

# Early Learning Facilities during COVID 19 Pandemic

August 18, 2020

COVID 19 is a virus that spreads through close person to person contact. Infection can be transmitted by droplets (e.g. coughs and sneezes) and touching surfaces with the virus on it and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth before washing your hands. People can spread the virus before they have obvious symptoms (asymptomatic transmission).

For children, COVID 19 infections tend to be mild and similar to other respiratory infections. Symptoms such as dry cough, fever, and gastrointestinal concerns (e.g. nausea, vomiting, diarrhea) may be present. Skin changes and lesions are less common symptoms.

Everyone has a role in preventing the transmission of this virus, by: practicing good hand hygiene and proper cough/sneeze etiquette, avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth, maintaining physical distancing in social situations, and staying home when you have COVID-19 symptoms.

## Requirements

Saskatchewan First Nations Early Learning Facilities (Childcare and Head Start) are required to follow either their Tribal Council Regulations or the Saskatchewan First Nations Early Learning Facility Regulations. They must also be in compliance with the COVID 19 Saskatchewan Workplace Guidelines, found at:

## Intent

This document provides supplementary information to First Nations for the re-opening of Child Care services and Head Start programs during the COVID 19 pandemic. These changes are to help protect the health and safety of children, families, staff and First Nations communities.

First Nations are encouraged to discuss these increased measures with *staff & parents*, to support consistent implementation.

## Re-opening Requirements

The Environmental Public Health Officer (EPHO) and the Early Childhood Development Program Coordinator shall:

- Meet with facility staff, program managers and Portfolio Councillors to review the re-opening requirements and clarify roles and responsibilities;
- Provide facility inspections to ensure the Early Learning facility meets current and new health and safety requirements, current First Nations Early Learning Regulations, and new program provision requirements;
- Provide recommendations on changes needed to meet requirements;
- Support staff, Supervisors and Chief/Council to implement recommendations before re-opening occurs.

The facility Coordinator/Supervisor/Manager shall contact families to determine the need for infant, toddler and preschool spaces. The EPHO and the ECD Program Coordinator will assist them to decide on how many children – infants, toddlers and/or preschoolers - they can accommodate within the new requirements.

Facility staff should have at least 2 weeks to prepare the facility for opening, develop new policies and procedures for approval by Chief and Council, order necessary supplies and equipment, reorganize their Center, and practice all new procedures.

The facility must have a supply of Health Canada approved/child friendly: cleaning supplies, hand sanitizer, and appropriate adult personal protective equipment to ensure a safe healthy environment for children, parents/guardians and staff.

### **Program Capacity**

As of August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020, First Nations may re-open their Early Learning facilities with a maximum of 25 children in a facility, insuring child:staff ratios are maintained for infants, toddlers and preschoolers. If the facility is licensed for more than 25 spaces, they may open separate rooms based on ratios, and following these additional requirements:

- Each room must have exclusive access to a washroom (toilet and sink, change table for infants and toddlers).
- Each group of children must stay together throughout each day, every day. They must be cared for by the same staff each day, and play, eat and sleep in the same indoor and outdoor spaces, everyday. Infants must sleep in their separate nap room, with no other children sleeping in their room.
- Children must attend only one facility or program, to reduce transmission of COVID 19 between locations.

### **Active Screening**

Parents/Guardians and Early Learning Facility staff should continue routine daily health assessments of each child for symptoms of the common cold, influenza, COVID-19 or other infectious diseases before they are allowed to attend either Childcare or Head Start. (See attached form)

Checking temperatures or requiring detailed screening checklists are not required or recommended at this time, based on current evidence.

The "Active Symptoms Screening Questionnaire" should be completed daily by each staff in the Early Learning Facility. See Appendix A.

Any child, parent, or facility staff member with symptoms of illness shall not enter an Early Learning Facility. Children, parents/guardians or staff can return to an Early Learning Facility when they have been cleared by Public Health.

Parents/guardians and staff person should be directed to use the Saskatchewan COVID 19 self assessment tool or contact HealthLine 811 for advice on self monitoring or self isolating.

### **Following New Protocols**

Signs must be posted as reminders to everyone to:

- not to enter the facility if they are sick, or have any symptoms of COVID19,
- use proper hand hygiene,
- to sneeze or cough into their elbow,



- to wash hands frequently, especially after using tissues, going to the bathroom, before eating or cooking and when entering/leaving the facility. See Appendix C for instructions.

Only staff, parents and registered children may be allowed to enter the facility.

### **Drop off and Pick up of Children**

Make new procedures for children being dropped off and picked up at the facility to allow for physical distancing, and separation of groups. Some ideas are:

- using emergency exits in each room to allow children to enter and leave from the room they will be in for the day,
- monitoring to maintain physical distancing between parents/guardians, other children and staff,
- allowing only 1 person to drop off or pick up a child or children,
- ensuring that parents picking up children from more than 1 group use the separate entrances for each child,
- having children picked up in the play yard for their group,
- posting occupancy limits for the entry areas.

Provide approved hand sanitizer dispensers and disinfectant wipes in each room entrance for adults to use when dropping off or picking up their children. These should not be accessible to the children.

Children should wash their hands as soon as they enter the facility.

Staff may fill out the daily attendance record. Parents and guardians will still be required to sign the Monthly Attendance form to verify their child's attendance.

Conversations or meetings to provide parents/guardians with required information, must occur using physical distancing, masks, or by phone, text, or email.

Ensure parents and guardians are informed about the new procedures, and respectfully reminded to follow them until they become new habits.

### **Transportation**

It is recommended that no transportation will be provided by programs until protocols are developed.

