

SEPTEMBER 2020



Hamilton-Wentworth  
Catholic District School Board

*Believing, Achieving, Serving*

# Early Years COVID-19 Guidelines

- Kindergarten
- Early Years Hubs/EarlyON
- Childcare



**Please note:** The term **cohort** is used to describe the group of children and educators within one classroom. These guidelines are based on current Public Health recommendations. This guidance is subject to change as new information regarding COVID-19 becomes available. The HWCDSB acknowledges that changes may require educators to make adjustments and adaptations to their classroom environment using their professional judgement.

## Principles

The Kindergarten Program reflects the belief that all children, created in the image of God, are viewed as competent, curious, capable of complex thinking, and rich in potential and experience. It approaches children as unique individuals who live and learn within families and communities. Based on these beliefs, and with knowledge gained from research and proven in practice, **The Kindergarten Program:**

- supports the creation of a learning environment that allows all children to feel comfortable in applying their unique ways of thinking and learning;
- is built around expectations that are challenging but attainable;
- is flexible to respond to individual identities, strengths, needs and circumstances;
- provides every child with the kind of support they need in order to develop:
  - self-regulation;
  - health, well-being, and a sense of security;
  - emotional and social competence;
  - curiosity, creativity, and confidence in learning;
  - respect for diversity, equity and inclusion;
- supports engagement and ongoing dialogue with families about their children's learning and development (*Kindergarten Program*, pg.8).

These key philosophies of the Kindergarten Program are important aspects to reflect on as children return to school amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The belief that children are competent, capable and full of potential promotes the understanding that children will adapt to the new health and safety protocols as they transition back to school. It also supports the understanding that children will be successful regardless of the change to some of the typical routines of the program. Educators in the Kindergarten Program are in the best position to help support children and families during this time.





## Objectives

The purpose of this guide is for educators to reflect on how best to incorporate all the fundamental aspects of the Kindergarten Program while adhering to health and safety protocols set out by Public Health officials. This may be a time for educators to reflect, rethink and remodel some aspects of their program in order to best respond to the individual identities, strengths and needs of the children in their classroom and ensure the health and safety of everyone.

## Preparing for the Transition Back to School

Social-emotional learning is an important part of a child's development. In light of the current situation, it is important to be mindful of the two groups of students we will be welcoming back. The Year 2 Kindergarten students know what school was like, and have been challenged with an extended time away from familiar routines, relationships, and learning. The Year 1 students are new to school, and will experience the challenges that come with transitioning to school for the first time, notwithstanding what they have been experiencing over the last several months at home.

As such, intentional learning opportunities should be created that support the social emotional learning of these students, as well as efforts to build a learning environment that is welcoming, safe, and to which each child feels as though they belong. Tools for Life continues to be our anchor program for teaching social emotional skills, and should be integrated into all elements of learning, especially in the early days of the school year. Faith learning, including Christian meditation will continue to be an integral part of Kindergarten programming.

Classroom routines and procedures are key in establishing a safe and welcoming learning environment. It has never been more important to build relationships with students and families. Flexibility, patience, compassion, understanding, and hope are values that we can impart on our students and their families, as we all move forward to embrace the new school year.

## Professional Practice

As an educator team in the Kindergarten classroom, a teacher and early childhood educator, are governed and licensed professionals under their respective colleges and adhere to a set of professional standards in their line of work. These two professional bodies intersect when it comes to the needs of children within their care. During these challenging times, it is important for both Kindergarten educators to reflect on their professional standards and how it impacts their professionalism in and out of the classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Well-Being

Catholic educators recognize each person is created in the image of God and are called to support the full flourishing of each child – body, mind and spirit. This holistic support necessitates concern for the well-being of our youngest learners (Ontario Catholic School Kindergarten Program 2019).

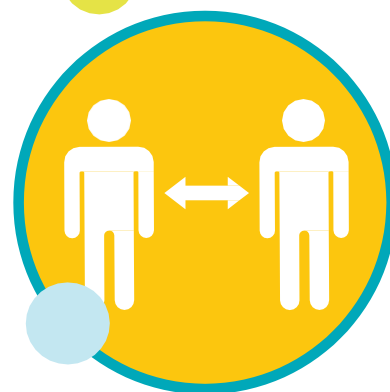
Play is a vehicle for learning and can be a way for children to show their thinking and understanding. It can be a way for children, especially for those who may have experienced trauma related to the impacts of COVID-19, to communicate their thoughts and feelings. Play promotes growth in their physical and emotional development, and gives young learners an outlet for their thoughts, concerns, and emotions. The current situation presents many challenges for social interactions, but play can be used as a way for children to communicate their understandings about the pandemic. It is important for educators to be mindful of this understanding and continue to deliver a program that promotes the needs of the whole child.

