have been reorganized and updated and the document has been pared down to provide *only* the minimum requirements for health and safety.

Some of the biggest changes to the content of the Minimum Requirements are as follows:

Ratios: Child care programs will now be allowed to return to their pre-COVID-19 licensed ratios in all age groups. Providers who are already reopened will receive a communication from EEC on Monday, August 24th regarding the provisional or final approval letter that specifically mentions a lower ratio.

Group sizes: Child care programs will now be allowed to return to their licensed maximum group size for all age groups provided that, for GSA programs, a minimum of 42 sq ft per child can be achieved. Providers who are already reopened will receive a communication from EEC on Monday, August 24th regarding the provisional or final approval letter that specifically mentions a smaller group size.

Face Mask use: Early educators and child care providers are now required to wear face masks at all times when at child care unless outside and maintaining 6 feet of physical distance. Face masks use for children continues to be *encouraged*.

FCC Capacity: EEC is temporarily lowering the age of children living in an FCC educator's home who count in an FCC's capacity. During the COVID-19 emergency, only children up to the age of **8** who live in the FCC home and are present in the child care space will be considered to be 'in the care of educators' for the purposes of determining capacity. Children who are enrolled in school and older than 8 may be in the child care space without counting towards licensed capacity as long as 35 square feet for child can be maintained.

Process for reporting COVID-19 positive individuals: In an effort to streamline reporting for positive cases and be able to respond promptly to child care programs that need immediate advice, a new reporting form has been created in collaboration with the Department of Public Health. The reporting form, which can be found in a provider's LEAD portal, is for reporting COVID-19 positive cases only and will facilitate a DPH representative contacting the child care program to discuss next steps.

Limited in-person services for children: Telehealth and virtual visits for specialized services for children are still preferable in order to keep the child care program virus free. EEC recognizes, however, that there are some services that are not possible to provide via telehealth, that cannot be provided at any other time of the day, or cases where the telehealth or virtual model is not developmentally appropriate for the child. In these cases, service providers are now allowed to provide in-person services on a limited basis provided that they complete a health screen, wear appropriate PPE, and do not mix with discrete groups of children.

If I have already reopened my child care program, do I need to take any further action?

Every licensed provider operating during COVID-19 is required to have a COVID-19 Health and Safety Plan submitted to EEC.

For child care programs that received provisional and/or final approval to reopen by submitting a Reopening Transaction, EEC is requesting that you review your Reopening Plan and update it in the areas where the Minimum Requirements have changed, but you are not required to submit that updated plan to continue to operate. Licensors will be reaching out to check in and make sure that you continue to be able to maintain the practices laid out in the minimum requirements. If you have questions about implementing the minimum requirements, please reach out to your licensor or contact your regional Professional Development Center.

Child care programs that are newly licensed or that have not yet reopened will also be required to have a Health and Safety Plan submitted to EEC.

How will EEC support licensed programs interested in changing or expanding capacity?

EEC has resumed licensing processes with some modifications due to COVID-19.

EEC has established expedited processes specific to either temporary or permanent space changes for both FCC and GSA programs.

EEC has also established new processes for currently licensed programs that would like to increase their licensed capacity to serve more children during this time.

Additionally, EEC is aware of the statutory limitations preventing licensed programs from operating while children are attending school. EEC is working in partnership with DESE, the Executive Office of Education, and the Governor's office to address this issue for providers interested in serving children enrolled in virtual learning arrangements.

More information will be available next week.

Can I serve more children during the school day?

EEC is working in partnership with DESE, the Executive Office of Education, and the Governor's office to create solutions that work for families in this new reality of virtual and hybrid learning. EEC is aware of the statutory limitations preventing licensed programs from operating while children are attending school. EEC has received permission from the Federal Office of Child Care to pay full-day subsidies for children enrolled in child care while engaged in virtual learning with a school district. More information will be available next week. All updated subsidy policies and guidance can be accessed [here](#).

I still have questions about what to do if a child might have been exposed. Who do I call?

Several resources exist for child care providers to get answers when they have questions that are not directly related to quarantine, isolation, and diagnosis of a COVID-19 positive individual. Child care providers can call the Bureau of Infectious Disease and Laboratory Science at 617-983-6800 or they can email childcare.covid19@state.ma.us to be connected with Department of Public Health representatives.

If you are informed that a child, staff member, or household member has tested positive for COVID-19, please use the new DPH COVID-19 Positive Reporting Form found in your LEAD portal to report the positive test as soon as you are made aware.