

Updates from the Office of Child Development and Early Learning during COVID-19 March 22

COVID-19 is active in Pennsylvania, and operational guidance in response to COVID-19 is being updated regularly. We'd like to share a few updates and clarify the waiver process for child care centers and group child care homes operating outside of a residence to remain open to serve emergency and essential personnel.

Child Care Closure related to COVID-19

Governor Tom Wolf's [closure of non-essential, non-life-sustaining businesses in order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19](#) established who is essential personnel. This list includes health care providers, emergency response personnel, grocery store employees, and home care workers, among others. Although child care centers were directed to close under the Governor's order, child care will be essential personnel with young children to perform their duties.

The Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) implemented a waiver process for child care centers and group child care homes operating outside of a residence serving children of essential services personnel such as health care workers, first responders, direct health care staff, grocery store staff, and long-term care facility staff.

If a provider submitted a waiver to OCDEL, the organization can operate under the assumption of approval. OCDEL staff are receiving and processing hundreds of waiver applications and will respond to requests as quickly as possible.

Group Child Care and Family Child Care operating in a residence have been permitted to operate without a waiver. The decision to remain open or not is at the discretion of the individual operator. This flexibility is due to the smaller number of children they serve, their knowledge of enrolled families, and ability to assess families' health as they are dropping off and picking up children.

Updated Waiver Information

Licensed Providers Operating Outside Philadelphia

Child care programs seeking a waiver from the commonwealth's temporary closure order, except those operating in Philadelphia, should complete the Exemption of Directive to Temporary Close form available [here](#). Completed waiver forms should be emailed to OCDEL at RA-PWDRACERT@PA.GOV. Child care certification staff will respond to requests as quickly as possible. Email subject line should read, "Waiver Request – (Insert County Name)."

Providers who have already submitted applications should not resubmit or send additional requests to the RA-PWDRACERT@PA.GOV account.

Questions? Call OCDEL at 1-877-4-PA-KIDS or contact your Child Care Certification Representative.

Licensed Providers Operating in Philadelphia

The City of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Department of Health have developed a separate additional process, requirements, and approval system for facilities operating in Philadelphia.

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Child care centers and group child care homes operating outside of a residence seeking to remain open in Philadelphia must complete both the OCDEL waiver request available [here](#) and the Philadelphia waiver form available [here](#).

Future closure instructions may be made to child care operators in Philadelphia and only those providers with both an OCDEL and Mayor's office waiver will be permitted to remain open.

Safety Recommendations

If you are caring for children, please follow the guidance provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PA DOH) to ensure the safety for the children, their families, staff, and yourself:

<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/Pages/Coronavirus%20Education.aspx>

It is important for early childhood stakeholders to use the PA DOH website for up-to-date information, announcements and information. Please continue to monitor this website for updated recommendations and educational materials on signs, symptoms, and preventive measures. If you suspect a case of COVID-19, please report it to DOH and OCDEL.

Enrollment Capacity

It is likely that as this situation progresses, families may need to make changes to their child care arrangements if their provider does not continue to operate. If you are currently operating with an Exemption of Directive to Temporarily Close waiver and are willing to accept new children of essential employees, please contact your Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC). Once you've notified your ELRC, they will be able to direct families to your facility. To contact your ELRC, please visit

www.raiseyourstar.org

Messages to Families

If your child care continues to operate in order to support families who must continue to work, please establish and share strategies to share critical updates with them. Using a call list or email alert could be useful at this time when operational status could change with little notice.

Additionally, the spread of COVID-19 may reach a point where Exemption of Directive to Temporarily Close waivers are rescinded, or you may make the decision to temporarily close. Please encourage your enrolled families to begin planning for child care services in the event that your services are no longer available.

Provider Agreements with Families

Licensed child care providers must maintain provider agreements between them and families served. The provider agreement is between the child care and the family, and DHS and OCDEL do not have authority over the contents of this agreement. OCDEL only has authority over copays for families that qualify for subsidized child care through Child Care Works. Most provider agreements include payment language in the event of a closure. Typically, this is related to weather or other short-term events. In this

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mandated closure period, and in the event it could potentially extend longer, families could be economically challenged and unable to fulfill the terms of their provider agreement.

If your child care facility is closed, OCDEL strongly recommends providers do not collect ongoing fees for this extended closure duration. Please communicate your decision regarding the provider agreement to your enrolled families, including your process to suspend or terminate the agreement.

Resources for Impacted Workers

If you are employed in Pennsylvania and are unable to work because of COVID-19, you may be eligible for Unemployment or Workers' Compensation benefits. The Department of Labor & Industry will continue to provide important employment benefit updates as the situation evolves [here](#).

For Child Care Legal Entities who are seeking ways to support their staff, Shared Work may be a solution at this time.

What is Shared Work? Shared-Work is an alternative to layoffs that may be used when the work available to employees decreases. Instead of the employer laying off some employees, all employees share the available work by working reduced hours and collecting a portion of their unemployment compensation, or UC, benefits. To receive approval for a Shared-Work plan, an employer must certify that the plan is in lieu of layoffs that would involve at least 10 percent of the employees in the affected unit and would result in an equivalent reduction in work hours. For more information on Shared-Work visit: <https://www.uc.pa.gov/faq/Employer/Pages/Shared-Work-Program-FAQs.aspx>

Financial Impacts to Providers

Stakeholders and advocates have shared their concern over the potential economic impacts COVID-19 may have on individual programs and their ability to recover and operate after this crisis is over. As OCDEL becomes aware of resources for small businesses, we will share those resources.

1. Governor Wolf's request to the US Small Business Administration to implement a disaster declaration to provide assistance in the form of Economic Injury Disaster Loans for businesses and eligible non-profits was submitted March 17th.
<https://www.governor.pa.gov/newsroom/governor-wolf-requests-disaster-declaration-for-small-businesses-and-non-profits-to-obtain-loans/>
2. Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority (PIDA): The PIDA provides low-interest loans and lines of credit for eligible businesses that commit to creating and retaining full-time jobs. The fact sheet specifically states that child care is eligible. <https://dced.pa.gov/download/pida-factsheet-2017/?wpdmdl=75694>