# Health and Safety Protocols

“Educators are responsible for ensuring the safety of the children, both in and out of doors. Educators also strive to develop in children an awareness of the importance of staying healthy and safe. In Kindergarten, children begin to develop a sense of responsibility for their health, well-being, and safety. They learn about the importance of playing, exploring, and investigating in safe ways to prevent injury to themselves and others.”

The Kindergarten Program, pg.106

- **Physical distancing of one metre between children.**
- **Spreading children out into different areas, particularly at meal and dressing time.**
- **Incorporate more individual activities or activities that encourage more space between children.**
- **Use visual cues to promote physical distancing** (ex.: painters tape, stop signs, posters, etc.).
- **Encourage children to wash their hands for at least twenty seconds after the use of each material.**
- **PPE will be available to educators** (gowns, masks, face shields, gloves) **in order to physically and emotionally support children when needed.**
- **Remove materials that cannot be easily cleaned** (ex.: plush toys, dress-up clothes, etc.).
- **Items can be quarantined for 72 hours (3 days) after use, without having to be cleaned.**



# Kindergarten Program Overview

Educators are encouraged to reflect, rethink and remodel certain aspects of their program during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure health and safety protocols are being followed where possible. The HWCDSB acknowledges that the adjustments necessary to keep both students and educators safe will create some new challenges. It will require educators to problem solve, to think creatively and to maintain an asset lens to support children and families.

## How your program can stay the same:

- Educators are flexible and to adapt to the individual strengths and needs of children and families.
- Educators engage in positive, supportive relationships with all families, children and the school community.
- Educators co-plan and co-teach as a team.
- A variety of play-based learning opportunities, open-ended tasks, and provocations are available to children.
- Educators create opportunities for inquiry and small/large group instruction.
- Outdoor learning takes place to support the needs of the children.
- Educators structure the flow of the day based on the needs of the children in their classroom.
- Educators engage and represent student voice.
- Programming is based on children's' strengths and needs rather than age.
- Educators will continue to foster a culture of respect, equity and inclusion.



# The Classroom Environment

Educators plan and begin to create the learning environment before the children arrive in the classroom, using their understanding of children, of their development, and of how they learn, and looking at the space from a child's perspective. They place materials and resources where children can see them and ensure that children have plenty of light and a view of (and if possible, access to) the outdoors. They consider how to create an environment that will support children's learning and accommodate a diversity of choices and needs in terms of space, time, and the use of materials. (Kindergarten Program, pg.30)

## What Can Stay the Same

- Efforts are made to create a **warm, welcoming, safe, accessible, respectful, inviting and inclusive environment** (ex.: student work displayed, pictures, plants, etc.)
- There is representation of student voice.
- Learning goals and success criteria are visible.
- A variety of learning opportunities are available to students.
- Children have choice in activities and available materials.
- Area(s) are provided for self-regulation and calming.
- The outdoors are viewed as an extension of the classroom throughout the day.



## Adjustments for Success

- Limit access to materials based on cleaning protocols.
- Some storage spaces or materials may be covered.
- Create a designated area/space/bin for items that need to be cleaned.
- Toys to be cleaned on a daily basis.
- Limit the number of children in the cubby area to promote physical distancing.
- Spread chairs out to maintain one metre distance.
- Rethink whole group learning space to facilitate physical distancing:
  - Use flex seating (chairs, tables, floor space, outdoors, etc.) for whole group instruction to promote physical distancing;
  - Consider moving to smaller group instruction to maintain physical distancing.
- Use visuals to section off areas or activities to maintain one metre distance.
- Keep frequently used surfaces clear and clutter-free to allow for proper cleaning procedures.
- Consider sectioning off parts of the outdoor learning environment to separate each cohort.





