

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Background

The evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and the unprecedented steps required to protect our community has resulted in the development of a specific policy to assist our community to manage this situation. This policy has been prepared to cover all aspects of operations, and the responsibilities of everyone within the NT Explorers community.

COVID-19 is caused by SARS-CoV2, a new strain of coronavirus that has not previously been identified in humans. It was first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, where it caused a large and ongoing outbreak. It has been declared a global pandemic.

According to current advice, the maximum incubation period (the time between being exposed to a virus and becoming sick) for COVID-19 infection is typically 14 days. While some people don't develop symptoms at all, for people who do, these typically appear 5 or 6 days after coming into contact with the virus. However, it is possible that symptoms can appear anytime from between 1 and 14 days after being exposed to the virus.

Symptoms can range from a mild illness, similar to a cold or flu, to pneumonia. People with coronavirus may experience:

- fever
- respiratory symptoms such as coughing, sore throat and shortness of breath
- other symptoms can include runny nose, acute blocked nose (congestion), headache, muscle or joint pains, nausea, diarrhoea, vomiting, loss of sense of smell, altered sense of taste, loss of appetite and fatigue.

People may be highly infectious before their symptoms show. Even people with mild or no symptoms can spread COVID-19. The virus can spread from an infected person's mouth or nose in small liquid particles when they cough, sneeze, speak, sing, or breathe heavily. These liquid particles are different sizes, ranging from larger 'respiratory droplets' to smaller 'aerosols'. People can catch COVID-19 when the virus gets into their mouth, nose, or eyes. This is more likely to happen when people are in direct or close contact (less than 1 metre apart) with an infected person.

Policy

In summary, the common ways the virus is spread is through:

- close contact with an infectious person (including prior to exhibiting any symptoms)
- contact with droplets from an infected person's cough or sneeze
- touching objects or surfaces that have droplets from an infected person, and then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes.

The Federal and Territory Governments provide regular updates including health recommendations, travel restrictions, and a vast collection of resources and information to help people make informed decisions. As this information can change rapidly, we monitor health alerts and implement measures suggested by Government bodies. We have a range of comprehensive policies in place to guide best practice in relation to health and safety, dealing with infectious diseases and maintaining a child safe environment. Our duty of care and responsibilities to children, families, and our team members to provide a safe environment is of the utmost importance.

This policy will change as required to ensure the protective measures against COVID-19 as advised by Government and related organisations are implemented by the Service.

We minimise our community's exposure by adhering to all recommended guidelines from Government and Public Health Units. We implement practices that help to reduce the risk of transmission of the virus including the exclusions set out by Government, many of which are already included in our existing policies and procedures.

We provide up-to-date information and advice to our community sourced from Government and reputable organisations as required. Recommendations and health measures mandated by Government are strictly adhered to at all times.

We implement procedures and practices as stipulated in *Staying Healthy: Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services* developed by the Australian Government National Health and Medical Research Council.

We are guided by orders and decisions regarding exclusion periods and notification of any infectious disease by the relevant Government bodies. COVID-19 is a notifiable condition in all states and territories of Australia. In the event of any child, family, staff member or visitor attending our Service being suspected or confirmed to have the infection, the Service will contact our Public Health Unit.

This policy summarises all information about COVID-19, and contains some information from, and relates to, other policies such as:

- Unwell Children and Administering Medication
- Infectious Diseases
- Medical Conditions
- Incident, Illness, Accident and Trauma
- Child Safe Environment

The *Australian Health Protection Principal Committee* made recommendations to help manage the spread of COVID-19. These measures include implementing good hygiene, self-isolation, and social distancing.

We ensure hand hygiene posters and procedures and information about COVID-19 are clearly displayed and communicated to our community through emails, newsletters, and social media.

