Child Care Update — Closure Period Extended

On March 27, 2020, Governor Phil Scott issued a new Executive Order directing schools to remain dismissed through the end of the 2019–2020 school year and indefinitely extending the closure period for child care programs.

Child care programs providing emergency child care to the essential critical infrastructure workforce should continue operations; schools are also encouraged to continue providing emergency care where possible. If there are any additional child care programs that are willing and able to open to provide emergency child care, you are encouraged to do so. All other child care programs should remain closed.

What This Means for Child Care Programs

The governor’s executive order extends the child care closure period until further notice (likely at least through the end of the school year) and acknowledges that child care is critical to both Vermont’s COVID-19 response and the state’s economy. The state is working to ensure that Vermont’s early care and education system remains supported through the extended closure period.

Financial Resources During the Extended Closure Period

Emergency Child Care Providers
Child care programs that provide emergency child care for the essential critical infrastructure workforce during the closure and extended closure period will receive a $125 supplemental payment per child, per week during the emergency child care period. More information is available from the Child Development Division’s guidance document.

Child Care Financial Assistance Program
Beginning on March 16, 2020, Child Care Financial Assistance Program payments will be based on children who were enrolled in the program and were eligible for CCFAP and not on actual attendance. More information is available from the Child Development Division here. This policy will remain in effect through the extended closure period.

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

- Request families to pay their full, regular tuition or CCFAP co-pay;
- Pay all of the program staff their full salary--for registered family child care homes, this is the owner/provider;
- Provide required information to the Child Development Division for the processing of payments; and
- Maintain a slot for the child of the enrolled family regardless of whether the payment comes from the state or the family.

During the extended closure period, beginning on April 6, 2020, the state of Vermont will cover half of any regular tuition not paid to a child care program 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 the Child Development Division for the processing of payments.

If a family unenrolls their child during the extended closure period, a child care program may request 100% of the tuition (up to $360) from the state of Vermont. The program must certify that the family has unenrolled and no longer has a slot in the program.

For More Information

The Child Development Division’s COVID-19 page has links to all new guidance. CDD has also provided a document of Frequently Asked Questions and Examples to help explain the new measures.
Let’s Grow Kids (LGK), in coordination with partners, is working to compile information and resources for child care and early education programs and early childhood educators. This document will be updated regularly as guidance and resources evolve.

**Summary of Child Care Closure Guidance from the State**
Governor Phil Scott ordered child care programs to close, along with schools, effective Wednesday, March 18, 2020 through Sunday, April 5, 2020 (known as the closure period) to all families except essential personnel. All programs should have received a call from a Child Development Division (CDD) licensor to discuss the governor’s guidance.

The state has requested that programs serving essential personnel consider remaining open to provide care for only the children of such families. These families may need extended care, especially in the case of health care personnel who are working extended or multiple shifts, and programs are encouraged to offer care to meet these needs. Employees who meet the state’s definition of essential worker and who need help finding child care should complete this online form or call 2-1-1 ext. 6.

If you are immunocompromised, reside with someone who is compromised, are over 60 years of age, pregnant, the parent of an infant, or have other mental health or medical needs that could be impacted by remaining open, and you currently serve children with parents or guardians who are essential personnel, you are encouraged not to work. Arrangements will be made with other programs to provide care to children of impacted personnel. It is important to protect your health and the health of your family. Licensors have been asking programs if they are willing to provide care to additional children with parents or guardians who are essential personnel if needed.

LGK is sharing ideas and questions with the state as they work to develop additional clarification around closure guidance. This document is not intended to be a substitute for reviewing the guidance provided by the state.

**Providing Emergency Child Care for Essential Personnel**
The state of Vermont has updated its guidance document for child care programs and schools that are providing emergency child care for essential personnel.

**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).

Employees who meet the state’s definition of essential worker and who need help finding child care should complete this online form or call 2-1-1 ext. 6. The state will use its child care referral service to match children with open child care programs.
Health & Safety Information
The Vermont Department of Health has developed a new resource for child care programs and schools providing emergency child care for essential personnel. It includes clarification 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.

Financial support for programs serving essential personnel
CDD is developing supports for additional per-child-served funding for child care programs that remain open to serve essential personnel during the closure period.

Program Closure Information & Resources
This section provides more information on how to develop a closure strategy, how to track important information during the closure period, and resources that may provide assistance with operating costs, utilities, and mortgage or rent payments. Additional resources and sections will be added as information becomes available.

Determining an Operations Strategy for the Closure Period
Child care programs across the state are assessing their individual situations, considering their families, staff, and community needs. Some considerations include:

- Program policies—current and potential temporary adjustments
- Fiscal implications for the program
- Financial implications for families
- If your program serves families of essential employees.

It is important to notify your families of the closure, your general operations plan, and your policies regarding payments during the closure period. Click here and here to view sample closing letters that you can modify and share with your families (courtesy of Robin’s Nest in Burlington and Reeva Sullivan Murphy). If your program will be closing, you can let families know that if they are essential personnel and need child care during the closure period, they can use this webform to request help finding child care or contact Vermont 2-1-1, families can dial 2-1-1 from their phone or visit this link for more info.

Business Practices During the Closure Period
During the closure period, it’s important to continue to actively manage your program. Some considerations include:

- Document all revenue losses, such as lost tuition, and all continued expenses, such as rent/mortgage, utilities, insurance, wages and benefits, etc. Emergency funding may become available from local, state, or federal sources and documentation will likely be important to apply for any such program.
- 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.

More information and resources are available through SharedServicesVT.org.
Tuition payments
During the closure period, your program has options regarding how to handle tuition collection and finance program operations:

- Families continue to make payments in full, partial, or on a sliding scale; or
- Suspend collection of payments.

