



Public Health Division

# County of Santa Cruz

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## HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

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### Guidance for Childcare Settings during COVID-19 Pandemic

March 19, 2020

TO: Childcare Organizations/Agencies and Santa Cruz County Families

On March 16, 2020, the Santa Cruz County Health Officer and County Office of Education collectively agreed to extend school closures until **April 10, 2020** in efforts to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Due to moderate community spread of COVID-19 within Santa Cruz County, a Health Officer order was also issued directing all Santa Cruz County residents to shelter in place except for those involved in certain essential services, activities, and work. Section 10.f.xxi of the March 16<sup>th</sup> Health Officer Order refers to childcare facilities providing services that enable essential employees exempt from the Order to work as permitted.

**This advisory addresses licensed childcare facilities and licensed and non-licensed family childcare programs (i.e. daycare, preschools).** Schools and childcare settings are environments that can allow for the continual spread of the virus, including transmission to older generations who are more at risk for severe disease. Children, especially young children, are a special focus of infection control because of the ease with which they can spread the virus and other germs. However, Santa Cruz County Public Health recognizes that 1) some childcare facilities may continue to assemble small groups of students and that 2) some families will need to make alternate childcare arrangements, which can be challenging in this environment.

We recommend childcare administrators and staff review U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance for school settings: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html>

**The following guidelines are intended to reduce the chance of COVID-19 exposure in childcare programs:**

- 1) Childcare ideally should be provided in the child's home, by household members, without exposure to other children or ill individuals.
- 2) When group childcare is needed, it should be prioritized for use by essential service employees and those who would otherwise not be able to work.
- 3) Group childcare should:

- a. Ideally, children should be in stable groups of 6 or fewer children. However, if that is not possible, stable groups should have no more than 12 children (“stable” means that the same 12 or fewer children are in the same group each day). Children should not change from one group to another.
  - b. If more than 1 group of children is cared for at one facility, each group should be in a separate room. Groups should not mix with each other. For example: meals, playground time, and toileting activities should be at separate times for each group.
  - c. Childcare provider(s) should also remain solely with 1 group of children (providers should not move from group to group or room to room).
- 4) Infection control measures in a childcare setting:
- a. **Screen children and staff for fever or cough daily, before entering childcare.**
  - b. **Exclude ill children and employees (those with symptoms specified above) from the facility from the time they are ill until they are well. Before returning, children and employees should be without symptoms for 72 hours AND wait a full 7 days since onset of symptoms.**
  - c. **Children or staff who develop symptoms should put on a surgical mask, enter a separate room, and be sent home immediately. They may contact their primary care provider if needed.**
  - d. Where possible, parents should not enter the childcare facility when picking up or dropping off their children. Consider setting up an outdoor or curbside pick-up or drop-off process.
  - e. Children and staff should wash hands with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol (if hands are not visibly dirty) upon entry to the facility and before/after eating, drinking, touching eyes/nose/mouth, toileting or diapering, and physical contact with each other.
  - f. Clean high-contact areas and surfaces frequently, using 10% bleach solution or EPA-approved disinfectant, including counters, toys, telephones, and doorknobs. See CA Environmental Protection Agency’s guidance on using disinfectants at schools and child cares:  
[http://apps.cdpr.ca.gov/schoolipm/pubs/reminders\\_for\\_using\\_disinfectants.pdf](http://apps.cdpr.ca.gov/schoolipm/pubs/reminders_for_using_disinfectants.pdf)
  - g. Staff and children should practice good respiratory hygiene including coughing/sneezing into sleeve and covering coughs. Posters and signage to remind children and staff of these practices may be helpful.

For printed materials, see: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/factsheets.html>

For hygiene etiquette and practice, see:  
[https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/hygiene/etiquette/coughing\\_sneezing.html](https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/hygiene/etiquette/coughing_sneezing.html)

**For Families:**

During this time, parents should keep children home if they are sick. Before returning to childcare, children should be without symptoms for 72 hours (without the use of medicine) AND wait at least 7 days since onset of illness. Parents should seek medical care immediately if symptoms, such as a high fever or difficulty breathing, become more severe; cover coughs with a sleeve or tissue; keep tissues and “no touch” trash cans close by; wash hands often and keep soap dispensers filled; and clean frequently touched surfaces routinely.

In addition, with the rise in public conversations around COVID-19, children may begin to worry about themselves, their family, and friends becoming ill. CDC has provided general principles for talking to children in a way that reduces anxiety and fear but provides honest and accurate information. See here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/talking-with-children.html>.

Lastly, the CDC has released guidelines for creating a household plan of action related to the virus. See here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/get-your-household-ready-for-COVID-19.html>.

The duration of this guidance will be determined by the spread of the disease in the community, in consultation with California Department of Public Health and regional public health partners. This recommendation will remain in effect until further notice from the Health Officer.

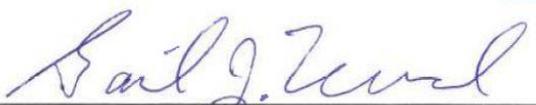
**Additional information:**

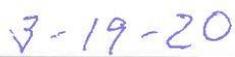
World Health Organization (WHO): <https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) : <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/novel-coronavirus-2019.html>

California Department of Public Health (CDPH):  
<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/nCOV2019.aspx>

Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency: <https://www.santacruzhealth.org/coronavirus>

  
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Gail Newel, MD, MPH  
Health Office

  
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Date