

To best support programs who have been issued a temporary license to operate during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) has collected best practice suggestions from and for programs that are caring for children in small restricted groups and increasing cleaning and sanitizing practices. We invite you to use these best practice suggestions to best acclimate your children, families, and staff to these unique and temporary conditions. Thank you to the many providers who shared their suggestions with licensing specialists.

Sanitary and preventive practices

The COVID-19 pandemic encourages programs to increase their cleaning and sanitizing, handwashing, and social distancing practices. Consider these options to promote advanced attention for a clean and sanitary environment.

- Promote sensory play experiences by utilizing small individual bins instead of a shared sensory or water table to prevent cross contamination. Set the bins in proximity to each other so children may still enjoy conversation with each other while playing.
- Promote children's choice while still limiting the items that must be sanitized. Select one set of items from multiple categories to be offered daily, such as one type of blocks, one type of dramatic play material, or one type of art material. The available and sanitized items may be alternated daily.
- Set up areas for children to play separately, sectioning off areas of the room for individual play.
- Designate a "germ bin" for toys that get licked, sneezed on, or contaminated. Doing this ensures immediate removal for proper sanitization.
- Create a sanitation room, station, or area where toys and materials can be sanitized and prepared for rotation each day.
- Arrange infant play space or infant/toddler outdoor space with barriers (such as a baby gate) to allow individual play spaces for each child, including individual toys. The caregiver will still interact with each child, providing necessary care and nurturing.
- Create a sanitation backpack to take to the outdoor play area. Include items such as cleaner, sanitizer, gloves, paper towels, and/or a small trash bag. This allows sanitizing after each group of children has utilized any shared equipment.
- Provide sanitizing wipes or spray so that doorknobs can be sanitized after each use.
- Prohibit children from bringing items from home such as no backpacks/bags/lunch boxes/sippy cups, etc.
- Wash or send home all naptime blankets/covers/crib sheets daily. Clean and sanitize cribs/cots/mats daily.
- Restrict staff from eating in areas used by children if food is brought from the outside (such as fast food) during breaks.
- Label an ink pen and other shared family essentials per family to avoid communicable use.
- Eliminate stuffed animals and other porous equipment/materials that is not easily sanitized.
- Place cots for napping being mindful of social distancing, yet not impairing supervision.
- Temporarily suspend family style meal serving to avoid cross contamination.

Social-emotional development, family engagement and daily routines

Many programs have seen a sudden change in their enrollment, accepting children of essential workers and distancing children who are friends to separate classrooms. To best meet their learning and social-emotional development and continue family engagement and daily routines, creative approaches may be needed.

- Create videos of familiar staff reading stories to the children in each small group. The videos may be shared within the program or posted for families. This will allow children to see their friends and familiar caregivers on the video, which may help when they miss them.
- Create electronic pen pals in other groups in the building for daily electronic mail delivery.
- Create a time capsule for drawings, letters, and other items to be opened in one year or future years.

- Schedule visiting times through windows for friends that are separated for engaged play such as charades and games using a dry eraser on glass window.
- Invite a guest reader to record stories and play them back during naptime.
- Create and mail drawings for nursing homes residents and staff. Invite them to do the same for the children.
- Offer families the option to have food delivered from a specific restaurant for a one stop type option. Partner with locally owned businesses. Offer a different restaurant on different nights and have pre-determined menu item that families can prepay/order and pick-up with their child at the center.
- Be mindful of any inappropriate media through television or radio near children. While the program will want to stay abreast of the daily pandemic updates, the information should not be accessible to children. Keep conversation regarding the pandemic with verbal children within appropriate content.
- Send families pictures of their child throughout the day to ensure the parents their children are safe and engaged in their activities.
- Encourage staff to keep the day as routine as possible as this will help the children feel confident in their surroundings.

Policies and procedures

The policies and procedures that a program utilizes during times of regular operation may need adaptation. Procedures for program staff and parents in the areas of enrollment, daily practices, and illness may be considered and adjusted.

- Ask parents to drop off and pick up children from the front entrance or the hallway, allowing for one drop off or pick up at a time. A staff person must then escort the child to their group, minimizing the amount of people in and out of the children's areas.
- Have parents take their own child's temperature when entering the program and show it to staff. This can be done at a sanitation station at the entrance, thus encouraging social distancing.
- Require anyone entering the program to wash and/or sanitize their hands.
- Require staff members to wear masks and/or gloves, and to check their temperatures before beginning work and throughout the day.
- Ask staff not to wear their "outdoor" shoes in the program. Upon arrival they leave their shoes at the door and put on clean slippers. The slippers are washed daily.
- Staff change into "scrubs" that are washed daily before beginning work.
- Have parents supply lunches and snacks, which will relieve any challenges in the program obtaining groceries.
- Document anyone entering the building, including delivery people, non-family members picking up children, etc. Have them call from outside the building if possible. If a child or staff tests positive for COVID-19, the program could notify the individuals who may have been exposed.
- While speaking to perspective families of essential workers for possible enrollment, have them wash hands upon entering the building and limit the tour of the program and avoid walking into classrooms.

Additional resources

Ohio Association for the Education of Young Children (OAEYC)

<https://www.oaeyc.org/covid>

Ohio Child Care Resource and Referral Association (OCCRRA)

<https://occrra.org/>

Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-childcare.html>