COVID-19 Child Care Operations Updates

On Friday, May 8, Governor Phil Scott announced that all regulated child care programs will be allowed to reopen as of June 1. In order to reopen, programs will need to meet updated health and safety guidelines that were released on Wednesday, May 13, 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. Additionally, the state created a Child Care Restart Stipend Program to support child care programs with reopening. More information is included in the reopening section of this document. It is important to share this update with families while letting them know that it will take some time for your program to figure out how and when to reopen.

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 and remain closed through April 5, 2020. On March 27, 2020, Governor Scott issued a new executive order directing schools to remain dismissed through the end of the 2019–2020 school year and extended the closure period for child care programs until further notice. 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 has been working to ensure that Vermont’s early care and education system remains supported through the extended closure period.

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, should not provide child care during closure or reopening periods unless discussed with a health care provider. 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 the COVID-19 closure, emergency child care period, and reopening period 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 are seeking.
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Information for Child Care Programs Preparing to Reopen

On Friday, May 8, Governor Scott announced that all regulated child care programs would be allowed reopen as of June 1. The Child Development Division and the Vermont Department of Health have developed resources to help child care programs with the reopening process. Let’s Grow Kids and other partners are also working to develop additional resources to help programs plan for when and how to reopen.

Updated Health & Safety Information

On Wednesday, May 13, 2020, the Vermont Department of Health updated its health and safety guidance for child care programs, schools, and summer. The guidance allows programs to have groups of up to 25 in size in a single space in accordance with child care licensing requirements already in place. The updated guidance also provides important information on health screening for children and early childhood educators, 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 a new webinar with Dr. Breena Holmes from the Vermont Department of Health about the new information here.

The Department of Health and Let’s Grow Kids are also working together to make various health information posters that include information for staff and families about the updated health guidelines:

- Program entrance posters
- Health check poster
- Handwashing posters

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 Program.” If you call after hours, 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:

- Adults 65 years of age and older
- People who have serious underlying medical conditions like:
  - Heart disease
  - Diabetes
  - Lung disease
  - Underlying immune disorders/people with compromised immune systems/people taking immune suppressant medications (examples of these disorders include Rheumatoid Arthritis, Crones 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.
Financial Supports for Reopening
The Child Development Division created a Child Care Restart Stipend Program to support child care programs with reopening. To qualify for a stipend, your program must:

- Be a regulated child care program or a day camp;
- Be located in Vermont and serve Vermont children;
- Provide half-day or full-day child care; and
- Reopen by July 6, 2020 if your program is normally open during the summer.

More information on the program is available through CDD’s FAQ for the program and through the program’s page on CDD’s website. The application process for the program closed as of 11:59 PM on Friday, May 22, 2020.

Stipend amounts were determined based on the number of requests received, the number of children served by your program each week, and the number of weeks your program will be providing care between June 1 and August 31, 2020.

Stipends will be issued between May 27 and June 17, 2020. Payment processing will be prioritized based on program reopening date for those that are currently closed and for programs currently providing essential child care.

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 and from this resource created by Gallagher, Flynn & Company, LLP, and through LGK’s 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.
Free Meals for Children in Care
During the month of June, child care programs are able to request free meals through your local school district for children 0-18 enrolled in your program. To participate in the program, contact your local school district or supervisory union to discuss the number of meals that you need throughout the week. Your school will work with you to determine a delivery plan. More information is available here.

PPE & Health Supplies
The Child Development Division is working with the State Emergency Operations Center to secure PPE and health supplies for child care programs. 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 is working with partners to offer resources that support child care programs in determining when and how to reopen. 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 Providing Essential Child Care
The state of Vermont developed this guidance document for child care programs and schools that are providing child care for essential personnel during the closure period. CDD recommends that priority be given to children with parents or guardians who are health care workers, first responders, and government employees who are helping to coordinate the COVID-19 response. Based on the governor’s child care reopening announcement, this guidance will remain in effect through May 31, 2020.

Health & Safety Information
The Vermont Department of Health has released guidance for child care programs and schools providing emergency child care for essential personnel. It includes information on group sizes, how to screen children and families for symptoms of COVID-19, and specific requirements for caring for children in emergency child care settings.

Let’s Grow Kids also worked with the Vermont Department of Health and CDD to host a webinar on health and safety practices for programs providing emergency child care. You can watch a recording of the webinar here.
Attendance and Enrollment
During the emergency child care provision period, programs are allowed to enroll new children using a modified enrollment procedure. More information on the modified enrollment process is available from CDD through the licensor-on-duty hotline (802-241-0837).

Supplemental Payments
Child care programs that provide emergency child care for essential workers will receive a $125 supplemental payment per child, per week during the emergency child care period. This does not need to be applied to tuition. More information is available from CDD’s guidance document and its updated FAQ document. These payments will remain in place through May 30, 2020. All invoices for the program must be submitted by 11:59 PM on June 7.

Resources for programs providing emergency school-age child care
Vermont Afterschool has a toolkit available for child care programs and schools offering child care for school-age children of essential personnel.

