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Expanded Guidance to Child Care Centers

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OKDHS issues expanded guidance to child care centers in response to Coronavirus Disease 2019

OKLAHOMA CITY -- As the licensing and inspection body for child care providers across the state, Oklahoma Human Services (OKDHS) issued expanded guidance today to child care centers in response to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

“In providing this guidance, we are sensitive to and considerate of many factors. We’re taking to heart the guidance offered to us by our stakeholders as well as other state and federal entities,” said Justin Brown, OKDHS director.

“OKDHS understands that child care facilities are traditionally places where people congregate,” Brown said. “We are also aware of the [CDC \(https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html) and the [Oklahoma State Department of Health \(https://coronavirus.health.ok.gov/\)](https://coronavirus.health.ok.gov/)’s guidance around social distancing. Although children are not considered ‘vulnerable populations’ in the context of COVID-19, we all maintain an intense desire to keep them and their adult caregivers safe, and to restrict the overall spread of the virus.”

In this context, OKDHS provides the following guidance to child care centers:

Provide critical services - The child care industry is a vital element of a community's ability to respond to a crisis, and OKDHS is working to do everything possible to support them. A widespread closure of child care facilities will dramatically impact the ability of first responders and health care workers to serve their communities. That said, child care providers, including home-based centers, are private enterprises with the ability to make their own individual business decisions.

Increase sanitization practices and remain vigilant in providing hygiene protocols to children and employees - In talking with child care providers and the OKDHS child care licensing team, partners and providers alike believe that many children maintain their best personal hygiene practices in their child care facilities where these practices can be constantly reinforced. Increasing these practices and regularly talking with children about proper handwashing are important to promoting healthy environments. The CDC recommends washing hands for 20 seconds as often as possible.

Follow best practices on social distancing and sanitization - The CDC and Oklahoma State Department of Health have provided guidance on social distancing and proper wipe down protocols to promote safe places for children. OKDHS asks that providers revisit protocols with their employees daily and put in place systems to ensure those processes are being followed. OKDHS is supportive of programs choosing to postpone in-person professional development sessions, staff meetings, parent meetings and field trips.

Pre-screening before children enter a program - Child care programs should consider implementing a pre-screening checklist to assess the health of the children and families they serve. Pre-screening could also include infrared thermometers to check for fevers at the entrances to facilities.

Exposure to COVID-19 in child care programs - Programs need to notify their Licensing Representative if someone connected with the program, including household members, is diagnosed with a confirmed case of COVID-19 or if the program is closed.

Flexibility and emergency regulation accommodations - Staying open during a time of crisis can present challenges, but the work of child care centers is critical for working families. The number one priority of OKDHS is child safety. Working with state and federal partners, OKDHS is evaluating processes to expedite new program applications and issuing alternative compliances to current requirements to meet the needs of working families. As facilities consider expanding services, OKDHS encourages offering preference to providing care to children of first responders and health care workers.

Guidance for parents - Parents who can should be encouraged to keep their children at home to fully achieve proper social distancing while also allowing for space for children of first responders and health care workers.

Independent decision-making - OKDHS knows that some programs may decide to close. If this is your choice, please notify your Licensing Representative.

OKDHS is here to help - Licensing Representatives are available to answer questions or concerns related to the operation of your program. Visit the DHS COVID-19 Feed at www.ourokdhs.org (<http://www.ourokdhs.org/>) for more.

The community is also here to help - If there are specific supply or other needs child care centers have, "Raise your Hand" at www.ourokdhs.org (<http://www.ourokdhs.org/>) so OKDHS may try to help, either directly or through community partners.

Opening a child/youth care program - Anyone interested in opening a child/youth care program, please visit <http://www.okdhs.org/services/cc/Pages/CCPLicense.aspx> (<http://www.okdhs.org/services/cc/Pages/CCPLicense.aspx>)

“OKDHS thanks all child care providers for their public service,” said Brown. “Many times, child care providers and their incredible workforce are not fully recognized for the important role that you play in our lives.”

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OKDHS will continue to monitor this evolving situation and anticipates that further official guidance could be issued over the coming days and weeks.

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