Information may include:

- symptoms of COVID-19
- transmission of the virus
- self-isolation and exclusion
- prevention strategies- including hygiene and self-isolation
- contact details for health assistance
- information provided to us by Government

All community members and visitors must comply with the following:

- the practices, measures and guidelines set out in this policy;
- inform us (prior to attending the service) if they are or have been subject to isolation or quarantine requirements for any reason;
- immediately advise if they, or anyone in their family or close contacts, receives a positive result of the virus;
- any person who is displaying symptoms such as: fever, coughing, sore throat, fatigue, and shortness of breath, must seek medical attention to determine if they need to be tested for COVID-19 and not attend the Service until a negative test result is received (if a test is deemed medically required by a medical practitioner)

Effective hygiene measures

We provide all necessary hygiene products such as soap, hand sanitiser, cleaning products and tissues. The national campaign *Help Stop the Spread and Stay Healthy*, has emphasised that effective handwashing is a vital strategy to help reduce the spread of COVID-19.

We adhere to these best practice guidelines and require/ensure that:

- all people must wash their hands with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitiser provided upon arrival and departure
- hands must be thoroughly dried using disposal paper and disposed of in the bin provided
- disposable tissues must be used to wipe noses, eyes or mouths and disposed of in the bin provided immediately after use
- hands must be washed following the use of tissues
- hands must be washed thoroughly using soap and water after using the toilet
- cough and sneeze etiquette must be used
- children are supervised when washing hands
- team members use effective food preparation and food handling procedures
- team members wash their hands or use alcohol based santiser, before wearing gloves and wash their hands after

wearing gloves and adhere to our Health and Hygiene Policy for cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and equipment as per Staying Healthy recommendations

- team members complete cleaning checklists as stipulated
- cleaners and team members hygienically clean the Service to ensure risk of contamination is removed as per Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection Principles for COVID-19

Other risk minimisation

The Service promotes and encourages our community to be **vaccinated for COVID-19** as soon as possible. Information about vaccines is evolving and we encourage community members to stay up to date with this via reputable and reliable information sources such as Government bodies. We strongly encourage our team members to be vaccinated, for their own health and that of our community.

The [COVIDSafe App](#) speeds up contacting people exposed to COVID-19. This helps the Australian Government to support and protect our community. We encourage our community to utilise this app.

[Territory Check In App](#) enables individuals to check-in to venues and have this data stored securely by NT Health for 28 days so contact tracing can be quickly undertaken if required. The NT Government states that *the Territory Check In app complements the COVIDSafe app. It is specifically for customers in the Northern Territory to use and enables them to provide their contact information when checking-in at a designated venue. The Territory Check In app allows contact information to be stored and accessed quickly by NT Health if required for contact tracing. The COVIDSafe app has a broader use and is not used for venues and businesses. It is for use in other locations such as open spaces, parks, and public transport.*

Other than team members and children attending care, ALL PERSONS are required to check in via the Territory Check In App for contact tracing purposes.

We encourage families to use the [Coronavirus Australia app](#) to stay up to date with official information and advice from the Australian Government. Through this app you can check your symptoms and get notified when urgent information and updates are published, as well as view current statistic and developments in all Australian states and territories.

[COVID-19 infection control training](#) provided online by the Department of Health is completed by our team members and covers the fundamentals of infection prevention and control for COVID-19.

[COVID-19 Safety Plan Checklist](#) is completed by the Service in accordance with the NT Government requirements, and updated regularly, and at least every 6 months. Within this plan we appoint COVID Safety Supervisors to facilitate the implementation of the plan, which are our Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor and various persons who act as the Person in day-to-day charge, in the absence of the Nominated Supervisor. Our supervisors have completed the Northern Territory Government's COVID Safety Supervisor training.

Social distancing reduces the risk of contracting infectious diseases through person-to-person contact. Government has confirmed and acknowledged that the standard social distancing measures required by the public, are not possible within the early childhood environment for team members. The *Australian Health Protection Principal Committee* "does not believe that the 'venue density rule' of no more than one person per 4 square metres is appropriate or practical in ECEC. Nor is the recommendation to maintain 1.5m between children. That advice extends to rooms, corridors and outdoor play areas and applies to children interacting with other children, as well as adults providing care or interacting with children in this environment."

