

TO: Child Care Licensees
Consolidated Municipal Service Managers and District Social
Services Administration Boards (CMSMs and DSSABs)

FROM: Phil Graham
Assistant Deputy Minister
Early Years and Child Care Division

DATE: August 3, 2021

SUBJECT: Updates to Health and Safety Guidance

Thank you for your continued dedication and commitment to supporting children, families, and staff working in the child care and early years sector. We are deeply appreciative of the efforts of the sector in ensuring children are in a nurturing, supportive and safe environment. The purpose of this memo is to provide you with updated COVID-19 screening and health and safety guidance for early years and child care settings.

We have every reason to be optimistic for this year, but must acknowledge there are public health challenges that remain. Although vaccination provides protection against COVID-19 and variants, greater vaccination coverage is required across all age cohorts and it is not known when younger children will be eligible to receive a vaccine. This necessitates a careful approach to health and safety, and continued monitoring of the COVID-19 situation, including Variants of Concern. Given the uncertainty of the public health landscape heading into the fall, health and safety protocols for child care settings will remain largely unchanged. By taking a measured approach we can help ensure child care and early years settings remain open to support families, and a safe place for children and staff.

EarlyON Centres are permitted to operate in accordance with the [Reopening Ontario \(A Flexible Response to COVID-19\) Act 2020 \(ROA\)](#) and the [Roadmap to Reopen](#). EarlyON Centres that are open to the public must continue to have [enhanced health and safety measures](#) in place.

The [COVID-19 child care, before and after school \(BASP\), and EarlyON guidance documents](#) have been updated to align with the back to school [COVID-19: Health, Safety and Operational Guidance for Schools](#) (2021-22), and adapted as necessary for early years and child care settings. In some instances, early years and child care settings will be required to take a differentiated approach for the safety of staff/providers and the children in their care. This is especially important when working

with young children who in addition to being unvaccinated, may not be wearing face coverings, and may not be able to practice physical distancing.

The ministry is currently working on making any necessary regulatory changes to the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*, and will communicate more details in August. Proposed regulatory changes under the General Regulation (O.Reg 137/15) include:

- Lifting the prohibition of volunteers (section 88.6(4))
- Removing the authority to prevent a parent from entering a child care premises in accordance with a licensee's COVID-19 policy.

Licenseses may wish to revise their policies to reflect the updated guidance. Further communication will be provided pending approval of regulatory changes.

For further details on required health and safety measures, please see the [COVID-19 child care, BASP, and EarlyON guidance documents](#). These changes reflect the latest advice from the Ministry of Health and the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health. Please note that some minor operational updates have also been made to the BASP guidance document. The Ministry will continue to work with the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and local public health units (PHUs) to adjust health and safety requirements (e.g., more or less restrictive measures) based on the public health environment and aligned with province-wide Ministry of Health metrics, and will update guidance as required. PHUs may also require additional or enhanced health and safety measures based on local experience and data.

Vaccination

We know that vaccination is an important tool to help stop the spread of COVID-19 and allow children, families, and staff to safely resume normal activities. We have seen significant uptake of youth and adult vaccination. We ask that licensees work with local public health units over the coming weeks to build on progress to-date and encourage all child care staff/providers to receive the full COVID-19 vaccination as soon as possible. Families with children of eligible age should also be encouraged to have their children fully vaccinated.

We are encouraged by the progress made to date and thank you again for your steadfast support and collaboration in delivering safe and high-quality licensed child care and early years programs across Ontario.

Sincerely,

Phil Graham