

Children's Services Responding to a Pandemic – Policy

Policy Statement

Woden Community Service (WCS) will ensure best practice is implemented to protect each Children's Service community during a pandemic. WCS is committed to providing a safe environment to its employees and service users. Educators will take steps to minimise the risk of exposure for children, families, staff and visitors as far as reasonably practicable.

Purpose

To ensure the safety and protection of all stakeholders accessing or using WCS Children's Services during a pandemic and minimise the risk of exposure in our services. Educators together with the children and families will identify risks and where possible eliminate or minimise those risks in accordance with guidelines and recommended practices.

Scope

This policy applies to all WCS Children's Services staff, including educators, volunteers and students on placement. References to educators in this document apply to all staff employed to work with children on a permanent, contract or casual basis.

This policy applies to all children who attend a WCS Children's Service as well their parents, guardians and carers.

Procedure

Protecting children and educators

Ventilation

Adequate airflow in the service helps to ensure the safety of staff and children. Ventilation needs of the service are discussed and procedures are developed. Outdoor play will be encouraged.

Vaccinations for staff

Ensuring very high vaccination levels for staff is the most effective way to protect both the workforce and unvaccinated children from disease. WCS will conduct site level monitoring of staff vaccination rates to ensure the safety of all staff and children.

Supplies

The service will check level of all essential PPE and general hygiene supplies each day.

Adequate cleaning

The amount of time viruses remain on inanimate objects and surfaces varies. Cleaning is one way to minimise risk. Every surface is cleaned regularly. High traffic areas of the service will be cleaned comprehensively, regularly. Every toy and object used at the service will also require regular cleaning.

Hygiene

Handwashing is critical and regular handwashing will be practiced by all children and staff. Children and staff will be reminded about good hygiene measures. Strict hygiene practices during food preparation will be adhered to.

Physical distancing

General health advice in maintaining a physical distance from others is not always practical in an education and care setting. Due to the nature of the service, educators will continue to have close/physical contact with children who need comfort or support, but steps are in place to minimise risks of exposure.

Whilst there is known transmission in the community, the service will ensure:

- Contact with parents and guardians at pick up and drop off is reduced where possible;
- Health directions to wear facemasks are followed at all times by people 12 years and over including staff, parents and guardians; and
- Adults practice physical distancing as far as reasonably practicable.

Physical distancing with and between children is not possible but activities involving a higher risk of transmission will be avoided as much as practicable. The service will consider small group play, indoor/outdoor activities and the placement of furniture and activities to decrease the risk of transmission.

Signing in

The service staff and visitors must sign in using service protocols. Government guidelines are followed for all visitors to the service.

Communication

Emergency contact

After-hours emergency contact details in the National Quality Agenda IT System (NQAITS) are kept up to date and are specific to each service. These numbers will be used by lead authorities to speak to a service representative in the event of an emergency.

Contact details

Contact details of each child's parent/guardian/authorised emergency person, are kept up to date by the parent/guardian, to ensure that a person will be available to collect the child at any time across the period of care being provided.

Contact details for ACT Health, the Regulatory Authority and emergency services are kept on hand in case of a critical situation.

Updates

The service will ensure that staff and families are immediately informed of any changes that may be notified to them by the lead authorities. A communication plan is developed to ensure this is possible.

Action in the event of a case

Children and educators who are unwell must not attend a Children's Service and should stay home and get tested. If children or educators attend while unwell, they must be sent home. In circumstances where children or educators have other medical reasons for recurrent symptoms, a letter from the GP is sufficient to allow return to the service without a negative test.

Managing suspected or confirmed cases

Children experiencing symptoms must be isolated in an appropriate space with suitable supervision and collected by a parent/guardian as soon as possible. Staff supervising unwell children do not need to isolate or be tested unless they themselves become unwell.

Staff members and visitors experiencing symptoms will be advised to travel directly home. The symptomatic person should wear a mask if possible. The staff member should get tested and isolate until they receive a negative test result.

The service will follow ACT Health and ACT Education Directorate advice for quarantine requirements.

Household contacts must contact the service to notify them they are a household contact. This will assist the service determine whether the household contact can attend the service if mutually agreed. Household contacts must abide by ACT Health guidelines. Household contacts must not attend, work at or interact with any children or staff of a WCS Early Learning Centres.