# Play-Based Learning

Play is a vehicle for learning and rests at the core of innovation and creativity. It provides opportunities for learning in a context in which children are at their most receptive. Play and academic work are not distinct categories for young children, and learning and doing are also inextricably linked for them. It has long been acknowledged that there is a strong link between play and learning for young children, especially in the areas of problem solving, language acquisition, literacy, and mathematics, as well as the development of social, physical, and emotional skills. (Kindergarten Program, pg.18)

## What Can Stay the Same

- Opportunities for inquiry.
- Variety of materials made available, both indoors and outdoors, that can be shared within the cohort and easily cleaned. Some examples include but are not limited to:

- ☐ Plastic manipulatives (linking cubes, dominoes, counters, pattern blocks, etc.)
- ☐ Finished wooden blocks
- ☐ Whiteboards

- ☐ Plastic dramatic play items
- ☐ Wooden puzzles
- ☐ Loose Parts

- ☐ Lego/Duplo
- ☐ Marble Run/Works
- ☐ Magnetic Tiles
- ☐ Balls



## Adjustments for Success

Remove items that cannot be easily cleaned, for example:

- Natural materials (tree cookies, wicker baskets, porous materials, etc.)
- Soft materials (blankets, dress-up clothing, cloth babies, etc.)
- Cardboard puzzles, puppets, carpets, and foam mats

Create individual supply bags / containers (ex.: labeled bags); for supplies such as:

- Pencils, Erasers, and Crayons
- Glue sticks, and markers
- Playdough, and other materials needed daily that cannot be easily cleaned

Dramatic play:

- Limit the amount of materials available to children
- Limit the number of students at the centre
- Consider having various 'sections / roles' in the dramatic center to limit contact between children while still engaging in play together (i.e.: in a doctor's office there may be a receptionist, a patient, a technician, a doctor, etc.)

Art materials:

- For single-use materials, reconsider how they will be stored and accessed by students (ex.: feathers, googly eyes, paint, pompoms, etc.)

Sensory bins:

- Consider single-use sensory bins
- Consider rotating bins daily to allow for 72-hour quarantine

Books and reading:

- Independent / leveled / guided reading – use individual reading bags
- Classroom library – pick a small selection that can be rotated to allow for 72-hour quarantine (ex.: Children are provided with an individual collection of books on each Monday that stays with them until Thursday when books are returned for quarantine).
- Home reading – online reading options, such as Raz Kids (school purchase)/ Epic / StoryLine Online

Outdoor learning tools:

- Use only materials that can be easily cleaned
- Separate and / or rotate materials between each cohort

# Flow of the Day

“Kindergarten educators carefully consider how the use of time and space affects the children’s learning. At the beginning of the year, the educators work collaboratively to set the classroom up for learning and to plan the “flow of the day”. They work around daily school schedules (ex.: times for gym, lunch, recess, and library) in order to provide as much uninterrupted time as possible for children’s play and inquiry, both in and out of doors, and to minimize transitions.” (Kindergarten Program, pg. 30).

## What Can Stay the Same

- Large blocks of uninterrupted play.
- Minimize transitions throughout the day.
- Self-regulated snack.
- Time for small and large group instruction while continuing to support physical distancing.
- Seamless transitions between indoor and outdoor learning environments.

## Adjustments for Success

- All children must wash/sanitize their hands after hanging up their belongings when entering the classroom at the start of the day or after lunch time.
- Encourage children to wash their hands, for at least 20 seconds, whenever they switch to a new material (ex.: a child moving from building a tower to making a pattern with bear counters is encouraged to wash their hands in between).
- Throughout the day, use both learning environments (indoor and outdoor) and both educators to promote physical distancing.
- Explicitly teach new health and safety routines (ex.: hand washing, physical distancing, etc.) and bathroom routines in an age appropriate manner.
- Be prepared for entry and exit to take longer to ensure physical distancing in cubby area.
- Teach and reinforce greetings that promote physical distancing (instead of high-fives, hugs, consider air high-fives or verbal greetings).



I wash my hands  
when my play is done  
Staying healthy  
and clean  
helps EVERYONE!

