



Georgia Dept of Early Care and Learning

BRIGHT FROM THE START

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Brian P. Kemp
Governor

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Dear Child Care Providers:

You likely have heard from various media outlets about the coronavirus and its potential impact on Georgia. This letter provides guidance on important health and safety practices for licensed and exempt child care programs.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, coronavirus outbreaks in young children are uncommon and severe symptoms are even more rare in children. Even so, in order to prevent the spread of illness, you should continue to monitor the children in your care for signs of illness, including fever, cough, difficulty breathing, body aches, fatigue, sore throat, headache, and diarrhea. In addition, please encourage good health practices such as appropriate handwashing; covering coughs or sneezing with a tissue or into the elbow; and disinfecting surfaces. Please also ensure that your program enforces the rules prohibiting children and staff who are sick or who show certain symptoms of illness from being in child care facilities.

Though the symptoms of the coronavirus are similar to the flu, there is no vaccine currently available to prevent the coronavirus. Infectious disease specialists strongly recommend that children receive a flu vaccination because it can help protect them from various strains of the influenza virus. Georgia law O.C.G.A. § 20-1A-18 requires child care providers to supply parents or guardians of children enrolled in their programs with information on the flu vaccine. The law also requires providers to distribute information about causes and symptoms of the flu, how the virus is spread, and the associated risks, as well as the availability, effectiveness, and known contraindications of the flu vaccine.

These procedures for proper handwashing can reduce the spread of germs:

- Wet your hands with clean running water and then lather them with soap; don't miss the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
- Scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds (about the time it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice).
- Finally, rinse your hands well with clean, running water. Dry them with a paper towel, use the towel to turn off the faucet, and dispose of the towel in a trash receptacle.

Georgia's child care licensing rules and regulations state that children should wash their hands with liquid soap and warm running water, as described above, in these situations:

- immediately upon arrival for care, when moving from one child care group to another, and upon re-entering the child care area after outside play
- before and after eating meals and snacks, handling or touching food, or playing in water
- after toileting and diapering; playing in sand; touching animals or pets; coming into contact with bodily fluids such as, but not limited to, mucus, saliva, vomit, or blood; and after contamination by any other means

Staff members must also ensure that their own hands are washed with liquid soap and warm running water, as described above, in these situations:

- before and after diapering each child; dispensing medication; applying topical medications, ointments, creams, or lotions; handling and preparing food; eating; drinking; preparing bottles; feeding each child; and assisting children with eating and drinking
- after toileting or assisting children with toileting; using tobacco products; handling garbage and organic waste; touching animals or pets; handling bodily fluids, such as, but not limited to, mucus, saliva, vomit or blood; and after contamination by any other means

Ideally, your program should have a plan in place to implement in the event of a pandemic illness. Information on developing your plan can be found at:

Caring for Our Children: National Resource Center For Health and Safety In Child Care and Early Education; Improving the Quality of Out-of-Home Child Care and Early Education
<https://nrckids.org/CFOC/Database/9.2.4.4>

The following links provide more information about flu prevention and about the coronavirus:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/freeresources/index.htm>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/children-faq.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/2019-ncov-factsheet.pdf>

Georgia Department of Public Health

<http://dph.georgia.gov/influenza-what-you-need-know>

<https://dph.georgia.gov/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-outbreak>

Healthy Children: American Academy of Pediatrics

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/prevention/Pages/Prevention-In-Child-Care-or-School.aspx>

The Children's Healthcare of Atlanta (CHOA) website provides resources you can share with your teachers, students, and their families to help them stay healthy. You'll find tips for fending off the flu at <https://www.choa.org/fighttheflu>. The checklist at <https://www.choa.org/medical-services/wellness-and-preventive-care/flu> can help you assess whether a child has the flu.

CHOA recommends taking these steps to prevent illness:

- Encourage individuals to get the flu vaccine—it's not too late.
- Practice good hand hygiene.
- Visit your primary care doctor or pediatrician as a first line of defense before visiting an emergency department or urgent care center.

As the recommendation states, if you think a child in your center or home may have flu symptoms or symptoms of illness, encourage the child's parents to visit their pediatrician before visiting an emergency department, unless immediate care is necessary. If the child needs a written note in order to return to child care or school, advise parents to request the note from their pediatrician during their visit, in lieu of requesting a note in an emergency department or urgent care center.

I hope you find these materials beneficial and that you share them with your families, friends, and colleagues throughout your communities. If you have questions about illness prevention or rules related to children's health, contact your Child Care Licensing Consultant. Together, we can help keep Georgia's children healthy and safe.

Thank you for all you do to maintain the well-being of our children and communities.

Sincerely,



Pam Stevens
Deputy Commissioner for Child Care Services