Service response

The service will follow specific instructions provided by ACT Health and lead authorities in response to an exposure or confirmed case at the service. The service will meet all regulatory requirements involving closure, communication and cleaning relating to the service.

If required to close, the service will re-open only after approval from the lead authorities has been given. The service will meet all notification requirements.

Responsibilities of parents/guardians

- Encourage and remind children to wash and/or sanitise hands as they arrive at the service.
- Remind children about personal hygiene (hand washing, coughing) and physical distancing.
- Ensure contact details of each child's parent/guardian/authorised emergency person are up to date.
- Make sure a person is available to collect the child at any time.
- Keep unwell children away from the service.
- Remain away from the service when unwell.
- Inform the service if the child or anyone who collects them is a household contact of someone who has been confirmed as having COVID-19.
- Do not attend the service if asked by ACT Health to isolate or while waiting for COVID-19 test results.
- Inform the Service if the child or a family member has been instructed to quarantine by ACT Health.
- Provide required documentation to the service as needed (COVID-19 test result, evidence of end of quarantine etc.).

Legislative Requirements

Links to Education and Care Services National regulations 2010, National Quality Standard 2018.

Regulation	Description
Reg. 77	Health, hygiene and safe food practices
Reg. 85	Incident, injury, trauma and illness policies and procedures
Reg. 86	Notification to parents of incident, injury, trauma and illness
Reg. 87	Incident, injury, trauma and illness record
Reg. 88	Infectious diseases
Reg. 161	Authorisations to be kept in enrolment record
Reg. 162	Health information to be kept in enrolment record

Quality Area	Description
2.1.2	Effective illness and injury management and hygiene practices are promoted and implemented.
2.2.1	At all times, reasonable precautions and adequate supervision ensure children are protected from harm and hazard.
2.2.2	Plans to effectively manage incidents and emergencies are developed in consultation with relevant authorities, practised and implemented.
6.1.3	Current information is available to families about the service and relevant community services and resources to support parenting and family wellbeing.
7.1.2	Systems are in place to manage risk and enable the effective management and operation of a quality service.

Sources and further reading

- ACT Health: <https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/#healthadviceforschoolsandchildcarecentres> and <https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/>
- Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC): <https://www.health.gov.au/news/australian-health-protection-principal-committee-ahppc-coronavirus-covid-19-statement-on-3-april-2020>
- Safe Work Australia – Early Education COVID-19 information: <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/industry-information/early-childhood-education> and [https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-04/early childhood care minimising the risk of exposure to covid-19.pdf](https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-04/early%20childhood%20care%20minimising%20the%20risk%20of%20exposure%20to%20covid-19.pdf)
- Australian Government Department of Health: <https://www.health.gov.au/>
- ACT Education Directorate – Early Childhood COVID-19 information: <https://www.education.act.gov.au/early-childhood> and <https://www.education.act.gov.au/early-childhood/information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-for-early-childhood/> nocache
- Australian Government Department of Education Skills and Employment: <https://www.dese.gov.au/covid-19>
- ACECQA: <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/latest-news/coronavirus-covid-19-information-australian-government>
- Staying Healthy in Childcare: <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/staying-healthy-preventing-infectious-diseases-early-childhood-education-and-care-services#block-views-block-file-attachments-content-block-1>

Current version

Service line Service area	Children's Services	Version	2.1
Process owner	Director, Children, Youth and Family	Date of issue	May 2022
Approved by	Vivienne Gould	Scheduled review date	May 2023

Modification history (including current version)

Version	Date	Author	Approved by	Description of changes
1.0	Feb 2020	Krysta Cordina	Kate West	New policy statement
1.1	May 2020	Krysta Cordina	Kate West	Lifting of restrictions to allow for incursions and training
1.2	Nov 2020	Krysta Cordina	Kate West	Lifting of more restrictions – changes to lockdown/evacuation procedures, use of resources, cooking activities
2.0	Oct 2021	Krysta Cordina	Vivienne Gould	Changes to nature of pandemic and ACT Health response
2.1	May 2022	Krysta Cordina	Vivienne Gould	Review of policy in line with updates to guidelines.