# Teaching & Learning in the 4 Frames

“In the Kindergarten program, four “frames”, or broad areas of learning, are used to structure thinking about learning and assessment. The frames – Belonging and Contributing, Self-Regulation and Well-Being, Demonstrating Literacy and Mathematics Behaviours, and Problem Solving and Innovating – are designed to support an approach that aligns with the way children’s learning naturally occurs and that focuses on aspects of learning that are critical to young children’s development. The frames reflect the integrated way in which learning occurs during children’s play and inquiry in Kindergarten.” (Kindergarten Program, pg.13)

## What Can Stay the Same

- Foster positive relationships with children and their families to create an inclusive, welcoming and respectful environment
- Pedagogical documentation to support childrens’ learning.
- Assessment based on overall expectations.
- Learning goals and success criteria co-created with students.
- Co-creation of environment when possible (ex.: routines/norms).
- Childrens’ needs and interests are incorporated in programming.
- Discussions and collaboration among students.

## Adjustments for Success

- Limiting the number of children during small groups to allow for physical distancing.
- Reconsider on-going communication with families that promotes physical distancing. Some examples include but are not limited to:
  - Online communication tool, myClass, and phone calls
- Embed health and safety requirements and protocols when planning and implementing instruction.
- Foster growth and development in students by teaching and embedding health and safety protocols in programming.
- When comforting/supporting a child, use professional judgement and consider the health and well-being of each child.
  - Follow health and safety protocols (ex.: wash/sanitize hands), wear PPE (ex.: gloves, gowns, etc.)

# Arrival & Dismissal

## Families

Parents/guardians should not enter the school. Those who are dropping off and picking up Kindergarten students are encouraged to:

- Maintain physical distance from other adults and children.
- Wear face coverings.
- Arrive at bell time.
- Remain outside the Kindergarten play area and leave immediately after dropping off or picking up their child.
- Where possible, recommend that only one parent/guardian do drop-offs and pick-ups.

## Staff

- Kindergarten team members will receive and dismiss Kindergarten students from the Kindergarten play area where possible.
- Staff are encouraged to release children to caregivers one at a time, maintaining distance from other cohorts.

# Lunch & Snacks

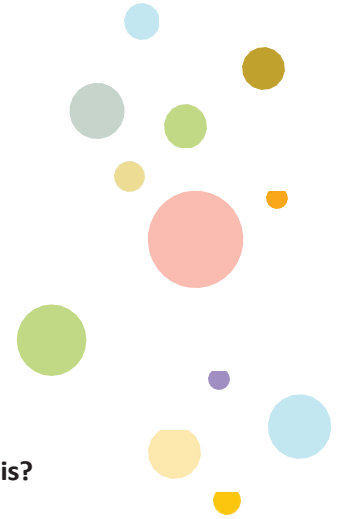
Lunch and snack times may have to be rotated to allow for limited seating per table. Ensure that adequate hand washing is being monitored before and after eating.

# Proactive Suggestions for a Positive Start

- A video of educators putting on PPE.
- Picture of educators in and out of their PPE.
- An email letter sent to children and families the week prior to school starting to welcome them.
- Create a visual cue (button, picture, etc.) of educators smiling face to wear on clothing.
- Creation of '1 metre mascot' to help students understand physical distancing.
- Rhyming poems to easily remember new routines *"I wash my hands when my play is done, staying healthy and clean helps everyone!"*

## Educator Questions for Reflection

- How can my colleagues and I support each other?
- What cues can I look for to determine how children may be feeling?
- How can I support children who may be stressed or fearful?
- How can I engage families in a meaningful way?
- What was my best moment today and how can I have more moments like this?
- What was my most challenging moment and why? How will I respond next time?







## Extended Day Kindergarten, Before and After School Programs and After School Recreation Programs

The HWCDSB plays a critical role in the childcare and early years sector. The HWCDSB provides a Catholic school culture where school and childcare operators work collectively with families to build cohesion and alignment across early years pedagogy and strong connections between children, families, and early years professionals and educators.

### Duty to Operate

Under the Education Act, school boards are required to ensure the provision of a before and after school program on every instructional day for every elementary school where there is sufficient demand and/or viability.

This year it is critical that schools and child care partners work together to ensure that all health and safety requirements set out by the Ministry of Education and Public Health for both core-school program delivery and extended day before and after school program delivery.