Our community will adopt social distancing practices by:

- adults avoiding being in close contact with each other when not required by their role
- avoiding gathering in walkway areas, so there is clear passage for people to continue to use these spaces
- Maximum of 4 team members utilising staff room, *reducing to 3 in higher risk periods* (room is 12sqm)
- Maximum of 5 team members utilising main office, *reducing to 3 in higher risk periods* (room is 12sqm),
- Maximum of 6 team members utilising main planning office, *reducing to 4 in higher risk periods*
- Team meetings being held in large spaces, *hosted online in higher risk periods*

Face masks help stop droplets spreading when you're in close contact with someone and they laugh, speak, cough or sneeze. Mask wearing is not generally a requirement for team members in early childhood services, although during higher risk periods such as an outbreak, mask wearing may occur as deemed necessary, or if directed by Government. All adults will be required to wear a mask in accordance with any current direction in place by Government, or if the Service deems this necessary in particular circumstances, which would be advised if it was to occur.

Lockdowns prescribed by Government may occur due to COVID-19 and we will comply with announced protocols. Information will be distributed to families as soon as possible. We have a *Business Continuity Plan* and *COVID-19 Safety Plan* which sets out our procedures for our team and centre operations during these events. Fees are still payable for permanent bookings during lockdown periods, including absences, as the Service still has many fixed costs such as wages, rent, etc. Child Care Subsidy (CCS) continues to be paid to families during these periods. For families that have exceeded the 42 allowable absences for the financial year, you will not receive CCS for these days, unless Government has announced a "period of local emergency" or alerts you to this being possible based on the current circumstances. We would inform families as the information is made known to us by Government. Not all lockdown periods are recognised by Government as a period of local emergency, for example the 1-week lockdown in June/July 2021 was not. Families experiencing temporary financial hardship may get extra help with the cost of childcare via Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS) and information can be found at the [Service Australia](https://www.serviceaustralia.gov.au) website. We also encourage families to talk with us. In 2020, due to the pandemic, additional funding arrangements were put in place by Government for early childhood services, and families received 13 weeks of free care. Any future funding that may occur due to the pandemic, which supported the service to make adjustments to fees being charged to families, would be communicated and explained.

In August 2021, the Australian Government has announced child care services in a **Commonwealth-declared COVID-19 hotspot can access additional allowable absences if the declaration extends for more than seven days**. Families will **not have to use their 42 days of allowable absences during the lockdown**. Additional absences will be available until the end of the hotspot declaration.

Water fountains and bubblers are cleaned regularly. They are only used by adults to fill water bottles and containers, not for people to drink from directly.

Other operational risk minimisation measures may be implemented in **certain circumstances**. Any measures that impact families would be communicated, as they occur. These may include the following:

- Drop off and pick up occurring in outdoor spaces to limit the number of people entering the buildings, with only team members being permitted to enter buildings
- Team members signing children in and out of care (in accordance with Regulation 158) to limit the touching of surfaces by families
- Drop off and pick up occurring at the front entrance, with only team members and children permitted to enter (this would only be implemented in extreme circumstances)
- Limiting care provided to children of essential workers, required to be at work, as classified by the NT Government. For the avoidance of any confusion, that would mean that **all parent/guardians** are classified as essential workers and are required to be at work. If an essential worker is working from home and caring for their child would prohibit them completing their duties, then this should be advised to the Service. We maintain a database of essential workers within our community, so families are not required to provide this information to us in the event of any future local lockdowns.
- Limiting care provided would only occur in the event of a lockdown, local outbreak, or specific direction from a Government body. We would work closely to support and accommodate other individual family circumstances during this time.
- Excluding any adult or child from the Service who has taken pain reducing medication in the 24 hours prior to attending the Service, which may mask symptoms
- Very high vigilance with excluding persons who appear/feel unwell and showing any symptoms of COVID-19
- Taking temperatures of people entering the Service
- Requesting families electronically complete medication and required forms and authorities and email these to the Service. This eliminates extra time needing to be spent in the drop off areas of the Service for the manual completion of forms.
- Avoid the mixing of different groups/rooms of children
- Avoid experiences where the transmission of illness via bodily fluids is high
- Team members serving children at meals times, instead of self-serving

