

INFORMATION & RESOURCES FOR CHILD CARE & EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Updated Wednesday, October 28, 2020

COVID-19 Child Care Operations Updates

As of Monday, June 1, all regulated child care programs are allowed to open to all families per Governor Phil Scott's announcement on May 8. In order to operate, programs must meet updated [health and safety guidelines](#), including use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and other important measures to protect both early childhood educators and the children and families that attend their programs. The state has made significant investments in the early care and education system during the pandemic, and more support is on the way for early educators who provided emergency care during the Stay Home, Stay Safe order. More information is included in the [reopening](#) section of this document.

Governor Scott initially [ordered](#) all child care programs not providing care for the children of essential workers or other qualifying families to close on March 18, 2020; child care programs were ultimately allowed to reopen starting June 1. The governor's executive order acknowledged that child care is critical to both Vermont's COVID-19 response and the state's economy, and the state worked to ensure that Vermont's early care and education system was supported through the extended closure period and able to access resources when making the decision regarding if and when to reopen.

Early childhood educators who are immunocompromised, 65 years of age or older, pregnant, or have other mental health or medical needs that could be impacted by COVID-19 are encouraged to talk to their health care provider to assess their risk and to determine if they should avoid in-person contact when physical distancing cannot be maintained. It is important to protect your health and the health of your family.

While no solutions are the perfect fit for all programs, this document contains a summary of information and resources to help you navigate this period of uncertainty, including an overview of different child care business operation options that may help you sustain your business during this time. This document is not intended to be a substitute for reviewing the guidance provided by the State. It will be updated on a regular basis as new guidance and resources are developed. See the next page for a table of contents to help you navigate to the information you're seeking.

Contents

COVID-19 Child Care Operations Updates	1
Information for Child Care Programs Operating During the Pandemic or Preparing to Reopen	3
Updated Health & Safety Information	3
Determining a Reopening/Operations Strategy	4
Free Meals for Families with Young Children	4
PPE & Health Supplies.....	5
COVID-19 Exposure Control Plan Training	5
Additional Guidance & Resources	5
Information for Child Care Programs that Provided Emergency Child Care for Essential Workers during Closure Period.....	5
Financial Supports for Child Care Programs	6
Financial Supports from the State of Vermont.....	6
VSECU Member Emergency Loans	6
Small Business Administration Economic Injury Disaster Loans	7
Utility & Rent/Mortgage/Lease Supports	7
Ongoing Supports.....	8
Northern Lights.....	8
Children's Integrated Services.....	8
STARS	8
Community Child Care Support Agencies	8
More Information	8
Help & Support	8

Information for Child Care Programs Operating During the Pandemic or Preparing to Reopen

On Friday, May 8, Governor Scott announced that all regulated child care programs would be allowed reopen to all families as of June 1. The Child Development Division and the Vermont Department of Health developed resources to help child care programs with the reopening process. Let's Grow Kids and other partners have developed additional resources to help programs plan for reopening and operating during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Updated Health & Safety Information

The Vermont Department of Health continually updates [health and safety guidance](#) for child care and out-of-school-time care. The guidance reviews physical distancing strategies, strongly recommends facial coverings for children older than 2-years-old, and requires that all staff wear facial coverings while providing care. The updated guidance also provides important and detailed information on health screening for children and early childhood educators, drop-off and pick-up procedures, the use of PPE, and recommendations regarding staff that should consult with their health care provider before returning to work. You can also view a recording of an August 6 webinar with Dr. Breena Holmes from the Vermont Department of Health about the new information [here](#). Additionally, the Department of Health has developed a [fact sheet](#) with more information on the Multisystem Inflammatory Disease that may be linked to COVID-19 in children, and a [resource](#) for families on what to do when a child gets sick.

The Department of Health, in partnership with groups including Let's Grow Kids, has developed several health-related resources for programs to help you communicate important health and safety information to staff and families. These include:

- [Program entrance posters](#)
- [Health check poster](#)
- [Handwashing posters](#)
- [What families can expect when returning to child care health handouts](#)
- [A sample weekly COVID-19 health checklist](#)
- [A sample daily COVID-19 checklist](#)

The Vermont Department of Health also has public health nurses available to answer health-related child care questions from 8 AM to 3 PM Monday through Friday. To reach a public health nurse, call 802-863-7240 and select the option for "Providers of Child Care and Summer Programs." If you call afterhours, you can leave a message in the program voicemailbox and staff will return your call the following business day.

