



# Updated COVID-19 Guidelines for Child Care Programs

August 13, 2021

This document provides updated guidelines for child care centers and family day homes. These guidelines supersede previous guidelines issued on July 20, 2021 by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and all child care guidance previously issued by the Virginia Department of Social Services.

## Important Notes:

- This document reflects guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Virginia Department of Health (VDH), and is generally consistent with guidelines for K-12 schools.
- The VDOE strongly recommends that programs use the guidelines to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.
- Guidelines should be considered “best practice” and **are not subject to enforcement** by the Office of Child Care Health and Safety.

The VDOE will continue to inspect regulated and licensed programs for health and safety requirements based on the [Code of Virginia](#) and in [regulation](#) (8VAC20-770 through 8VAC20-850, as appropriate). Exempt programs are subject to inspections as allowed by the Code of Virginia. Licensed and regulated programs are subject to health, sanitation, exclusion, and infection control requirements as described in the appropriate regulation or requirements or any executive or public health orders.

## Guidelines for Child Care Programs

Following public health guidance remains critically important, especially noting that emerging data show that the Delta variant is different from past versions of the virus and is much more contagious. Here are the key guidelines for child care programs in Virginia:

### Face Masks

- On August 12, 2021, the state health commissioner issued an [order](#) that requires **all individuals** ages two and older to wear masks when indoors in public and private K-12 schools. **This includes child care and afterschool programs operating at public and private schools.** This does NOT include freestanding child care or afterschool programs.
- Pursuant to current guidance from the CDC and VDH, VDOE **strongly**



**recommends** that all staff and children ages two and older wear masks when indoors, regardless of vaccination status, to the extent practicable.

- **For staff:** The Virginia Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI) [Final Permanent Standard for Infectious Disease Prevention of the SARS-CoV-2 Virus That Causes COVID-19, 16VAC25-220](#) requires staff in child care settings to wear face masks, regardless of vaccination status. The Virginia Safety and Health Codes Board is currently reviewing proposed amendments to these requirements. For questions, please visit [www.doli.virginia.gov](http://www.doli.virginia.gov) or contact DOLI at 804-371-2327.
- **For children:** Masks are **strongly recommended** for children ages 2 and older when indoors, including while on transportation, regardless of vaccination status. Face masks should NOT be put on babies and children under age two because of the danger of suffocation. Face masks are NOT recommended for any child who is eating, drinking, sleeping, has trouble breathing, or is unable to remove the cover without assistance.
- Providers should also be aware of the CDC Order related to face masks on public transportation. Please visit the [CDC website](#) for more information.

### Physical Distancing and Cohorting

- Programs should facilitate physical distancing indoors while still allowing for the care and developmental needs of children. Programs should generally maintain 3 feet of distance between individuals to the extent practicable and appropriate.
- Practicing **cohorting**, or placing children and staff into distinct groups that stay together from day to day and limiting mixing between groups, can help to limit the spread of COVID-19. To the extent practicable and appropriate, programs should try to keep groups of children together with consistent staff and maintain at least 6 ft distance between cohorts to limit impact in case of exposure.

### COVID-19 Testing and Symptomatic Individuals

- Notify the [local health department](#) and your licensing inspector of outbreaks and report COVID-19 cases using VDH [online reporting portal](#). This portal ensures case reports will meet VDH and DOLI reporting compliance.
- Encourage staff and children to stay home when sick and have a plan to isolate children or staff that display [symptoms of COVID-19](#) or other illnesses.
- Facilities with a confirmed case of COVID-19 among children or staff should



contact the local health jurisdiction to follow [local health department](#) guidelines.

### Family Access to Child Care Facilities

As a reminder, Virginia law states that parents or guardians cannot be *prohibited* from entering a child care facility when their child is present under [Section 22.1-289.054](#). Providers may recommend or require parents or guardians to maintain a certain distance and/or wear masks while picking up or dropping off their children or visiting the facility.

### Vaccinations

Everyone ages 12 and older is eligible to receive a free COVID-19 vaccine in Virginia. Vaccines are safe, effective and widely available. All child care staff are encouraged to get vaccinated, especially as young children are not yet eligible to be vaccinated.

- [Data](#) show that unvaccinated Virginians account for nearly everyone who is now being hospitalized or dying from COVID-19. Visit <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/covid-19-vaccine/> for information.

### Additional Resources for Child Care Operations

- [Guidance, resources, and data](#) on COVID-19 from VDH
- [Resources for child care and camps](#) from VDH
- CDC's [COVID-19 Guidance for Operating Early Care and Education/Child Care Programs](#)
- [Local health department](#) for guidance on specific situations and/or how to respond to a confirmed case of COVID-19
- Free print and digital resources on CDC's [communications resources](#) main page

We encourage you to review information from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), the [Virginia Department of Health \(VDH\)](#), and other sources of reliable public health information for guidelines and recommendations for child care programs.

Programs should contact their assigned licensing inspector or the [Office of Child Care Health and Safety](#) in their region with questions.