



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Department of Early Education and Care

TEMPORARY POLICY STATEMENT	
Accepting Children and Families at Exempt Emergency Child Care Programs	Field Operations – Exempt Emergency Child Care Programs
Effective Date: April 1, 2020 Updated: April 21, 2020	

Purpose of Temporary Policy:

The Department of Early Education and Care (“EEC”) hereby sets forth its process for enrolling children and families at Exempt Emergency Child Care Programs (“EECCPs”).

Background:

To slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), Governor Baker issued an emergency executive order on March 18, 2020 (subsequently amended) (“Temporary Closure and Emergency Child Care Order”), temporarily closing all early childhood education programs across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and authorizing EEC to establish and oversee EECCPs. The closure applies to all center-based and family child care programs and will remain in effect until June 29, 2020 or longer, as needed.

The Commonwealth is mindful that child care is a critical service and is relied upon by essential workers who are needed to address the health, safety, and welfare of the Commonwealth’s residents. To prioritize public health and safety while maintaining this critical service, **EECCPs will be the only child care programs that are legally allowed¹ to operate during the COVID-19 State of Emergency.** To support providers who are interested in providing these critical child care services, EEC is setting forth this policy to offer guidance for serving children and families at EECCPs.

Temporary Policy Statement:

EECCPs shall respond to requests for emergency care using a first come, first served approach, based on the prioritization required in the Temporary Closure and Emergency Child Care Order, which states that priority access to emergency child care must be given to vulnerable children and the children of families who work to maintain the health, safety, and welfare of all Commonwealth residents. In determining the placement of children into EECCPs, priority must be given to children in families working in certain production and service sectors as “COVID-19 Essential Services” (“COVID-19 Essential Services Order”), and those identified in Exhibit A of the COVID-19 Essential Services Order as workforces engaged and working in COVID-19 Essential Services. In no priority order, these include but are not limited to health care workers, essential state and human service workers, grocery store and pharmacy employees, emergency response personnel, law enforcement, transportation and infrastructure workers, sanitation workers, DCF-involved families, and families living in shelters.

Please Note: EECCPs are to be used for emergency back-up child care for children of families who have exhausted all other non-group care settings and have no other option for care. **Only those priority**

¹ Each EECCP must obtain a letter of legal approval from EEC prior to operating.

conditions articulated above shall be considered in accepting children into an EECCP. EECCPs shall not give priority to the children and families enrolled in their licensed child care program prior to the suspension of the license or limit care to such children. EECCPs must accept otherwise eligible children who were not previously enrolled in their program prior to suspension of the license, unless otherwise authorized by EEC due to a pre-existing relationship with an employer of essential services.

EEC reserves the right to verify the needs of the children being served to ensure the intent of this emergency provision is maintained. Outreach directly to identified families and/or a review of the required family paperwork may be conducted by an EEC staff member, if deemed necessary by EEC.

To slow the spread of the coronavirus, all families should keep children out of group care settings to the greatest extent possible. Providers should encourage families to identify non-group care settings for children whenever possible. EEC will be working to identify capacity for families who meet the priority populations and need an EECCP slot but are unable to locate an available placement.

Receiving Requests for Drop-Off from Families or Referral Agency:

EECCPs shall accept child care inquiries via phone and email beginning Saturday, March 21, 2020 (or at time of EECCP approval), unless otherwise authorized by EEC to implement an alternative reservation system. Prior to approval, EECCPs must agree to be listed on EEC's website, unless they have been authorized by EEC to utilize an independent method of recruiting priority children and families. EECCPs shall also accept inquiries via phone or email from referral agencies, such as the Department of Children and Families (DCF).

With revised information from the Governor, EEC is encouraging families to be planful about their child care needs for the duration of the emergency closure. While EECCP care is to be only used as an emergency need and when no other child care options are available, parents may reserve an EECCP slot for their children up to one week in advance, provided that they meet priority criteria and emergency back-up slots are available on the requested days and at the requested times.

Parents are encouraged to use the same EECCP for the duration of the State of Emergency, subject to the EECCP's availability. Parents **MUST** call ahead to cancel if the reservation for care is no longer needed, and parents should notify EECCPs of their cancellation as soon as they are aware. Parents who show up for EECCP care without calling in advance will not be guaranteed a child care spot. Failure to adhere to these guidelines may limit an EECCP's ability to serve your family going forward.

EECCPs that are unable to accommodate a reserved child care slot **MUST** notify the family immediately to allow them to secure an alternative child care option. EECCPs should notify EEC when care will not be available during a previously allotted day or time.

Child care services provided by any EECCP shall be available to essential workers and vulnerable families without discrimination on the basis of sex, race, color, creed, disability, sexual orientation, national origin or ancestry.

Required Family Paperwork and Fees

Parents will be required to sign EEC's Child Enrollment Form on the first day of utilization of the EECCP provider, confirming information about the child and acknowledging that EECCPs are not subject to EEC's licensing regulations at 606 C.M.R. 7.00. EECCPs will receive blank versions of these forms with the receipt of their approval to operate from EEC. EECCPs may require additional information of all parents at the time of drop-off. EEC expects that any additional information will be required of all

families in a uniform manner.

Emergency child care services will be provided for free to families by EECCPs, unless otherwise approved by EEC due to an existing relationship between the EECCP and an employer of essential employees. EECCPs can accept donations from families, provided that a family is not required to donate and no family is penalized by the donation policy.

Participation in Required Calls with EEC Regional Office

Each EECCP must designate a point of contact who will be responsible for communicating with an EEC Regional Team Member at least once, but no more than twice, a day. EEC Regional Team Members will initiate contact to collect daily attendance numbers and anticipated attendance for upcoming days. EECCPs may also use these calls to inform the Regional Team Member of any issues encountered during the day (e.g., more demand of their services than supply of slots, lines forming outside the program).

EECCPs may request phone calls with the EEC Regional Director to share concerns or request for guidance. These calls can be set up directly with the EEC Regional Director, upon request by an EECCP or EEC.

All participation, either as provider or utilizer of EECCP services, is at EEC's sole discretion for the duration of the State of Emergency. EEC's determinations with respect to participation in this emergency program are final and not subject to judicial review.