



**ANNOUNCEMENT: C-20 #02
ELRC-20 #02
EI-20 #02
FSP #01
ELS/HS #-A
ELS/PKC #01**

**OFFICE OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND EARLY LEARNING
BUREAU OF CERTIFICATION SERVICES BUREAU OF
EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES
BUREAU OF ELRC OPERATIONS AND MONITORING
BUREAU OF POLICY AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**ISSUE DATE: March 13, 2020
EFFECTIVE DATE: Immediately
DATE: On-Going**

SUBJECT:	Operational Recommendations for Early Childhood Providers Due to Coronavirus (COVID-19)
TO:	Child Care Centers; OCDEL Staff; Early Learning Resource Centers; Children’s Trust Fund Grantees; Early Intervention Coordinators; Early Intervention Providers; Early Intervention Technical Assistance; Executive Directors for Preschool; Head Start Supplemental Assistance Grantees; MH/MR Administrators; MR Coordinators; Nurse Family Partnership Grantees; PA Head Start and Early Head Start Grantees; PA Key and Regional Keys; PA Pre-K Counts Grantees; Parent-Child Home Program Grantees; Preschool Program Specialists; Preschool Supervisors; Special Education Director
FROM:	Tracey Campanini Deputy Secretary, Office of Child Development and Early Learning

PURPOSE:

This announcement is to provide early learning programs with operational recommendations for services due to Coronavirus (COVID-19).

BACKGROUND:

In response to growing concerns about the spread of COVID-19 and its potential impact on the delivery of services to children and families the Department of Human Services, Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) has developed the following operational recommendations for services. **This document will be updated and re-released on a recurring basis as new information becomes available.**

Information will continue to be shared and disseminated going forward to address questions and concerns that have been brought to our attention. We continue to monitor information from [the Pennsylvania Department of Health](#) and [the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). Guidance developed by DHS will be centrally located on [this page](#), which will be updated as additional guidance becomes available. We encourage you to continue to consult these resources for updates on COVID-19, information on staying healthy, and updates on the situation in Pennsylvania.

DISCUSSION:

Recommendation #1: Exercise and promote hygienic practices.

The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to COVID-19. Chances of exposure can be reduced by:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or use the inside of your elbow.
- Clean AND disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily. This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks.
- If you are sick, stay home.

Recommendation #2: Review your agency back-up plan and infection control procedures. All ECE providers are strongly encouraged to:

- Review internal infection control protocols and emergency backup plans for events in which a provider does not have adequate staffing to meet individuals' health and safety needs.
- Evaluate staff adherence to provider infection control protocols.
- Develop a communications plan. A key component to preparedness is developing a communications plan that outlines how you plan to reach different audiences including ensuring all communications are culturally and linguistically appropriate as well as accessible for individuals with disabilities.
- Evaluate capacity to implement emergency backup plans in the event staffing is impacted by the COVID-19 virus.

Recommendation #3: Communicate.

- Staff should follow Department of Health guidance for evaluation, testing, and reporting related to staff or a beneficiary suspected of having COVID-19 available [here](#).
- Communicate about COVID-19 with your staff. Share information about what is currently known about COVID-19 and your facility's preparedness plans. Communicate your expectations for modeling respiratory etiquette, staying home when sick, and supporting employees who need to take care of a sick family member.
- Communicate about COVID-19 with children and families. Provide updates about changes to your policies or operations. Use all communication channels that you have available, including direct communications (face-to-face, letters), electronic communications (your district or facility's website or social media pages), as well as parent meetings to share updates. Make sure to plan ahead for linguistic needs, including providing interpreters and translating materials. Information on COVID-19 and Children: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/children-faq.html>
- **Post signs.** Existing signs should be visible that remind staff, visitors, and students to perform hand hygiene, sneeze/cough into their elbow, put used tissues in a waste receptacle and to wash hands immediately after using tissues. Recommend everyone to avoid close greetings like hugs or handshakes. Several examples of signs are available in the Department of Health website [here](#).

- Intentionally and persistently combat stigma. Misinformation about coronavirus and COVID-19 can create fear and hostility that hurts people and makes it harder to keep everyone healthy. We're stronger as a community when we stand together against discrimination.

Recommendation #4: Contact the appropriate OCDEL designated point of contact (POC) before making any changes to your business practice whenever possible.

It is strongly recommended that providers contact the designated POC before making any changes to their business practices in response to COVID-19. Examples of changes in business practices include, but are not limited to:

- Suspending services at a service location such as temporarily closing a program.
- Relocating staff and children to another facility.
- Reducing or eliminating the provision of community-based activities.
- Restricting individuals' abilities to receive services.

Providers may contact the appropriate POC to notify OCDEL of a proposed change in business practice and/or seek guidance related to a proposed change.

OCDEL POC Information

Child Care Providers	Regional Certification Office or Certification Representative
Early Learning Resource Centers	ELRC Program Representative
Home Visiting and Family Support Programs	Home Visiting Consultant
Early Intervention, Birth to Three and Preschool	Early Intervention Advisor
PA Pre-K Counts and HSSAP Grantees	Preschool Program Specialist

Recommendation #5: Document what actions were taken and maintain evidence for why actions were taken.

Providers should document any changes to their operations as a result of COVID-19 and maintain evidence to support why the changes were made. Doing so will help demonstrate the basis for an action if the appropriateness of the action is questioned after COVID-19 is contained and operations return to normal.

In general, evidence that should be maintained includes, but is not limited to:

- **Orders or notices from local authorities.** Example: County Health Department *A* imposes a restriction on public gatherings of more than 20 people, forcing Provider *B* to close its program for one week. Provider *B* should retain the official notice from County Health Department *A* as evidence to support the closure.
- **Communications from landlords or other program partners indicating closure.** Example, Provider *A* uses space for school age child care in a school building. That building is closed for preventative cleaning on specific dates. As a result child care could not operate.

Recommendation #6: Stay Informed

- COVID-19-specific information can be found at:
 - The Pennsylvania Department of Health's Coronavirus Update Page - <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>
 - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Coronavirus Page - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/>

- The Pennsylvania Department of Health holds daily press briefings every day to announce the latest efforts and updates on the commonwealth's response to COVID-19. You may watch a free live stream of the daily briefing at noon here: <https://pacast.com/live/doh>. An archive of past briefings is available here: <https://pacast.com/video>.
- One of the most important steps you can take to stay informed about our program is subscribe to our Listservs. Important announcements, including announcements about COVID-19, are regularly sent over the Listservs.
 - To subscribe to the PA Early Education News: <https://www.pakeys.org/getting-started/about-us/newsletter-signup/>
 - Update contact information in Provider Self Service for child care providers and PELICAN for PA Pre-K Counts and HSSAP grantees.
Provider Self Service: <https://www.pelican.state.pa.us/provider>
PELICAN main page: <https://www.pelican.state.pa.us>

NEXT STEPS:

1. Share the information in this announcement with all appropriate staff.
2. Comments and questions regarding this announcement should be directed to OCDEL at (717) 346-9320.