Those who should not return to work without consulting with their health care provider include, but are not limited to:

- Adults 65 years of age and older
- People who have serious underlying medical conditions like:

- Heart disease or other serious heart conditions, such as heart failure or cardiomyopathies
- Diabetes
- Lung disease or COPD
- Chronic kidney disease
- Underlying immune disorders/people with compromised immune systems/people taking immune suppressant medications (examples of these disorders include Rheumatoid Arthritis, Crohn's Disease, recent cancer treatment).
- Pregnant women
- People with HIV

If you have any questions about your health conditions, you should contact your medical provider before resuming work.

Determining a Reopening/Operations Strategy

Programs across the state are assessing their individual situations and considering the needs of their families, staff, and community. Some considerations include:

- Program policies—current and potential temporary adjustments;
- Fiscal implications for the program;
- Financial implications for families; and
- Staff availability.

More information and resources are available through SharedServicesVT.org, from [this resource](#) created by Gallagher, Flynn & Company, LLP, and through Let's Grow Kids' [child care COVID-19 business operations webinars](#) to help you determine your program's strategy or make changes to your strategy.

Once you determine how your program will move forward (or how you will make changes to your plan), remember to:

- Document all revenue losses, such as lost tuition, and all continued expenses, such as rent/mortgage, utilities, insurance, wages and benefits, etc. Documentation is important when applying for state and federal emergency funding support programs.
- Communicate with families—provide clear information in a format that works for the families you serve.
- Support for staff—maintain regular scheduled communication, provide clarity on program status, and share resources.

If you are or will be experiencing staffing challenges that may impact your compliance with regulations, contact your [licensor](#) or the licensor on duty (802-241-0837) to discuss variance options that may be available to you.

Free Meals for Families with Young Children

Many schools and local organizations are providing meals for all children 18 years old and under, including preschoolers and children not enrolled in school through the end of the current school year. Families can get more information about free meals and other nutrition resources by visiting [Hunger Free Vermont's COVID-19 page](#).

PPE & Health Supplies

The Child Development Division is working to help child care programs secure PPE and health supplies. You can learn more about available supplies and how to get them [here](#).

COVID-19 Exposure Control Plan Training

The Vermont Occupational Safety and Health Agency (VOSHA) has developed a [training](#) to inform Vermonters about appropriate safety measures necessary to return to work. The training discusses the need for workplaces to have an exposure control plan in place. For child care programs, the [updated health guidance](#) from the Vermont Department of Health for child care programs, in combination with standard child care regulations, meets this requirement.

Additional Guidance & Resources

Let's Grow Kids worked with partners to offer resources that support child care programs in determining when and how to reopen and operate safely. You can view a list of reopening-related webinar trainings hosted by Let's Grow Kids [here](#) and find additional resources through [Shared Services VT](#).

Information for Child Care Programs that Provided Emergency Child Care for Essential Workers during Closure Period

Child care programs that provided emergency child care for essential workers through May 30 were eligible for a \$125 supplemental payment per child, per week during the emergency child care period. This payment did not need to be applied to tuition. More information is available from CDD's [guidance document](#) and its [updated FAQ document](#). **All invoices for this program were due by June 7, 2020.**

Frontline Workers Hazard Pay Program: In September, the Legislature and Governor Scott authorized a second round of the Frontline Workers Hazard Pay Grant Program, expanding the program to more categories of people who worked during the COVID-19 closure period (March 13–May 15, 2020), **including those who provided emergency child care to children of essential workers.** The program allows covered employers to request funding to provide \$1,200 or \$2,000 in hazard pay to each employee who meets eligibility criteria, including risk of exposure to COVID-19, numbers of hours worked, and employee's hourly wage. The Department of Financial Regulation is partnering with the Agency of Human Services to administer this next round of grants.

The application period opened on Wednesday, October 28, 2020 at 9 AM EST, and the [application can be accessed here](#). Grants will be awarded through an online application process, and funding will be given out on a first-come, first-served basis. **Demand for these funds is expected to be higher than the amount of funding available, so it is important to apply as soon as possible once the application opens. [For more information, click here](#).**

Financial Supports for Child Care Programs

Financial Supports from the State of Vermont

The State of Vermont created [a number of programs](#) and resources during the pandemic to support early care and education programs and families, including:

Support during the closure period:

- **Child Care Stabilization Payments for Private Tuition:** The state created a program to help child care programs whose families were unable to pay their regular tuition during the COVID-19 closure period. This program ended on May 30, 2020.
- **Continued Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) Payments:** During the closure period (March 16 through May 30, 2020), CCFAP payments were made to programs based on children enrolled to attend and not on actual attendance. Beginning June 1, 2020, only child care programs that reopened received CCFAP reimbursements, based on how a family utilized care during the reopening process.
- **Continued Act 166 – Universal Pre-K Tuition Payments:** During the closure period, programs continued to receive Act 166 UPK tuition payments for children who were enrolled in the program. The Agency of Education also released a [resource document](#) for early educators to support pre-K learning from home to support work with pre-K children for the remainder of the 2019–2020 academic year.