- Children predominately playing and eating in smaller than normal groups
- Spreading sleep mats further apart than normal
- Cancelling orientation and transitions visits
- Cancelling all non-essential visitors
- Spending maximum (suitable to the children) time outdoors in well ventilated spaces
- Maximising ventilation by opening as many windows and doors as is safe to do so
- Increased environmental cleaning
- Team meetings being held online with only up to 8 people attending in person

To support the risk of the spread of infectious diseases within NT Explorers and the wider community we should all:

- stay home when unwell
- stay home if you have an unwell family member, and there is a high likelihood that this will be spread to other family members
- regularly conduct hand hygiene
- avoid physical contact with other people who may be sick
- practice social distancing
- clean and disinfect high touch surfaces regularly
- have strict hygiene measures when preparing food
- following instructions and guidelines from Government and Public Health Units

Suspected and diagnosed cases of COVID-19 at our Service

As described in our *Unwell Children and Administering Medication* policy we reserve the right to refuse a child into care if exhibiting symptoms of being unwell. The policy also states that “Parents/guardians are the best people to care for their child when they are not well and are expected to keep unwell children at home or collect children who become unwell while attending the Service. In the event a child becomes unwell whilst at the Service, they are required to be collected as quickly as possible and **within 30 minutes**. If a parent/guardian is unable to collect their child within 30 minutes, they will need to make arrangements for an alternative person to collect their child. If this person is not included on the list of Authorised and Emergency Contacts, the parent/guardian will advise the Service of their full name in an emailed written authorisation and ensure that the person brings photo identification to show at the Service. The decision to send an unwell child home is at the discretion of the Nominated Supervisor or person acting in charge of the Service”.

Families are reminded to ensure their contact details are current and emergency contact details are updated when required.

Because of the nature and high transmissibility of COVID-19, any person exhibiting the symptoms described earlier in this policy will be excluded from the Service. In the event that we become aware of a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19, families would be notified quickly, and the Service would follow the advice of our Public Health Unit.

All community members are required to advise us if they have had medical advice to have a COVID-19 test, and to remain at home until the results are known and inform us of the test results. Each occurrence of this would be managed in accordance with the individual circumstances.

Notification

The Approved Provider or Nominated Supervisor is mandated by law to notify the NT Department of Health of any confirmed cases of COVID-19. This notification is made by calling the NT COVID-19 hotline on 1800 008 002. In addition, the Approved Provider must also notify the Regulatory Authority within 24 hours.

Management reserves the right to request employees to self-isolate if they suspect they have come into contact with someone who has a confirmed COVID-19 infection.

Talking to children about COVID-19

Team members will acknowledge children’s concerns and be open to discussions and questions asked by children. Children depend on the adults around them for safety and security and need reassurance, care, and opportunities to share their feelings. By speaking directly with children about challenging circumstances, you can help them to cope, be

prepared, and make sense of what they are seeing, hearing, and feeling. Children have a right to truthful information about what's going on in their world, but adults also have a responsibility to keep them safe from distress.

When speaking with children, we use age-appropriate language, watch their reactions, and are attuned and sensitive to their responses, and how we respond to this. We support children understanding age-appropriate ways they can support their own general health with preventative measures such as handwashing, use of tissues, cough and sneeze techniques, and limiting touching other children's faces.

Posters that demonstrate correct handwashing methods are used as a visual learning aid and team members model techniques.

Children's emotional well-being is closely monitored by team members and any concerns communicated with families. The Service shares information with families to help explain the situation to young children.