### **Caring for Children who become ill at an Early Learning Facility**

If a child develops symptoms of COVID 19, the child should be isolated from other children until their parent or guardian can pick them up. The child should be at least two metres from other children and separated by dividers, or in a separate room.

For a child, who requires close contact and care, staff should wear a surgical mask, goggles and protective gown while caring for the child.

After the child has been picked up by their parent /guardian, clean and sanitize the surfaces they touched or were near.

It is important that a parent, guardian, or an approved emergency contact person pick up the child, and take them for medical assessment.

## **Cleaning and Sanitation Guidelines**

Set up a cleaning schedule for additional cleaning and sanitizing to reduce COVID-19 transmission. Train staff in new procedures.

Ensure the disinfectant used in the facility is adequate for the elimination of viruses and is approved by Health Canada.

Prepare sufficient cleaning solution each morning and afternoon, e.g. - 1 teaspoon of 5% sodium hydroxide bleach into 1 cup (250 ml) of water, in a clearly labeled spray bottle.

Disposable gloves are only needed when cleaning body fluids, and changed after each incident. Gloves may also be used to protect cleaners' hands from disinfectants.

Frequently touched surfaces (toys, counters, doorknobs, light switches, phones, sink taps) must be cleaned 3 times a day with an approved disinfecting solution. It is recommended to use checklists to ensure all surfaces are cleaned.

Washrooms should be cleaned and disinfected before and after: morning snack, lunch, afternoon snack, and at the end of the day. Ensure each washroom has sufficient liquid soap, paper towels, and toilet paper.

Clean and disinfect diapering stations after each use.

Have a sufficient supply of easily cleaned toys for individual play, that can be cleaned and rotated daily. Books and toys that cannot be washed must be placed in plastic bags, sealed and stored for 3 days before using again.

There are no special handling procedures for laundry. Sheets, blankets and towels must not be shared, and must be washed daily. Do not shake laundry.

Clean and disinfect cribs, cots and sleeping mats, and diapering areas after each use. Launder all sheets and blankets.

Shared outdoor structures and equipment must be cleaned and disinfected before and after each use, by each group.

Change furnace filters more frequently, using MERV 11 or 13 filters, if possible. HVAC filters should also be changed more frequently. When changing filters, wear a mask and gloves, place in a plastic bag and seal it immediately.

For further information, see Appendix C.

## **Program Considerations:**

### **Activities:**

- create outdoor learning spaces – take art, blocks, dramatic play and circle time outside!
- Ensure there is a variety of activities and materials available for the children in each room.
- Arrange activities so children have enough different choices so they can maintain some physical distancing with others in the room.
- Plan activities that help children learn to physical distance from each other, and focus on minimizing physical contact between children in their play.
- Each group of children should have their own furniture, equipment and play materials.
- Provide individual tubs for sensory play – water, sand, or other materials, and sanitize after each use.
- Prepare fresh play dough weekly, and place in labeled bags for each child.

### **Meals and Snacks:**

- Meals should be provided on individual plates or bowls prepared for each child. Keep serving dishes a safe distance away from where children are eating.
- Children should be physically distant from each other at their tables, or at least 1 – 2 chair widths away.
- There should be no common food items such as a shared snack bowl.



- Food provided by the family should be stored in the fridge or in the child's room/cubby. Food must not be shared with other children.
- Children and staff shall not share food, drinks, cups, soothers, toothbrushes, facecloths, or other personal items.

#### Outdoor Play:

- If there is only 1 outdoor play space, groups of children must take turns for outdoor play, to ensure their room groupings are maintained. Outdoor toys and equipment must be disinfected after each group has used it.

#### Napping:

- Children's cots and bedding must be stored in the room they play in.
- Place cots as far apart as possible – 2 metres is best – or place children on the cots head to toe.
- Label each child's cot and bedding for individual use.

#### Bathroom Use:

- Develop a plan to allow groups of children to use 1 washroom exclusively – no shared use between groups.
- Monitor children to encourage good handwashing.

#### Guidelines for Staff:

- **Allow More Time When Arriving** - Additional health and safety procedures upon arrival will take a little longer.
- **Maintain 2 metre physical distance from other staff when possible –**
- **Wear either masks or face shields** - when physical distancing is not possible.
- **Take breaks alone** - or ensure you are maintaining physical distancing with others.

#### Guidelines for Families

- **Allow More Time When Arriving** - Additional health and safety procedures upon arrival will take a little longer.
- **Be Respectful to Others** - Only one family should be in the entry area at a time. Maintain physical distancing.
- **Same Parent to Drop off and Pick up Child** - The same parent or guardian shall drop off and pick up the child/(ren) each day.
- **Coordinate** the pickup and drop off times for each family, to minimize contact between parents and children.
- **Signing in and out Procedures**- Staff will sign the children in to limit the number of individual handling these documents using proper procedures.
- **Items from Home** -Parents and guardians should only bring comfort items from home, that can be laundered at the end of each day. Early Learning staff shall ensure that children's belongings are stored separately to prevent potential cross contamination.

Adapted from the following documents:

*COVID 19 Public Health Guidance for Child Care Setting Saskatchewan.ca/COVID19, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020*

*COVID 19 Public Health Guidance for Child Care Settings, Coronavirus COVID – 19 BC Centre for disease Control/BC Ministry of Health.*

Note: the information in this document has been reviewed by Health Canada and Saskatchewan Public Health for accuracy of the information.

**This document has been prepared by the First Nation Early Childhood Circle (FNECC), the advisory group to the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN), on early childhood matters.**