

The Tennessee Department of Health provides the most current information on its website regarding COVID-19 and resources to learn and understand facts about the disease. This site has a wealth of information such as preparedness tools, practice tools for educational institutions and general information for the public. We encourage you to review these resources so you are fully aware of all precautionary measures and updates as they occur. <https://www.tn.gov/health/cedep/ncov.html>. The CDC also has specific guidance for child care environments: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html>.

Many organizations are wondering how they can help their communities by providing care for children whose schools are closed due to COVID-19 precautions. In light of the emerging need for temporary childcare, DHS is providing the following guidance for families and organizations as they consider providing group care for school-aged children.

If you wish to provide emergency childcare to support your community's response to COVID-19, please call 1-800-462-8261: select Option 1.

Below are some recommended guidelines for those considering offering emergency childcare:

Main areas to focus on in order to protect the health and safety of school age children in care include:

1. Registration with the Department of Human Services
2. Appropriate Caregivers
3. Ratios of Caregivers to Children
4. Appropriate Age Grouping of Children
5. Accountability Procedures
6. Facility Safety
7. Disease Management/ Medical Needs

Below is some basic guidance for each of these areas. This guidance does not serve as a substitute for licensure. It is intended simply as guidance for those who are considering offering temporary childcare, in response to school closures related to COVID-19.

1. Registration

The Department of Human Services asks that all emergency childcare facilities register with our office by calling **1-800-462-8261**: select **Option 1**.

2. Appropriate Caregivers

We will be asking the site lead to complete an abbreviated background check limited to public records. We will ask for a copy of the driver's license of any adult who will be working or volunteering in the emergency childcare facilities.

3. Ratios of Caregivers to Children

Ratios of caregivers to children are intended to support an appropriate level of supervision and provide for overall child well-being. Generally, when more than 12 children are present on the premises, a second adult should be physically available on the premises. The recommended adult/child ratio for school-aged children (kindergarten and above) is 1:20. For preschool aged children (ages 3-5), the recommended ratio is 1:13.

4. Appropriate Age Grouping of Children

To provide care that is safe and developmentally appropriate, it is recommended that children should be assigned to groups with similar aged children. Each child should be placed in a specific group that is assigned to a specific educator(s)/caregiver.

5. Accountability Procedures- such as Sign-in/out sheets

a. Maintain a daily sign-in and sign-out sheet that includes:

- (i) Each child's printed full name;
- (ii) Date;
- (iii) Time of entry;
- (iv) Time of departure; and
- (v) Space for printed name and signature of parent/guardian or authorized representative.

b. Maintain basic information about each child such as:

- (i) How to contact parents in case of emergency
- (ii) Any medical conditions or allergies

6. Facility Safety

Basic facility features should be present in order to protect the safety of children.

- a. Working Telephones
- b. At least 2 useable and unblocked exits for each area of care
- c. At least one working smoke detector in each area of care
- d. All toxic substances such as medicines, cleaning agents, insecticides, paints etc. must be stored out of children's reach and away from food
- e. Kerosene or other portable heaters must not be in use while children are present

- f. All weapons must be stored unloaded and locked away from children
 - g. Lighting, heating, and ventilation must be adequate for normal activities.
 - h. Power tools or other dangerous tools must be secured or otherwise inaccessible to children
 - i. Working indoor toilets should be available to children
 - j. Swimming pool areas must be inaccessible to children when not in use. Adult supervision is required at all times.
 - k. Should have emergency/disaster preparedness procedures in place
7. Disease Management/ Medical Needs
- a. Smoking and alcoholic beverages should not be allowed on the premises when children are present
 - b. Have a first aid kit available and appropriately stocked
 - c. Have parent permission to administer medication, including dosage. Have any special medicines for children labeled with child's name. All medications must be inaccessible to children.
 - d. Both hot and cold running water, soap, and towels should be available for hand washing
 - e. The receiving caregiver should observe each child upon arrival each day for signs of illness and injury
 - f. Designated staff should immediately contact a parent/guardian when a child shows sign of illness or infection.
 - g. A child showing signs of illness should be cared for apart from other children to the extent that supervision can be maintained for all children, and the parent should be contacted and arrangements made for pick up
 - h. Parents/guardians of every child enrolled should be notified immediately if a communicable disease has been introduced into the childcare facility
 - i. Handwashing should be encouraged at regular intervals throughout the day and upon specific circumstances such as before eating, after using the bathroom, and after sneezing, blowing the nose, or coughing into the hand
 - j. Clean/Sanitize frequently touched surfaces

Children younger than school age are particularly vulnerable and additional protections should be taken. Anyone wishing to offer group care (5 or more children unrelated to the caregiver) for children younger than school age should contact the Field Supervisor assigned to your area. You can find more information on your Field Supervisor here: <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/human-services/documents/Licensing-Field-Supervisor-List-3.17.20.pdf>

Childcare providers who are currently licensed by the Department of Human Services should follow these steps.

If your agency is impacted by COVID-19 (such as confirmed case of a child or educator), we ask that you contact your Licensing Program Evaluator via email. The email should include the following:

- *Agency Name and Address*
- *Contact Name and Contact information*
- *How your agency has been impacted by COVID-19*
- *Plan of action for your agency*
 - *For example: if an educator is sick, will you engage a substitute or close the agency?*
 - *If your agency is closed due to known contact; how will your agency clean to reduce further risk?*

- *Do you have a policy in place to prevent/mitigate future risk?*
- *How long you will be closed, if applicable?*

Our staff are prepared to discuss general program elements such as capacity, care categories, grouping, license transfers, and drop-in centers, as needed. Our staff will work with you to find solutions that will keep children safe and meet families' needs.