



COVID-19 Guidance for EarlyON Child and Family Centres

September 28, 2020

The Ontario Ministry of Education permits EarlyON Child and Family Centres (EarlyON Centres) to re-open effective September 1, 2020. To support re-opening, the Ministry of Education has released [Operational Guidance During COVID-19 Outbreak](#). This guidance document has been designed for use in conjunction with the Ministry Guidance provided to date.

Note: With community transmission of COVID-19 in Ottawa, there is a risk that transmission from both symptomatic and asymptomatic persons may occur. While measures to attempt to control these risks will be implemented at EarlyON programs, it is important that parents, students and staff are made aware of, and understand, the risks. Please see the **Notice of Risk** below that could be provided to families prior to participation.

Notice of Risk

When children from multiple families attend a single EarlyON center to participate in programming there is an increased risk of the COVID-19 virus being transmitted. Children who are infected with the COVID-19 virus are more likely than adults to have very mild infections or to have no symptoms at all, but these children can still transmit the infection to other children and to adults at the EarlyON program. This means that children can bring home an infection acquired at the EarlyON program and put other persons at risk. This EarlyON Program has a screening process to help detect infections when there are symptoms; however, this screening process will not detect infected children or adults who do not have symptoms at the time of screening. The risk of serious COVID-19 infection increases with age, which older staff and family members should consider in terms of the risk to themselves personally.

The following recommendations have been developed in conjunction with the provincial guidance for EarlyON centres, and [Child Care Re-Opening guidance](#) and [OPH's COVID-19 Guidance for Centre-Based Child Care](#).

OPH recommends all EarlyON and Family Centered Programs have the following measures in place to avoid the spread of COVID-19.

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| <p>Health and Safety Measures</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child care and early years programs may return to maximum group sizes as set out under the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 (CCEYA) prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. OPH wishes to remind child care providers, as well as the general public, that any increase in the number of contacts within a group also increases the risks associated with COVID-19 transmission and that local guidance will continue to recommend smaller groups. • Staff and students are not included in the maximum group size but should be assigned to a specific group where possible. Children are permitted to attend on a part time basis, and as with children attending fulltime, should be included in one group and should not mix with other groups. • Maximum group size rules do not apply to Special Needs Resource staff on site. |
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Health and Safety Measures

- While groups are permitted to return to the previous maximum group size prior to the COVID -19 outbreak under the CCEYA, each group should stay together throughout the session as much as possible and not mix with other groups.
- Outdoor programming is strongly encouraged when feasible and appropriate.
- More than one early years program and or day care can be offered per building as long as they are able to maintain separation between the groups and or programs and follow all health and safety requirements that apply to those programs.
- To help limit the spread of COVID-19, Ottawa City Council approved a [Temporary Mandatory Mask By-law](#) to make masks mandatory in enclosed public spaces. Masks are not required in outdoor spaces, although still highly recommended, particularly when physical distancing is challenging to maintain.
- Staff and students should work at only one location whenever possible.
- Students on field placement should be assigned to a specific licensed age group.
- All EarlyON service providers should maintain daily records of anyone entering the EarlyON program and the approximate length of their stay. Records are to be kept on the EarlyON site premises.
 - Records (e.g. name, contact information, time of arrival/departure, screening completion/result, etc.) must be kept up-to-date and available to facilitate contact tracing in the event of a confirmed COVID-19 case or outbreak.
- EarlyON centres should develop procedures that support physical distancing at all times and separate groups as best as possible (i.e., separate outdoor sites for different programs, staggered start times to minimize mingling between groups).
- Ensure that all participants can practice hand hygiene often, and when needed. When possible, hand washing with soap and water is preferred over alcohol-based hand rub for children.
- Ensure alcohol-based hand sanitizer is available and encourage participants to use upon arrival to the program and upon leaving.
- Recognizing the challenge of routine cleaning for outdoor play structures, especially in the event of colder weather, ensure handwashing before and after their use, and allow use by only one group at a time.
- Although not required when outdoors, masks and or face coverings are strongly recommended whenever physical distancing of at least 2-metres cannot be maintained and when tolerated/appropriate for the child. Masks should not be placed on children under two years of age.
- Personal belongings should be minimized and not shared during programming. If brought, belongings should be labeled and kept out of reach of all participating children.
- No food or drink shall be provided as part of EarlyON programming.
- Limit non-essential visitors, volunteers and activities involving external groups or organizations as much as possible.
- Do not plan activities with exposure to animals or pets that involve frequent touching.