Support for reopening and operating during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- **Restart Stipends:** Following the end of the Child Care Stabilization Program, the state created a Restart Stipend Program to support child care programs in reopening following the conclusion of the COVID-19 closure period. The deadline for requesting a stipend was May 22, 2020.
- **Operational Relief Grants:** To help cover income losses and expenses due to COVID-19, the state created [Operational Relief Grants](#) for child care and afterschool programs and summer day camps. The deadline to apply for these funds was August 26, 2020.

The deadlines for these programs have passed. We will update this section with information about any additional state financial supports. For information on the Frontline Workers Hazard Pay Program, refer to the [Information for Child Care Programs Providing Essential Care](#) section of this document.

VSECU Member Emergency Loans

Let's Grow Kids, in partnership with the Vermont Community Foundation and the Vermont State Employees Credit Union (VSECU), has established a loan fund for early childhood educators to access during this time of financial uncertainty. The Vermont Community Foundation has supported VSECU in expanding its Member Emergency Loan program to all Vermonters who have or will experience a disruption to their income as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and don't have the financial capacity to care for themselves or their families.

Let's Grow Kids is expanding this investment to include funds specifically reserved for early educators working in regulated child care programs with children ages birth to five who have experienced a disruption to their household income. Additionally, Let's Grow Kids is offering to cover the following expenses for qualified early educators: the \$25 membership fee for non-VSECU members and a borrower's first loan payment.

For specific details on the loan program, including how to find out if you qualify, please visit [VSECU's Member Emergency Loan web page](#) or call 802-371-5162 to speak with a VSECU member service consultant.

To be eligible for the program, you will need to demonstrate proof of employment with a regulated child care provider for children ages birth to five, including a letter from your employer and the program's BFIS Provider ID, which can be found by searching the [BFIS Provider Directory](#) by Provider Name.

Small Business Administration Economic Injury Disaster Loans

For programs in need of immediate financial assistance, the Small Business Administration's Economic Injury Disaster Loans offers up to \$2 million in assistance for a small business. To learn more about the process for accessing the SBA's COVID-19 disaster relief lending program, visit <https://www.sba.gov/funding-programs/loans/coronavirus-relief-options/economic-injury-disaster-loans>, call 1-800-659-2955 or email disastercustomerservice@sba.gov.

More information on Small Business Administration loan options and other national supports for child care and early education programs is available through [this resource](#) from the Center for Law and Social Policy and through [this podcast](#) from the Center for Economic Development for center-based child care programs and [this podcast](#) from CED for home-based child care programs.

Utility & Rent/Mortgage/Lease Supports

Some utility companies, mortgage lenders, and landlords have put emergency measures into place to businesses and families during the pandemic.

- Utilities
 - A number of Vermont utility providers will not pursue disconnections during Vermont's COVID-19 response period. If you are concerned about your ability to continue to pay your utility bill, please contact your utility provider(s) to discuss your options.
- Mortgage and Rent/Lease Payments
 - Contact your lender or landlord immediately regarding your situation. Some programs have had success requesting payments be waived or reduced, or structuring an alternative payment plan.
 - Additional support may be available through the [National Housing Conference](#).

Ongoing Supports

Whether your program is open or you are taking more time to evaluate your options and develop a reopening plan, there are a number of ongoing child care and early education supports available to you and your program.

Northern Lights

You can still reach out to your [Northern Lights at CCV resource advisor](#) with questions about professional development.

Children's Integrated Services

CIS continues to be a valuable resource for your program and families during the closure period. Click [here](#) to find out how to contact your CIS team coordinator. DCF also has [specific COVID-19 information](#) for child care CIS services providers.

STARS

The STARS office is still conducting work as they are able, but they have made adjustments during the COVID-19 response. The team has suspended due date requirements for both programs that are open to provide emergency child care for essential personnel and programs that have closed. The STARS office has also suspended program assessments until after normal day-to-day program operations have resumed. While the STARS team won't conduct any assessments during the COVID-19 response, you may still request to have an assessment scheduled once normal operations resume.

Community Child Care Support Agencies

Your [community child care support agency](#) is actively working to help you fill any available slots and help families find and afford child care. If you have or anticipate any openings, please reach out to your local child care referral specialist to update them on your availability.

More Information

The Child Development Division has a [COVID-19 page](#) with information for child care programs on topics including health guidance, COVID-19 supplies, and financial supports.

Help & Support

If you have a question that is not addressed in this document, please contact the Let's Grow Kids team at info@letsgrowkids.org and we will help to connect you to the best resource or try to update this page with new content that addresses your question.