First Start Children’s Center

COVID-19 Family Handbook

2020 – 2022

First Start Children’s Center will take every precaution for your child to stay healthy! This handbook is a fluid document to help communicate and guide teachers and families during the current COVID-19 pandemic. As such, this guide may be adjusted based on the pandemic and emergent needs of the center. We will continue to follow all New Hampshire Child Care Licensing Rules, regulations, requirements and recommendations. Additionally, we will follow rules, regulations, requirements and recommendations of our local, state and federal government to protect the health and safety of our students, teachers and families.

**Arrival of Children**

All staff and children are expected to review and follow First Start Children’s Center’s health and travel questions below and found on our COVID-19 Self Attestation Form daily prior to entering the center. Parents and children over the age of 2 should wear a cloth face covering and report directly to their assigned classroom. Upon arrival in the classroom, the parent should sign the child into the classroom and keep the time in the classroom short. Teachers and parents should direct children to the bathroom to wash their hands before joining in play.

## Health and Travel Questions

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|  | **Yes** | **No** |
| 1. Are you or your child experiencing new and unexplained symptoms of a respiratory infection (cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fever or chills, sore throat)? | Stay home and seek COVID testing. Return with a negative COVID test result, fever free for 24 hours without medication and improvement of symptoms. | Welcome! |
| 1. Are you or your child experiencing new and unexplained generalized symptoms such as nasal congestion or runny nose, muscle or body aches, headaches, fatigue, vomiting/diarrhea, loss of sense of taste or smell? | Stay home and seek COVID testing. Return with a negative COVID test, fever free for 24 hours without medication and improvement of symptoms. | Welcome! |
| 1. Have you or your child been in close contact with a confirmed **COMMUNITY** case of COVID-19? | Exclude from the center for up to 10 days from the last contact with the infected person.  Seek PCR-based test day 5 after last exposure to the infected person.  Return to center with a negative test result on days 8 – 10. | Welcome! |
| 1. Have you or your child been a close **HOUSEHOLD** contact of person with a confirmed case of COVD-19? | Contact Center Director, Sally Wood, for individualized plan. | Welcome! |
| 1. Have you or your child traveled in the last 10 days on domestic public transportation (planes, buses, trains, boats)? | Return to the center with a negative antigen (rapid) test result on day 1 after trip.  Seek PCR-based test day 5 after trip. | Welcome! |

**Student Supplies**

To reduce the number of items coming and going from the center, we would like to keep as many of the items here as possible. Please be sure that your child has at least one set of spare clothes labelled with your child’s name or initials. We will launder them as needed with the daily loads we currently run. This includes nap time items and changes of clothing. We understand that some children have lovies or blankets that go back and forth daily. We will continue to respect children’s needs for these items. Please avoid bringing in stuffed animals to the largest extent possible.

**Departure of Children**

The door will be unlocked for end of the day sign-outs beginning at 3:00 pm. Parents, wearing a face cloth covering, will go directly to their child’s classroom and sign their child out. Please enjoy checking with the teacher(s) and keep your visit to the classroom brief. Should you need to pick up prior to 3:00 pm, please ring the door bell and you will be met at the door.

**Face Coverings**

All child care providers and other staff are **encouraged** to wear face coverings over their nose and mouth at **all times**, especially when 6 feet of social distancing is not able to be maintained and when caring for potentially vulnerable children with underlying health conditions or disabilities.

People wearing face coverings must not touch their eyes, nose, mouth, or face, or adjust their face covering without first sanitizing hands. After touching face or adjusting face covering, hands must be sanitized.

Face coverings are **REQUIRED** for all persons aged 2 years and older when **INSIDE** the building as a mitigation strategy especially during cold and flu season and increasing cases of COVID. Face coverings are **REQUIRED** when New Hampshire Public Health determines the community transmission in Merrimack County to be at the highest level of **SUBSTAINTIAL**.

**Handwashing**

Staff and children practice frequent hand hygiene including:

* Washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, such as on the playground, staff will use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol that is stored out of reach of children.
* Washing hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.
* Teachers supervise and help young children to ensure they are washing/sanitizing hands correctly, and to prevent swallowing of alcohol-based hand sanitizer. When soap and water are not readily available and hand sanitizer may be used with children under the direct supervision of staff. When not in use, hand sanitizer is kept out of reach of children (on a high shelf, cabinet, or in a backpack worn by staff outside).