### Groupings

Best practices to limit interactions between students from different classes and reduce transmission of COVID-19 may include:

- Making best efforts to group the before and after school program class with the same core day class (ex.: determining core day classes based on whether the child is enrolled in the before and after school program).
- Making use of large, well-ventilated spaces (gymnasium) or outdoor spaces as much as possible.
- Provide accommodations for regular start to school for all children that require childcare.

## Cleaning and Disinfecting

School custodial staff, school administration and child care staff will meet to plan the Before / After school and childcare cleaning procedures.

## Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

All child care staff are required to wear a medical mask and eye protection (ex.: face shield) while inside the school. All children enrolled from K to Grade 12 will be required to wear a mask. The Ministry of Education will supply all child care programs with appropriate PPE.

Reasonable exceptions to the requirement to wear a mask are expected to be put in place by child care providers. Reasonable exemptions for medical conditions, Human Rights Code related needs or special circumstances will be accommodated short of undue hardship and must be consistent between core day and extended day programs.

PPE is not required during outdoor programming, unless physical distancing cannot be maintained.

## Screening

All individuals including children attending before and after school programs must be screened each day before entering the program. Children who have been screened for symptoms prior to entering the before and after school program would not need to be re-screened for the core day program. Similarly, an individual that has been screened prior to the before school program or core day program, would not need to be re-screened for the after school program. All screening stations must be equipped with proper hand sanitizer that contains 60% to 90% alcohol content.

Daily screening should be tracked by child care and a plan should be in place to allow for communication between school/core day and before and after school program staff regarding screening.

If an individual does not pass the screening and is not permitted to attend the program, the child care staff will communicate this to the local public health unit and the school Administrator.

## Pick Up and Drop Off Procedures

Parents and visitors will not be able to enter the school building. Child Care staff will ensure that anyone dropping or picking up their child does not go past the screening area. School administrators and child care staff will collaborate to develop procedures that support physical distancing and the separation of children as best as possible (ex.: children from the Kindergarten extended day program enter door A and children from the school age program enter door B).

## Attendance Records

Child Care will maintain daily attendance records of anyone entering the shared space child care room and note the approximate length of their stay. This includes school custodians, classroom core day educators, support staff, school Administrators etc. The records will include name, contact information, time of arrival/departure, screening completion/result and must be kept up-to-date and available to facilitate contact tracing in the event of a confirmed COVID-19 case or outbreak.

## Illness Protocols

A single, symptomatic, laboratory confirmed case of COVID-19 in a staff member or child will be considered a confirmed COVID-19 outbreak, in consultation with Hamilton Public Health. Any student or staff member that is symptomatic or has been advised to self-isolate will not be able to attend the program. If a child becomes symptomatic during the child care before and after school program, they are to be isolated in the designated school illness room and their families contacted to arrange pick-up. The use of the space is to be communicated with school administrators and custodial staff to ensure the space is properly cleaned and disinfected. Please refer to Public Health protocols for further information on best practices when someone demonstrates symptoms of illness.

## Washrooms and Toileting

The Ministry has recommended that only one group access the washroom at a time and recommend that the facilities be cleaned twice per day and in between cohorts. School Administrators, Head Custodians and Child Care Supervisors should work collectively to develop a plan.

## Space Set-Up and Physical Distancing

We recognize that it will be challenging to keep children physically distanced in the before and after school program and encourage educators to maintain a welcoming and caring environment at all times. The Ministry of Education has developed a document to support your practice entitled 'Building On How Does Learning Happen?', this tool provides ideas on how to deliver an engaging environment while physically distancing.

Each group will have their own assigned indoor space, separated from all other groups by a physical barrier (if space is large such as a gymnasium). The physical barrier should begin at the floor and reach a minimum height of 8 feet to ensure that it will always be 12 inches taller than the tallest person in the program space. The purpose of the barrier is to reduce the spread of respiratory droplets that are thought to transmit COVID-19 and to reinforce physical distancing requirements between groups/cohorts.

When using common spaces such as hallways and entrances, physical distancing of at least 2 metres should be maintained between different groups/cohorts and should further be encouraged between children in the same group/cohort.

Shared spaces that have not been cleaned in between groups/cohorts cannot be used.

## Food Preparation and Provision

Child care will continue to provide morning and afternoon snacks ensuring that there is no self-serve or sharing of food, utensils must be used to serve food and all food items are pre-packaged or individually served. Families are not permitted to send food to child care and children will not be able to eat anything left in their lunch or snack bags during their time in care.