Caring for our community

We understand that the COVID-19 pandemic, and the constant stream of media and information may be stressful to adults and children. The anxiety about this disease may be overwhelming and cause fear and anxiety to some people, especially children.

We are committed to continue to provide high quality education and care to our children and support families responsibly during these times. Knowing how to look after yourself, and others is very important.

We will promote a safe and supportive environment by:

- reassuring children they are safe
- acknowledging and listening to children's questions
- promoting and implementing hygiene routines for handwashing and coughing and sneezing
- keeping regular and familiar routines within our Service
- closely supporting children's health needs such as nutrition, physical activity and rest
- engaging children in play
- being alert to children's level of anxiety and having quiet and relaxing experiences available
- providing reliable information to children, families and team members, and support services as required

There are many services that provide free information, advice, and support such as the examples below:

- Australian Government – COVID-19 Support <https://www.headtohealth.gov.au/covid-19-support/covid-19-support>
- Raising Children - <https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/coronavirus-covid-19-guide/coronavirus-tips-to-manage-distancing-or-self-isolation>
- Kids Helpline - <https://kidshelpline.com.au/parents>
- Beyond Blue <https://coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au/covid-normal.html>
- Black Dog Institute – Reassuring your child about the unknown <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/news/coronavirus-reassuring-your-child-about-the-unknown/>
- Australian Psychological Society <https://www.psychology.org.au/for-the-public/Psychology-topics/COVID-19-Australians>
- Territory FACES - is a telephone hotline that offers information about and referrals to support services throughout the whole of the NT. This service can be accessed by anyone in the community from parents and carers to professionals, who are seeking advice on resources and services that can help, support, and empower families and children. FACES stands for Families and Children Enquiry & Support. It is a free service that is available by calling 1800 999 900 between 8am-8pm Monday to Friday.

Related documents:

- Risk Assessment – COVID-19
- COVID-19 Safety Plan Checklist
- Business Continuity Plan
- Emergency Management Plan – COVID 19

References

Education and Care Services National Law Act 2011 (www.legislation.nt.gov.au)

Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 (www.legislation.nsw.gov.au)

Guide to the National Quality Framework – Updated Sept 2020 (www.acecqa.gov.au)

Staying Healthy – 5th Edition 2013 (<https://nhmrc.gov.au>)

Australian Government – COVID-19 (www.australia.gov.au)

Australian Government – COVID-19 Support (www.headtohealth.gov.au)

Australian Government - Department of Health (<https://www.health.gov.au>)

Australian Government - Department of Health – Infection Control Training (www.health.gov.au)

Australian Government - Department of Education, Skills and Employment (www.dese.gov.au)

Australian Government Fair Work Ombudsman(www.coronavirus.fairwork.gov.au)

Australian Government – healthdirect (www.healthdirect.gov.au)

St John Ambulance Australia (www.stjohn.org.au)

Australian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA) (www.allergy.org.au)

Northern Territory Department of Health – Immunisation Schedule (www.health.nt.gov.au)

NT Department of Health Centre for Disease Control (<https://health.nt.gov.au>)

NT Government - Coronavirus (www.coronavirus.nt.gov.au)

NSW Department of Health (www.health.nsw.gov.au)

Safe Work Australia Model Code of Practice (www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au)

Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (www.legislation.nt.gov.au)

Northern Territory Department of Education - ECEC and OSHC Pandemic Sub Plan 19 March 2020 Version 0.4 (document provided to Service)

Northern Territory Department of Education - COVID-19 Guidelines for Northern Territory Early Childhood Education and Care Services Version 2 February 2021 (document provided to Service)

Northern Territory Department of Education – Enhancing safety and wellbeing during the COVID-19 Pandemic – Fact Sheet (document provided to Service)

Northern Territory Department of Education – Talking with children about COVID-19 – Fact Sheet (document provided to Service)

Australian Health Protection Principal Committee – [Statement 25 May 2020](#) and [Statement 3 April 2020](#)