



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

March 18, 2020

Dear Child Care Provider:

Thank you so much for the critical role you are playing in our Commonwealth's efforts to protect the health and safety of all citizens. As we face the COVID-19 national emergency, we recognize that many of you are serving as first responders within your communities and bear the great responsibility of continuing to provide essential care to children. We are deeply grateful for your commitment to ensuring that our emergency services and medical personnel, as well as other front line staff involved in the provision of basic needs to the Commonwealth, have access to child care during this time.

We recognize the challenge of balancing the public health recommendations necessary to help reduce the spread of COVID-19, along with the need to provide essential child care to the number of families that rely on your services. It is our hope that the following information will support your efforts to remain open, and support the children and families within your communities.

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) is closely monitoring the COVID-19 pandemic and all guidance that is being distributed to child care facilities at the federal level. For centers that remain open, we encourage you to adapt your service settings as much as possible to align with public health recommendations, which include social distancing. **Please encourage your families to remain at home to care for their children if at all possible.** This will help ensure spaces for essential personnel in need of child care as they directly support the COVID-19 response efforts. For now, **classroom child care settings should limit capacity to 10 individuals per room to include staff.** In addition, centers should continue to follow these guidelines:

- Encourage your staff and community members to protect their personal health.
- Educate your child care community and staff of the signs and symptoms of COVID-19.
- Ensure students are eating meals in the classroom.
- Require employees to stay home when sick and send home anyone who becomes sick.
- Limit facility events or gatherings (<10 people) that require close contact and stagger entrances and exits to limit contact.

- Have staff and children wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are frequently touched.
- Alter programming to increase distance between children, such as allowing only one classroom of children outside at a time.
- Conduct regular health checks of staff and children to look for symptoms of sickness or fever. Separate symptomatic individuals until they are picked up from the facility.
- Serve meals in the classroom.

Understanding this may be very challenging, we ask that child care centers only remain open if they can adhere to these guidelines for protecting vulnerable populations.

We are especially appreciative of the child care providers that serve the nearly 25,000 children in Virginia's Child Care Subsidy Program. Temporary program modifications will be implemented this week to assist families and providers during this challenging period. Information on the following will be disseminated to both parents and providers participating in the Program:

- School-age children currently designated for part-day care will be eligible for full-day care.
- The number of paid absence days will increase from 36 days to 76 days for level 2 (licensed). The same number will also be available to Level 1 (unlicensed) providers.
- Families due for eligibility redetermination in the near term, will have their eligibility automatically extended for two months.
- The requirement for a face-to-face interview for initial eligibility will be temporarily suspended.
- Procedures for receipt of manual attendance will be streamlined to make it easier for providers to submit attendance.

It is imperative that we stay connected with partner agencies in efforts to stay informed and proactive. It is my hope that the following resources will be helpful to you:

- The [Virginia Department of Health](#) (VDH) has provided resources and information specific to child care settings to understand this pandemic and mitigate the risk of COVID-19.
- Please refer to the [Centers for Disease Control](#) (CDC) for information on COVID-19 and guidance on protecting yourself, your staff, and the children you serve.
- Parents who need child care may call **866-KIDS-TLC** or email KasharaL@va.childcareaware.org for assistance with locating child care programs that remain open.

- Information is being posted daily to Virginia's child care microsite (www.childcareva.com) and I encourage you to check there frequently for updates on this evolving situation.

Please remember to notify your local VDH and your VDSS licensing inspector immediately if there is confirmation of COVID-19 in your facility and follow guidance from VDH and the CDC for all subsequent actions and precautions. Also, please notify your VDSS licensing inspector if you decide to close your program.

We will provide ongoing communication as new information becomes available. On behalf of the entire Commonwealth, thank you again for your efforts and diligence to serve our communities and protect those in your care during these unprecedented times.

Sincerely,



S. Duke Storen
Commissioner