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 Response Plan: EarlyON centers offering community programs should have a communication plan or protocol in place in the event that a participant, student or staff member at the program is exposed to COVID-19. • Where mobile programming is offered in shared settings (ex. malls, libraries), all efforts should be made to adhere to all available guidelines in addition to the specific EarlyON guidance. Consult with Ottawa Public Health and the involved local site for further clarification. • Continue offering virtual services, where possible, so that families can access programs and services without having to attend an EarlyON Centre in person. |
| Registration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advanced registration/reservation systems must be employed to ensure capacity limits are not exceeded. Families who have not signed up to attend a program or receive services ahead of time cannot enter an EarlyON Centre or participate in programs and /or services on a drop-in basis. • The more people attending any EarlyON program increases the risk of possible exposure to COVID-19 for all involved. EarlyON programs should seek to minimize the different number of people attending each session. • Upon registration request that the same parent/guardian accompany the child to each session if possible. Consider restricting adult participation to one adult per child. • Adult participants should be advised of the risk for exposure to COVID-19 by attending any EarlyON program. Anyone at increased risk of serious illness if they contract COVID-19 (ex. grandparents who are older adults) should assess their own comfort with the risks involved. • Parents should be actively informed (e.g., through sign-off of a consent form) of the possibility of exposure to COVID-19 at the EarlyON program. • All children and family members must be screened each time on site prior to participation in the program. Parents should be reminded of this before registration and through visible signage at the access point to the programming. • Providers should (where possible) collect contact information for all site attendees including the date, time and duration of the visit. Provide screening forms, and distribute health and safety policies and procedures, including information regarding program operations as part of the of reservation/registration process. |
| Active Screening | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All individuals including children, families, visitors and staff attending the EarlyON program must be screened each day before participating. • Active screening is the process of proactively checking for symptoms (e.g., temperature checks and asking questions), travel history and contact (without appropriate Personal Protective Equipment) with a person(s) who may have COVID-19). • Where possible it is recommended daily screening be done at home prior to arrival at the EarlyON setting. • Parents/guardians who are unable to do this at home must wait on site, until screened, prior to participating in the program. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If screening is done onsite, ensure participants and parents/guardians maintain two meters from others when waiting to be screened. • Results of screening can be reported to the child care centre in person, by phone or electronically (e.g., via online form, survey, or e-mail) based on the child care centre’s policy. • Program leaders should maintain a log of all screening results. All records must be kept on premise at the EarlyON center. • Alcohol-based hand rub containing at least 60% alcohol content should be placed at all screening stations. Dispensers should not be in locations that can be accessed by young children. • Anyone with symptoms should not attend EarlyOn programming. Symptoms can include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Fever (temperature of 37.8 degrees C or greater), new or worsening cough, shortness of breath (dyspnea) • Other symptoms: sore throat, difficulty swallowing, new olfactory or taste disorder(s), nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, runny nose, or nasal congestion (in absence of underlying reason for these symptoms such as seasonal allergies, post-nasal drip, etc.) ○ Other clinical features: clinical or radiological evidence of pneumonia ○ Atypical symptoms and clinical features: unexplained fatigue/malaise/myalgias, delirium (a serious medical condition that involves confusion, changes to memory, and odd behaviours), unexplained or increased number of falls, acute functional decline, worsening of chronic conditions, chills, headaches, croup, conjunctivitis. ○ Atypical signs: unexplained tachycardia (heart rate over 100 beats per minute) including age specific tachycardia for children, decrease in blood pressure, unexplained hypoxia. • Anyone with COVID-19 symptoms should self-isolate and not leave their place of isolation unless it is to go for testing or to seek medical care. Anyone in distress (e.g., significant trouble breathing, chest pain, fainting, or have a significant worsening of any chronic disease symptoms), should go to the nearest Emergency Department or call 9-1-1. • For self-isolation instructions and testing for COVID-19 visit: ottawapublichealth.ca |
| Masks , Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All EarlyOn staff are required to wear medical masks and eye protection (i.e., face shield) while inside the EarlyOn premises. All other adults (i.e. parents/guardians, and visitors) are required to wear a face covering or non-medical mask while inside the premises. • As per provincial guidance, reasonable exceptions to the requirement to wear masks are expected to be put in place by EarlyON Centres. Exceptions to wearing masks indoors could include circumstances where a physical distance of at least 2 metres can be maintained between individuals, situations where a child cannot tolerate wearing a mask, reasonable exceptions for medical conditions, etc. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks should not be placed on children under two years of age, or children under the age of five years either chronologically or developmentally who refuse to wear a mask and cannot be persuaded to do so by their caregiver. • EarlyON Centres should document their requirements and exceptions related to masks. • The use of masks is not required outdoors for adults or children if physical distancing of a least 2-metres (6 feet) can be maintained between individuals. • Use caution in hot weather as masks may make the wearer feel uncomfortable and feel like it is more difficult to breathe; masks may also impose a greater physiologic burden on the wearer. • When using a mask, wearers should wash their hands before putting on the mask and before and after removing the mask. Ensure proper storage of mask when removed. For more information, visit: ottawapublichealth.ca/masks. |
