

City of Austin/Travis County Guidance for Open Child Care Programs

Last updated: September 16, 2020



Child care programs must operate in accordance with:

- This City of Austin/Travis County Guidance for Open Child Care Programs,
- The [Emergency rules from the Texas Health and Human Services Commission](#), which include many of the guidelines from the state's [Open Texas Child Care Checklist](#), and
- The [Guidance for Child Care Programs that Remain Open](#) released by the Centers of Disease Control.

In addition, child care programs located in the City of Austin and/or in Travis County must comply with the guidelines in this document. To the greatest extent possible, programs should also follow the recommendations in this document. This guidance is designed to minimize the risk of coronavirus transmission and help keep staff, children, and families safe.

The latest local information on COVID-19, including local control orders, can be found at this City of Austin web site: www.austintexas.gov/covid19.

GUIDELINES

How to contact Austin Public Health (APH), the local health department

- Child care programs must call the Austin Public Health Nurse Line at 512-972-5560 to report laboratory confirmed cases of COVID-19 among children and/or staff.
- Programs may also call the Austin Public Health Nurse Line at 512-972-5560 to ask questions about suspected or potential cases in child care programs or about COVID-19 exposure of staff, children, or families.
 - The APH Nurse Line staff will advise child care programs on next steps regarding COVID-19 cases, suspected cases, or potential exposure.

Notification of COVID-19 Cases

- When a laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 case has entered a program, child care programs must communicate with staff and parents about closure decisions, possible COVID-19 exposure, and guidance from Austin Public Health on appropriate quarantine or isolation measures.
- Plan to include messages to counter potential COVID-19 [stigma](#) and discrimination.
- It is critical to maintain confidentiality of the student or staff member as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act.

Face Coverings

- It is required that the following people wear fabric face coverings:
 - All child care staff
 - Parents and guardians dropping off and picking up children
 - Children age 10 and older

- Face coverings should not be worn by:
 - Children younger than 2 years old
 - People who cannot take off the coverings without assistance
 - Anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious
 - Anyone who is incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the cloth face covering without assistance
 - A child with a significant behavioral or psychological issue undergoing treatment that is exacerbated specifically by a face covering
 - A child with severe autism or with extreme developmental delay who may become agitated or anxious wearing a mask
 - A child with a facial deformity that causes airway obstruction
- Teachers should use their best judgement to determine if children should remove face coverings in these situations:
 - While engaging in outdoor physical activity when physical distancing is maintained
 - During extreme heat when a face covering could contribute to a greater risk of heat-related illness

Temperature checks

- Deny entry to any adult or child with a measured temperature greater than 99.6°F per the City of Austin Medical Authority.
- This temperature threshold, which is lower than that recommended by the CDC, should be followed.

Enrolling New Children in Care

- Child care programs shall use the forms in Appendix A when enrolling a new child in the program. These forms provide child care programs with the child’s recent enrollment history in a child care program or school and health/exposure status.
 - It is recommended that the new program contact the child care program or school the child was in previously to verify whether or not they have had a recent closure due to COVID-19.
- Child care programs shall not begin caring for a newly enrolled child until the criteria on the “Health Screening Questions for Newly Enrolling Children” form in Appendix A is met.

Signs required

- Child care programs shall post:
 - At least one face covering sign at or near each entrance; and
 - At least one Austin Public Health “Prevent the Spread of COVID-19” sign at each entrance and on each restroom door (available in various languages for download and print at: <http://austintexas.gov/page/printed-materials-and-required-signage>; and
 - Where information for workers is customarily posted, at least one sign in English and at least one sign in Spanish that explains the requirement to wear a face covering.

Health and Safety Plan required

- Child care programs must prepare and implement a health and safety plan that explains how the program is meeting the standards for child care operations to control and reduce the transmission of COVID-19.