Here are some ways LGK has learned that Vermont programs are continuing to collect tuition:

- Ask families who have not seen their income reduced to continue to pay.
- Ask all families to continue to pay and offer to provide a credit on future tuition bills once the full financial impact on the program is assessed.
- Ask families to pay what they are able.
- Ask families to continue to pay and continue to provide educational services and supports to families virtually.

Financial Assistance for Child Care Programs With Families Unable to Pay Tuition or Co-Pays
If a family cannot afford to pay tuition during the closure period, the State of Vermont has created a program to support child care programs whose families are unable to afford tuition payments or co-payments. In order to be eligible for the program, child care programs must be able to certify that staff are paid during the closure period and that families were asked to continue making payments. To receive reimbursement, child care programs will 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. For more information, review CDD’s guidance document for the program. Click here to review CDD’s new frequently asked questions for the program.

Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) Payments
CCFAP payments will continue during the closure period and will be 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.

Act 166 – Universal Pre-K Tuition Payments
The Agency of Education and the Agency of Human Services are continuing to refine guidance related to the provision of emergency child care for children enrolled in Act 166 universal pre-K. We will continue to provide updates as information and resources are developed.

Additional Funding Support
For programs in need of immediate financial assistance, the Small Business Administration’s Economic Injury Disaster Loans offer 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.
Utilities, Mortgage Payments, and Rent/Lease Support
Some utility companies, mortgage lenders, and landlords have put emergency measures into place to support 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.

Engage with Families During the Closure Period
During the closure period, you can continue to be a resource to your families to help them navigate family challenges, provide resources and information, and support the continued healthy development of the children who attend your program.

- **During the closure period, it’s still possible to apply the principles of the Strengthening Families Framework.** In times of uncertainty, the teacher/program and parent relations are vital in preventing child abuse and neglect. Check in with families; offer concrete supports such as information on resources from the Vermont Department for Children and Families, child development and parent resources; share ideas for building social connections while physically distancing; and monitor and promote parent resilience.

- **Continue to communicate with families**
  - Encourage two-way communication with families
    - Ask families to share something from their day and support families in understanding what children need and how to maintain their child’s relationship with their teacher during the closure period.
    - Respond with resources or suggested activities.
  - Choose at least one social media format to use to be in touch with families each day
    - Instagram, Facebook (create a private page for only your families), YouTube, Zoom, or Email
    - Use your social media to share information on things to explore each day
    - Share videos of staff reading stories or set up a regularly-scheduled virtual story/circle/music and movement time(s) so that children can remain connected to their teachers and help families have a few minutes to take a breath.
    - Social media examples from other child care programs:
      - Pine Forest Story Time
      - Montpelier Children’s House Morning Meeting
      - Little Red House is using 30-minute videos
      - Burlington Children’s Space has created a private Facebook group to share activities.
  - Let parents/guardians know that you can still be a resource during the closure period. Let them know they can ask questions about their children’s behavior, ways to help children pursue interest areas, etc. Some key topics to flag for families include:
    - Adjusting to new routines.
    - New behaviors never encountered before as children adjust to new situations and experience powerful emotions.
Learn & Connect
During our state and nation’s response to COVID-19, there are many groups working to support child care programs and early childhood educators through webinars, resources, and new peer networks.

- Join the Strengthening Families National Network Facebook group to connect with others in the field, share how your program is adapting to these times, and find out what others are doing to support children and families.
- Register for the Center for the Study of Social Policy’s webinar on Flourishing Families, scheduled for April 9 (3 – 4 PM) to learn more about a curriculum created by five certified “Bringing the Protective Factors Framework to Life in Your Work” trainers in Arizona.

Resources for Staff
As you plan for staffing, please keep in mind that federal and state policy changes and new legislation will likely offer additional supports in the near future.

Unemployment Benefits
Employees who are laid off or have hours reduced because of COVID-19 are typically eligible for unemployment benefits; employers may designate the lay off as temporary. Unemployment insurance benefits typically only replaces about half of an employee’s wages.

The Vermont Department of Labor has created a new, on-line system for filing unemployment claims to support workers who have been adversely affected by COVID-19.

For support with your claim or if you receive a denial, visit Vermont Law Help’s unemployment benefits page with specific information about unemployment benefits and COVID-19.

Additional policy changes are under consideration by state leaders such eliminating the waiting period.

Health Insurance
If you do not currently have health insurance, Vermont Health Connect has temporarily opened enrollment to provide immediate health insurance coverage to uninsured Vermonters. Financial verifications have been temporarily waived for enrollment. Visit Vermont Health Connect’s website or call 1-855-899-9600 for more information.

Vermont 2-1-1
This free service for all Vermonters lets you talk to specialists, including trained health care professionals and child development specialists, who answer questions on topics such as: utility, mortgage/rent, food, and unemployment assistance and resources; free or low-cost internet options; health concerns; and child development. Dial 211 or call 802-652-4636 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week), or text your ZIP code to 898211 (Monday through Friday, from 8 AM–8 PM).

Protecting Your Health
The national Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration had developed a tips sheet to help people understand social distancing, quarantine, and isolation.

Self-care is also an important consideration during this time. The Vermont Department of Mental Health has compiled information on mental health during this time.
**Ongoing Supports**

Whether your program has shifted to remote operations or is providing emergency child care for essential personnel, you still have access to many supports and resources in Vermont’s early care and education system.

**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. The Vermont Department for Children and Families also has [specific COVID-19 information](#) for child care CIS services providers.

**Additional Frequently Asked Questions**

CDD has compiled a [frequently asked questions resource](#) to help answer questions they have been receiving from the field.

**Questions**

If you have a question that is not addressed on this page, please contact the LGK team at [info@letsgrowkids.org](mailto: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.