| Management of Child(ren), Students and Staff with COVID-19 Symptoms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff and students who report feeling unwell before their shift must stay home. • Children, staff, students, parents and guardians should be referred for testing when demonstrating symptoms of COVID-19. • Please be aware that the first symptom of a COVID-19 infection in children can be gastrointestinal, including diarrhea. • Those who test negative for COVID-19 must be excluded from the program until 24 hours after symptom has resolved without fever reducing medication, or 48 hours after vomiting or diarrhea has resolved. • Those that test positive for COVID-19 must be excluded from the program for 14 days after the onset of symptoms and /or clearance has been received from the local public health unit. • If a child, student, parent or guardian develop symptoms while in the program, they should immediately leave the program. • If staff develop symptoms during a shift they must be separated from others, wash their hands and continue to wear a medical mask as well as eye protection (i.e., face shields, goggles) until they can leave the centre. Refer to the OPH COVID-19 Guidance for Centre-based Child Care (Appendix B) for next steps. • The person who is symptomatic should be provided with tissues, a mask and reminded of hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and proper disposal of tissues. • If the person who is symptomatic is a child (above the age of two), they should wear a mask if tolerated. • All equipment and or toys used by the person who is symptomatic should also be cleaned and disinfected. Anything that cannot be cleaned (e.g. paper, books, cardboard puzzles) should be removed and stored in a sealed container for a minimum of 7 days. • Inform parents/guardians of other children and staff that a participant has developed symptoms and has been sent home. Ask parents to monitor the health of their child(ren) and to notify the EarlyON program if their child develops symptoms. As long as other program participants remain symptom-free, they can continue to attend the Early ON program. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If an EarlyON participant or staff tests positive for COVID-19, Ottawa Public Health is automatically notified of the result and will provide advice to other Early ON participants and staff. A single, symptomatic, laboratory confirmed case of COVID-19 in a staff member, child or parent/guardian who was in the facility for an extended period of time must be considered a confirmed COVID-19 outbreak. If the EarlyOn Centre is located in a shared setting (e.g., in a school), follow public health advice on notifying others using the space. • See OPH 's COVID-19 Guidance for Centre-based Child Care Childcare for additional information. |
| Cleaning and Disinfecting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For outdoor spaces, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that surfaces on playgrounds need routine cleaning with soap and water, but not disinfectant, including high touch surfaces made of plastic or metal. • Cleaning of wooden surfaces is not recommended, according to the CDC. Only routine cleaning of non-porous outdoor surfaces (i.e., high touch areas of steels/plastic/rubber play structures) is needed. • Recognizing the challenge of routine cleaning for outdoor play structures, especially in the event of colder weather, these structures should be considered a “soiled surface”. Ensure handwashing before and after their use and allow use by only one group at a time. • Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at least twice a day as they are most likely to be contaminated; for example, doorknobs, water fountain knobs, light switches, toilet and faucet handles, electronic devices, and tabletops, using an enhanced cleaner/disinfectant. • Ensure washroom facilities are cleaned between each group’s use. • Clean/disinfect staff/lunchrooms regularly; it is recommended that centres keep a log to track and demonstrate cleaning schedules. • Information from Public Health Ontario provides best practices for cleaning and disinfecting. • EarlyON programs are encouraged to provide toys and equipment which are made of materials that can be cleaned and disinfected (e.g., avoid plush toys) or are single use and disposed of at the end of the day/program (e.g. craft supplies). • Toys and equipment, and frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected at a minimum between program sessions and between users as needed. Mouthed toys should be cleaned and disinfected immediately after the child is finished using it. • Only one group should access the washroom at a time, and it is recommended that the facilities be cleaned in between each use, particularly if multiple groups will be using the same washroom. • The use of sensory materials (e.g., playdough, water, sand, etc.) should be avoided. However, Ministry guidance states that if sensory materials (e.g., playdough, water, sand, etc.) are offered, they should be provided for single use (i.e. available to the child for the day) and labelled with child’s name, if applicable. • Blankets or sheets should be laundered in-between uses. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Items that cannot be easily cleaned and disinfected (e.g. books) should be removed and stored in a sealed container for a minimum of 7 days. • Children must not share food, soothers, bottles, sippy cups, etc. • Play structures can only be used by one group at a time. • General cleaning with soap and water is recommended for play structures between groups. • It is recommended that operators keep a cleaning and disinfecting log to track and demonstrate cleaning schedules. |
| Physical Distancing and Gathering Restrictions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs and services must be offered with physical distancing measures in place. • Group staff, students and children where possible/appropriate for recurring weekly programming. • OPH recommends when possible, children of the same family be put together in a group (to reduce the likelihood of transmission to children of multiple families). • Incorporate more individual activities or activities that encourage more space between children. Extend outdoor play as much as possible as this will limit close contacts. • Use visual cues to promote physical distancing. • Space seating and activity stations at least two metres (six feet) apart. • Avoid singing activities. • Where the outdoor play area is large enough to accommodate multiple groups, EarlyON centers should divide the space with physical markers to ensure groups remain separated by at least 2 meters. • Plan layouts and stagger the scheduling of activities and programs. • Shared spaces and structures that cannot be cleaned and disinfected between groups should not be used. |

Supporting Each Other and Our Community

We understand that these enhanced measures place an additional burden on EarlyON programs; however, measures like this are needed to ensure that the spread of COVID-19 in our community is reduced. We appreciate all the efforts being made by EarlyON Centres to serve and protect our community.

It is important to recognize that the COVID-19 situation continues to change. Please visit [Ottawa Public Health- Novel Coronavirus](#) , [Ottawa Public Health Childcare Providers](#), and [Ottawa Public Health Outbreaks in Childcare Centres](#) for the most up to date information.