Children will not prepare or engaged in any type of food preparation. Food prep areas will continue to be used by child care, following safe food handling cleaning and sanitization practices as set out by Public Health. Where food preparation is located in a shared staff room or kitchenette, it will be important that the space is cleaned and sanitized after each use, effective hand hygiene is practiced and appropriate PPE is worn.

## Early Years Support

Please access the Early Years Resource Guide and *Best Practices for Shared Spaces* document.



## HWCDSB Early Years Hubs/EarlyON Guidelines

The Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board partners with family support and early years agencies that provide programming for children ages 0-4 and their caregivers. We play a critical role in the early years sector by providing environments where services can be co-located and integrated for the purpose of reducing transitions, building cohesion and alignment across early years pedagogy and stronger connections between children, families, and early years and school professionals and educators. Now more than ever school board leadership is vital to supporting comprehensive and continuous education.

Early Years programs are essential for the growth and development of our youngest learners, programs are designed to enhance children's development and provide parents and caregivers with tools to further their child's learning, development and emotional well-being at home.

Early Years/EarlyON programs will continue to follow the Ministry of Education's 'How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years' (HDLH) guide. This guide acts as a key support for children, families and educators as they navigate the challenges that have been brought on with COVID-19.

### Locations

To ensure all children, families and educators in our school buildings remain safe at all times, we are only going to allow Early Years Hubs that have exclusive space within our school buildings to operate. Where a location has an exclusive space with a need for a shared washroom facility, conversations regarding safety and distancing must take place at the school level between the Early Years Hub supervisor and the school Administrator. If the washroom cannot be safely accessed, then the decision to delay opening will be fully supported.

## Program Delivery

All Early Years Hub programming will need to be delivered through registered programming to all staff to collect contact information, conduct screening and review health and safety protocols for those in the program. Partners will follow their own policies and procedures related to registration and reservations in to programs they operate. All programs must operate with physical distancing measures in place.

Families and caregivers who have not registered or signed up in advance will not be permitted to access the Early Years Hub/EarlyON space.

## Outdoor Programming

Many of our EarlyON programs have provided outdoor programming over the summer months. This practice is strongly encouraged to continue as a program delivery model. Where this is offered on school grounds, early years partners will be required to collaborate with school Administrators to ensure that there is no conflict with school recess and outdoor classroom times.

## Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

All staff members are required to wear a medical mask and eye protection (i.e. face shield) while inside the building.

All adults (parents/caregivers) are required to wear a face covering or non-medical mask while inside the building.

Masks are not recommended for children under the age of 2, any child over the age of two involved in the registered programming should be encouraged to wear a mask.

Reasonable exemptions for medical conditions, Human Rights Code related needs or special circumstances will be accommodated short of undue hardship.

## Cleaning and Disinfecting

Early Years Hubs/EarlyON programs must follow the advice of Hamilton Public Health to develop policies and procedures on their day to day operations. School Board custodial staff will do one complete clean of the space on a nightly basis.

Early Years Hub/EarlyON educators are encouraged to keep an active cleaning log in place.



## Screening for COVID-19 Symptoms

All individuals including children, staff, parents and caregivers must be screened each day before entering the school building. Program staff will remind parents and caregivers of the screening requirement at the time of registration as well as through visible signage on entry doors. Early Years Hubs/EarlyON staff will be required to keep daily records of screening results and make them available to Public Health in the event of an outbreak. Programs will ensure that an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing 60%-90% alcohol content is placed at all screening stations at a level high enough to be out of reach to young children.

## Attendance Tracking

Early Years Hub/EarlyON staff are responsible for maintaining daily records of everyone that enters the school to access their program as well as the length of their stay. This includes custodial staff, educators, maintenance staff and Administrators. Records will be stored safely and be made accessible if required to facilitate contact tracing.

## References

Before and After School Programs Kindergarten – Grade 6 POLICIES AND GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOL BOARDS FOR THE 2020- 2021 SCHOOL YEAR, Version 1 – August 2020;  
Operational Guidance During COVID-19 Outbreak EarlyON Re-Opening, August 2020; and,  
Operational Guidance During COVID-19 Outbreak Child Care Re-Opening, Version 3 - August 2020.