At a minimum, handwashing is required:

* when arriving at the facility
* entering the classroom
* before and after meals or snacks
* before and during meal preparation or service as necessary to prevent cross contamination
* after outside time
* before and after going to the bathroom or each diaper change
* after handling any bodily fluid
* before and after medication administration
* after cleaning up and handling any garbage
* prior to leaving for home.

Children, families, and staff need to avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.

**Illness Policy and Monitoring**

If staff members or children (**fully vaccinated or not**) develop any new and unexplained symptoms of fever (subjective or documented 100.4 or higher), respiratory illness (cough, sore throat, runny nose, shortness of breath), mild flu-like illness (fatigue, chills, muscle aches), nausea, vomiting or diarrhea seek COVID testing.

Anyone with symptoms will need to contact their physician and schedule a COVID test. A person may return to the center once the following conditions are met:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Negative Results from a COVID Test (antigen or PCR based)** | **Positive Results from a COVID Test (antigen or PCR based)** |
| * Fever free for at least 24 hours without fever-reducing medications | * At least 10 days have passed since the onset of symptoms or positive test date |
| * Improvement in other symptoms | * Fever free for at least 24 hours without fever-reducing medications |
| * Alternate diagnosis from the physician | * Improvement in other symptoms |

**Any staff member, child or immediate family member diagnosed with COVID-19 must make the Director aware immediately. The Director will need to coordinate with NH Public Health to ensure the health and safety of the potentially exposed children, teachers, families and environment.**

Anyone with symptoms who is not tested and can be managed at home should self-isolate until:

* At least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared **AND**
* Fever free for at 24 hours without fever-reducing medications **AND**
* Improvement in other symptoms

In addition to monitoring for COVID-19 symptoms, we observe the children for all signs of illness. When children exhibit any of the following symptoms, we are required by New Hampshire Child Care Licensing rules to contact the child’s parent and inform them of the need to remove the child from the program:

* Skin lesions (rash) which have not been diagnosed or treated by a licensed health care practitioner

Children or staff who are determined ill will be isolated until they are able to leave the center. Parents are expected to quickly wrap up their work and pick up their child promptly to reduce the risk of exposure to the center’s staff, children and families.

**COVID Exposures and Exclusions**

* **Community Close Contact** with a confirmed case of COVID-19
  + If staff member or child is identified as a close contact (within 6 feet for 15 minutes or more in a 24-hour period) of a community member diagnosed with COVID-19 the following protocols apply:
    - Timely notification will be made by the Director or Enrollment Coordinator by phone, email or the Remind App.
    - Continue to attend as scheduled.
    - Watch for symptoms for 10 days.
    - Stay home and get tested if symptoms develop. (Rapid test preferred)
    - Even if no symptoms, get tested on day 5 after exposure. (PCR-based test preferred)
    - Wear a well-fitting face mask for 10 days after exposure when around other people.
  + If a classroom becomes a cluster with 3 or more linked cases, the classroom will be shut down for the recommended timeframe based on the exposure risk caused by the most recent reported positive case.
* **Household Close Contact** with a confirmed case of COVID-19
  + If an unvaccinated staff member or child is identified as a close household contact of a person diagnosed with COVID-19 the following protocols apply:
    - Exclusion from the center until 10 days have passed since last contact with the person during their infectious period.
    - Even if no symptoms, get tested on days 5 and/or 15 after exposure. (PCR based test preferred)
    - Return to center with negative test results as early as day 6 or 16 based on last contact with the infected person during their infectious period.
  + If a fully vaccinated (or is < 90 days post infection) staff member (primary series + booster) or child (primary series) is identified as a close household contact of a person diagnosed with COVID-19 the following protocols apply:
    - Continue to attend as scheduled.
    - Watch for symptoms for 10 days following exposure.
    - Get tested if symptoms develop. (Rapid test preferred)
    - Even if no symptoms, get tested on day 5 after exposure. (PCR based test preferred)
    - Wear well-fitting face mask for 10 days after exposure when around other people.
* **Travel**
  + If a staff member or child (fully vaccinated or not) travels on domestic public transportation (plane, bus, train, boat) the following protocols apply:
    - Return to the center with a negative antigen (rapid) test result on day 1 day after trip.
    - Test completed on day 5 after trip and copy of result.
    - Exclude and test if staff member or child becomes symptomatic between tests.

**Keeping Healthy**

Second Start is a strong community and encourages all eligible persons to get vaccinated to keep our community healthy and strong, especially for the young children who are not yet eligible for vaccination.