Additional Financial Supports for Child Care Programs
COVID-19 Child Care Stabilization Payments for Private Tuition
The state of Vermont created a program to help child care programs whose families are unable to pay their regular tuition during the COVID-19 closure period.

During the initial closure period from March 18, 2020 through April 5, 2020, the state of Vermont covered regular tuition not paid to a child care program on behalf of a family. To receive these payments, child care programs must have:

- Requested families to pay their full, regular tuition or CCFAP co-pay;
- Paid all of the program staff their full salary—for registered family child care homes, this is the owner/provider;
- Provided required information to CDD for processing of payments; and
- Maintained a slot for the child of the enrolled family regardless of whether the payment came from the state or the family.

During the extended closure period, beginning on April 6, 2020, and ending on May 30, 2020, the state of Vermont will cover half of any regular tuition on behalf of a family. To receive these payments, child care programs must:

- Ensure slots are maintained for children of families who pay at least 50% of their regular tuition and/or co-pay;
- Pay all program staff full salary; and
- Provide required information to CDD for processing of payments.

If a family is unable to pay 50% of their regular tuition or co-pay, programs may negotiate with families to pay less than 50% to hold their spot. If your program allows a family to pay less than 50% of their regular tuition or co-payment, the state will still only reimburse 50%. If you are unable to provide a scholarship or other financial support to a family, you may want to share information about Vermont’s Child Care Financial Assistance Program with them. A family may
be eligible for up to 12 weeks of child care financial assistance while searching for work and support them in paying to hold their spot during the closure period.

If a family is unable to pay their share of their tuition or chooses not to continue making payments and unenrolls their child during the extended closure period, a child care program may request 100% of the tuition (up to $360 per week) be covered through the Stabilization Payment Program. The child care program must certify that the family has unenrolled and no longer has a slot in the program. Families may be added to the program’s waitlist for a slot when normal operations resume.

To receive reimbursement, child care programs need to provide CDD with a copy of the message or letter sent to all families requesting tuition payments during the closure period; a copy of the program’s tuition structure or rates; and a completed invoice form.

To help you share information about the stabilization program with your families, Ken Schatz, commissioner of the Department for Children and Families (DCF) and Steven Berbeco, deputy commissioner of the DCF CDD, have written an explanation letter to families. Click here and here to view sample letters that you can modify and share with your families to go accompany the DCF letter.

For more information, review CDD’s guidance document, frequently asked questions for the program, and its updated FAQ document on financial support options for child care programs and families. Additional questions can be sent to katie.lavallee@vermont.gov. If you have specific questions about stabilization program payments, please contact Sarah Truckle at 802-241-0673 or Sarah.Truckle@vermont.gov.

Final invoices for the program must be submitted by 11:59 PM on June 7.

Act 166 – Universal Pre-K Tuition Payments
During the closure period, programs will continue to receive Act 166 UPK tuition payments for children who are enrolled in the program. The Agency of Education and the Agency of Human Services issued initial guidance on March 24, 2020 on how this works for early care and education programs that remain closed during the closure period and those that are open to provide emergency child care for essential workers. Updated guidance was issued on April 13, 2020 with more information on continuation of payments based on enrollment vs attendance and continuity of learning for pre-K students for the remainder of the 2019–2020 academic year.

The Agency of Education has also released a resource document for early educators to support your work from home with pre-K children for the remainder of the 2019–2020 academic year.

Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) Payments
During the closure period (March 16 through May 30, 2020), CCFAP payments are being made to programs based on children enrolled to attend and not on actual attendance. Please refer to the special closure period guidance manual for how to submit CCFAP attendance for child absences related to COVID-19. You can also review CDD’s updated FAQ document.
Beginning on June 1, 2020, only child care programs that reopen will receive CCFAP reimbursements. Reimbursements will be issued based on how a family utilizes care during the reopening process. Families are being instructed to consult with their eligibility specialist or CIS Specialized Child Care Coordinator to determine how to use their CCFAP supports. CCFAP staff will then contact an eligible child’s child care program, in writing, to specify the family’s approved billing codes. Billing code options that will be available during reopening include:

- Parent, guardian, and/or child are ill;
- Child is required to self-isolate;
- Vacation; or
- Family chooses to remain home for a period of time due to continued concerns regarding COVID-19.

The Child Development Division sent a letter to CCFAP families describing code options. You are also welcome to share this letter with families if you choose.

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 Paycheck Protection Program Loans
The Paycheck Protection Program is designed to help small businesses keep their workers on the payroll during the COVID-19 emergency response. Congress has just approved additional funding for the program.
When additional funding is made available, programs can apply through any existing SBA 7(a) lender or through any federally insured depository institution, federally insured credit union, and Farm Credit System institution that is participating.

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/disaster-assistance/coronavirus-covid-19, 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.
  - See the Payment Protection Program Loans information in this document for more details on forgivable loan options that can help you make your mortgage, rent, or lease payments.

Ongoing Supports
Whether your program will be reopening in the near future 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 on its website with information for child care and early education programs on topics including handwashing, health and safety guidance, COVID-19 supplies for child care programs, and financial supports.

Help & Support
If you have a question that is not addressed on this page, please contact the LGK 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.