



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Department of Early Education and Care

TEMPORARY POLICY	
Use of Face Masks in Child Care Settings	Field Operations – Emergency Exempt Child Care Programs
Effective Date: May 6, 2020 Updated: May 11, 2020	

Background

Pursuant to the Governor’s Executive Order, effective May 6, 2020, all individuals are required to wear a mask in public places. In accordance with this order, any person who is in a place open to the public in the Commonwealth, when unable to maintain a distance of approximately six feet from every other person, must cover their mouth and nose with a mask or cloth face-covering. This applies to both indoor and outdoor spaces.

Policy Statement

While small group sizes, physical distancing, daily health checks, handwashing, respiratory etiquette and diligent cleaning and disinfecting remain vital to minimize the risk of spreading infection, EEC strongly encourages child care programs to enforce the wearing of masks or cloth face coverings during the child care day when 6 feet of physical distancing is not possible.

To slow the spread of COVID-19, child care staff should be strongly encouraged to wear a cloth face covering while serving children and interacting with parents and families. Face coverings are strongly encouraged for children age 3 and older, if tolerated. Providers should set their own policies¹ regarding the use of face coverings by children while in care, including a requirement for parental consent. This policy is being established to offer guidance to child care programs on the safe and effective use of face masks for staff and children in child care settings.

The use of a mask does not replace important social distancing measures. All children and staff must continue to maintain more than 6 feet of distance from each other whenever possible; wash hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds; and always stay home when sick.

Who Should Wear Face Masks in Child Care Settings:

- Child care staff
- Children age 3 and older who can safely and appropriately wear, remove, and handle masks²

¹ This decision should consider the age of the child, number of children in care, and the level of community spread. The [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) provides tips for how to help children be more comfortable wearing cloth face coverings and provides more information to inform your decision about whether to require children in your care, age 3 and older, to wear cloth face coverings.

² Children under the age of 5 should be supervised at all times while wearing a mask. If wearing the face covering causes the child to touch their face more frequently, staff should reconsider whether the mask is appropriate for the child.

- Parents/guardians if/when permitted to enter the child care space and at all times during drop off and pick up

Who Should NOT Wear Face Masks in Child Care Settings:

- Children under the age of 3 years
- Children who have difficulty breathing with the face covering or who are unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the cover without assistance
- Children with severe cognitive or respiratory impairments that may have a hard time tolerating a face mask
- Children where the only option for a face covering presents a potential choking or strangulation hazard
- Individuals who cannot breathe safely with a face covering, including those who require supplemental oxygen to breathe
- Individuals who, due to a behavioral health diagnosis, are unable to wear a face covering safely
- Individuals who need to communicate with people who rely upon lip-reading

How Should Face Masks Be Worn

In accordance with [CDC Guidance](#), cloth face coverings should—

- clean and free of holes
- fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face (to be safest and most protective for children and adults, face coverings should securely cover the nose and mouth and stretch from before the ear to the other side)
- be secured with ties or ear loops
- include multiple layers of fabric
- allow for breathing without restriction
- be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape

Safety Considerations for Children Wearing Masks

- Masks/face coverings should NOT have any attachments (e.g., buttons, stickers, etc.) that may be a choking hazard;
- Masks/face coverings should NOT be worn if they are a strangulation risk (e.g., during certain activities or for certain children);
- Masks/face coverings should NOT be worn during active outdoor play*;
- Masks/face covering should NOT be worn while napping*;
- Masks/face covering should NOT be worn while eating or drinking*;
- Masks/face coverings should never be worn around the neck; and
- Children should NOT be forced to wear a cloth face covering if they are not comfortable/able to do so safely or show signs of breathing difficulty.

*If children can be kept at least 6 feet away from others, and will not be in contact with surfaces that could harbor the virus, then they do not need a mask for the protection of themselves or others. Strict and consistent physical distancing should be practiced at all times during eating/drinking, napping, and active outdoor play.

What kind of Face Masks Should Be Worn

- Due to the extremely limited supply, professional grade masks like N-95 masks should be reserved for medical professionals on the front lines who have increased risk of exposure to coronavirus in close proximity.
- For general use, homemade or purchased cloth masks are suitable. For instructions on how to make sew and no-sew face masks, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>
- Pleated masks with elastic are likely to work best for children. Ensuring the right fit is important and masks should be adjusted as needs to achieve a secure fit.

Cleaning and Care of Face Masks

Masks and face coverings should be routinely washed (at least daily and any time the mask is used or becomes soiled) depending on the frequency of use. When possible, masks should be washed in a washing machine in hot water and dried fully before using again. If a washing machine is unavailable, masks should be washed with soap and hot water and allowed to dry fully before using again.

Each staff member and child should have their own mask/face covering. Whenever possible, extra masks/face coverings should be available in the event a mask/cloth face covering is broken or becomes soiled. Used cloth face coverings should be placed in a clean paper bag that has been marked with the child's or staff member's name and date until the face covering needs to be put on again. Clean masks should not be stored with used masks. All masks and face coverings should be clearly marked to distinguish which side of the covering should be worn facing outwards so they are worn properly each day.

Additional guidelines for wearing a face mask:

- Do not to touch the mask, your eyes, nose, or mouth while wearing cloth masks to prevent potential contamination.
- Wash your hands thoroughly before putting on the mask.
- Remove the mask carefully and wash your hands thoroughly after removing.
- Wash the mask after each use.
- Cloth masks do not provide adequate protection for others if a staff member or child has symptoms compatible with COVID-19. **Ill staff members and children should stay at home.**

Communicating with Parents About the Use of Masks for Children

Programs shall inform parents of their policies and procedure for the use of face coverings. Programs should also share information with parents to help them understand that the CDC and other health experts have found that there is evidence that children may be asymptomatic carriers of COVID-19. *Face coverings for children age 3 and older are recommended to reduce the chance that they are spreading the virus, despite having no symptoms.* In determining whether using a face covering is appropriate for their children, parents and child care staff should consider this, along with their knowledge of their child, their child's maturity level, and/or special health concerns. While the decision for a child to wear a face covering must ultimately be a parent's choice, it is at the program's discretion to enforce any policy concerning the use of masks for children in care.