First Start Children’s Center will take every precaution for your child to stay healthy! Consistent handwashing and cleaning of the center will be performed many times during the day. Children will be required to wash their hands addition times throughout the day. This may cause your child’s hands to become red or even raw. Please consider using lotion nightly prevent them from becoming uncomfortable or even crack and bleed.

We need your help in keeping children and teachers healthy! It is the responsibility of the parents to be open and honest with teachers about any illnesses the child or parent may be experiencing. If we find this is not the case, families may be asked to leave the center.

**Physical Distancing**

We plan seating, bedding (head-to-toe positioning), and activities so that children are spread out as much as possible. They want to play together as this is an important part of their social/emotional development. We encourage them to spread out as much as possible while still making those valuable human connections.

Our classrooms consistently keep the same groups of children and staff together and avoid intermixing or interaction between groups during the day to the best of our ability. Due to staffing shortages, we need to get creative to keep children in the center and parents at work. Each classroom has an assigned playground time each morning and afternoon as well as their own set of playground toys.

We will not be using the cafeteria at this time as children will be eating in the classrooms.

**Classroom Cleaning**

The single most effective tool against this virus is cleaning and disinfecting. Children and teachers are washing their hands frequently throughout the day. We also have to wash the environment. We clean and disinfect items regularly throughout the day. The teachers have dishwashing liquid for the cleaning and a bleach solution for the disinfecting stocked daily in their classrooms. The closing teacher in the classroom will wash all of the counters, toy shelves, light switches, door handles, etc. before leaving for the day.

Our evening maintenance crew wash and disinfect the bathrooms and classroom sinks, sweep, clean and disinfect the tile floors, vacuume the carpets, and disinfect the counters, toy shelves, light switches, door handles, etc. before leaving the room for the night. Maintenance is currently using a disinfecting solution in a fogger for each classroom nightly. We are also considering bringing in hospital grade ultra violet technology for nightly classroom disinfection in addition to the daily classroom cleaning.

**Classroom Closures**

Full classroom exposures will occur when there is a cluster of three or more positive COVID cases in a single classroom. All exposed staff and children will follow the exclusion policy of a community close contact. All unexposed staff are expected to report to work as scheduled. Unexposed children will be allowed in the center when there is adequate staffing.

**Tuition Payments During COVID-19**

Our COVID best practices have come with a significant cost and is requiring us to operate at a loss week after week. We have applied for and received some grant monies to offset some of the losses. **New Hampshire’s Absent Due to COVID support is ending May 27, 2022**. Further, Absent Due to COVID only covers 10 business days of exclusion for a six-month period. Almost the whole center has exhausted their allotment and then some. Here is out plan to share the burden of COVID with families while still providing for our staff.

Tuition will be suspended:

* If a family experiences a household positive COVID test and has to isolate or quarantine
* If the center experiences a cluster or three or more positive COVID cases in a single classroom which closes the classroom, your child is excluded and you provided a negative test result for the exposed child to return when the classroom reopens.
* If a family chooses to quarantine and test on day 5 to return on day 6 for toddlers and preschool or day 11 for infants and minis.

Full tuition will be expected when:

* A family continues to attend after an identified community exposure.
* A family chooses not to test and instead isolates for 10 days after symptom onset
* A classroom reopens after a COVID closure.
  + This means that a family who chooses not to test their child and instead isolates for the full 10 days, will be charged for the gap days between the classroom reopening and the child’s physical return to care.

**Holidays**

The health and safety of everyone at First Start requires that everyone answer the illness and travel screening questions honestly and abide by the guidance. We urge you to follow the guidance on gatherings as well. We know this is the hardest especially because extended family and friends want to shower your children with love during the holiday season.

The CDC recommends the following guidance for safer ways to celebrate the holidays:

* Protect those not yet eligible for vaccination such as young children by getting yourself and other eligible people around them vaccinated.
* Wear well-fitting masks over your nose and mouth if you are in public indoor settings if you are not fully vaccinated.
  + Even those who are fully vaccinated should wear a mask in public indoor settings in communities with substantial to high transmission.
    - Outdoors is safer than indoors.
  + Avoid crowded, poorly ventilated spaces.
  + If you are sick or have symptoms, don’t host or attend a gathering.
  + Get tested if you have symptoms of COVD-19 or have a close contact with someone who has COVID-19.

If you are considering traveling for a holiday or event, visit CDC’s [Travel](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html) page to help you decide what is best for you and your family. CDC still recommends delaying travel until you are fully vaccinated.