- An electronic or hard copy of this plan shall be shared with staff, parents, and guardians, or at a minimum, be provided to staff, parents, and guardians upon request.
- Child care programs must post conspicuous signage displaying the requirements of the health and safety policy or plan at or near each entrance (on each entry door if feasible) to the premises in a manner sufficient to provide clear notice to employees, customers, and visitors at least of the face covering requirement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Testing

- It is strongly recommended that staff exhibiting new or worsening symptoms of possible COVID-19 seek a COVID-19 test.
- Persons with health insurance are encouraged to seek testing through their healthcare provider.
- Enrollment for free public testing can be found at www.austintexas.gov/covid19. Click on the “Take a Self-Assessment” link to begin enrollment.

Group Sizes, Gatherings & Events

- It is strongly recommended that child care programs not exceed the ratio and group size limits specified in the [Minimum Standards Health Protocols Check List for Child Care Centers](#).
- It is strongly recommended that, to the greatest extent feasible, child care programs limit group sizes to no more than 10 people, including children and adults.
- It is strongly recommended that child care programs:
 - Not hold group gatherings, events, or assemblies, and
 - Not invite outside visitors or guests whose presence or service is not essential

Field trips

- It is strongly recommended that child care programs:
 - Not take field trips to locations where children will come in contact with large groups of people or many people crowded together, and
 - Consider planning walking field trips rather than trips requiring transport in vehicles
- Walking trips to nearby outdoor natural spaces may be a safer option than field trips to indoor locations

Transportation

- If transport is provided, in addition to what is stated in the [Open Texas Child Care Checklist](#), it is strongly recommended that child care programs:
 - Screen all passengers before they enter the vehicle; and
 - Follow the same screening protocols used for people entering the child care program; and
 - Follow guidance from the American Camp Association that could also pertain to child care regarding [Transportation To or From](#) programs and [Travel by Bus or Van](#).

Appendix A- Parent verification forms for:

- **Previous Child Care Information for Newly Enrolling Children**
(Note, this form has been updated to capture information about a child's recent enrollment in a school or child care program.)
- **Health Screening Questions for Newly Enrolling Children**

Previous Child Care Information for Newly Enrolling Children

(Updated 9/16/2020)

Austin Public Health requires that this document be completed when children are being newly enrolled in care with a licensed, registered, or listed child care program located in the City of Austin and/or in Travis County to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

1. Has your child been in care in another child care program or school within the last two weeks?

- Yes
 No

2. If you answered yes to question 1, please provide:

Name of the program or school: _____

Program/school phone number: _____

3. If you answered yes to question 1, has there been a closure of your child's classroom or the entire child care program or school due to cases of COVID-19 within the last two weeks?

- Yes
 No

By signing and dating below, I verify that the above information is true and correct, and I give permission for the child care program in which I am enrolling my child/children to contact my child's/children's previous child care program or school to obtain information regarding closure due to COVID-19.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Health Screening Questions for Newly Enrolling Children

(Updated 9/16/2020)

Austin Public Health requires that this document be completed for each child being newly enrolled in care with a licensed, registered, or listed child care program located in the City of Austin and/or in Travis County to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

1. **Does the child you are enrolling currently have any signs or symptoms of a respiratory infection or COVID-19, such as cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat; chills, muscle aches, loss of smell, loss of taste, vomiting, and/or diarrhea?**

- Yes
 No

If yes, your child may not begin care in this child care program until all three conditions have been met:

- at least 24 hours have passed since recovery (e.g., resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications); AND
- the individual has improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); AND
- at least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.

2. **Has the child had close contact* in the last 14 days with someone who:**

- Has a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19; or
- Is under investigation for COVID-19; or
- Is ill with a respiratory illness?

- Yes
 No

If yes, the child should not begin care in the program until after completing a 14-day quarantine period beginning from the last date of exposure to the individual with suspected or confirmed COVID-19. If the child becomes symptomatic, the child should not begin care until criteria listed above under #1 are met.

By signing and dating below, I verify that the above information is true to the best of my knowledge.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

* For COVID-19, a [close contact](#) is defined as any individual who was within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 15 minutes during the 48 hours before the person began feeling sick (or, for asymptomatic patients, 2 days prior to positive specimen collection) until the sick person begins isolation.