


Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning  
Bureau of Early Learning Policy and Professional Development and Bureau of  
Certification

**Issue Date:** Aug. 31, 2021

**Effective Date:** Sept. 7, 2021

**Subject:** COVID-19 Policy Updates

**To:** Certified Child Care Providers  
Early Learning Resource Centers  
Office of Child Development and Early Learning Staff

**From:** Tracey Campanini   
Deputy Secretary, Office of Child Development & Early Learning

## PURPOSE

To communicate the release of an [Order of the Acting Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health Directing Face Coverings in School Entities](#) (Order) and expectations for compliance by certified child care facilities as well as provide clarification of ongoing reporting requirements related to COVID-19. The [Order](#) applies to all child care providers licensed by the Department of Human Services.

**This announcement replaces announcement [C-21-04 Best Practices for Child Care Facilities Operating During the Novel Coronavirus](#) in its entirety.**

## BACKGROUND

COVID-19 continues to impact Pennsylvania, including a new variant, B.1.617.2 (Delta). To support the safe return of children to school, early learning settings and child care, on Aug. 30, 2021, the Acting Secretary of Health issued an [Order](#) for all individuals 2 years and older in school entities to wear a face covering while indoors in a school entity. The definition of “school entity” in the [Order](#) includes all child care providers licensed by the Department of Human Services.

## DISCUSSION

The COVID-19 virus continues to impact Pennsylvania, with COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths on a sharp rise. Despite the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) recommendation that all K-12 schools, child care and other early learning settings should require masks, many entities are not following the CDC’s recommendations. There is evidence that indicates community masking is effective in reducing the spread of COVID-19. Further, research supports that mask wearing has no significant adverse health effects for wearers. More information on the effectiveness of mask wearing, including citations and published research, can be found on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website [here](#).

The Acting Secretary of Health's [Order](#) will be effective **Sept. 7, 2021**. School entities should comply with the [Order](#) on or before that date. Effective Sept. 7, 2021, child care certification representatives (reps) conducting inspections or complaint investigations will cite child care facilities operating out of compliance with the Order. The citations for non-compliance with the Order will be issued under 55 Pa. Code [§3270.14](#), [3270.21](#), [§3280.14](#), [3280.20](#), and [§3290.18](#), all pertaining to compliance with "pertinent laws and regulations" and "general health and safety."

COVID-19 has been identified by the Department of Health as a communicable disease. Child care programs are required to report positive COVID-19 cases utilizing the DHS Licensed Facility COVID Data Tool and reporting to child care certification staff and informing parents of suspected outbreaks. Certification reps will continue to cite programs for failure to report cases of COVID-19.

To assist child care providers with continued compliance with these requirements, OCDEL has provided a *COVID-19 Certification Requirements: OCDEL Guidance Chart* ([See Appendix A](#)). The chart outlines the areas of compliance, legal citation, and regulatory language.

## FACE MASK:

The [Order](#) requires individuals to wear a "face covering." "Face covering" means covering of the nose and mouth with material that is secured to the head with ties, straps, or loops over the ears or is wrapped around the lower face.

While procedural and surgical masks intended for health care providers and first responders, such as N95 respirators, meet those requirements, these specialized masks should be reserved for appropriate occupational and health care settings.

Regardless of vaccination status, individuals two and older **must** wear a face covering while in school entities unless they meet one of the following exceptions in Section 3 of the Order:

- A. If wearing a face covering while working would create an unsafe condition in which to operate equipment or execute a task as determined by local, state, or federal regulators or workplace safety guidelines.
- B. If wearing a face covering would either cause a medical condition, or exacerbate an existing one, including respiratory issues that impede breathing, a mental health condition or a disability.
- C. When necessary to confirm the individual's identity.
- D. When working alone and isolated from interaction with other people with little or no expectation of in-person interaction.
- E. If an individual is communicating or seeking to communicate with someone who is hearing-impaired or has another disability, where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication.
- F. When the individual is under two (2) years of age.
- G. When an individual is:

1. engaged in an activity that cannot be performed while wearing a mask, such as eating and drinking, playing an instrument that would be obstructed by the face covering; or
  2. participating in high intensity aerobic or anerobic activities, including during a physical education class in a well-ventilated location and able to maintain a physical distance of six feet from all other individuals.
- H. When a child/student is participating in a sports practice activity or event, whether indoors or outdoors.

When face coverings are not being worn, utilizing additional prevention strategies, such as physical distancing and increased ventilation, become even more essential to protect students, teachers, and staff. For instance, when possible, move a classroom outdoors or to a larger space such as a gymnasium.

## REPORTING DISEASES:

On Aug. 28, 2020, OCDEL launched the [Licensed Facility COVID Data Collection Tool](#). Child care providers must continue to use the COVID Data Collection Tool and notify their designated certification rep of exposure and/or new positive cases of COVID-19. Utilize the link above for the most recent information relating to this tool. Facilities who do not have access to the COVID Data Collection Tool will inform their DHS certification rep to ensure the information is entered into the COVID Data Collection Tool by DHS personnel.

In all instances when reporting to DHS, provide:

- The name of the facility;
- The address of the facility including the county;
- The number of cases; and
- Identify if the positive case or cases are a facility person, child, family member, or household member (of a GCCH or FCCH).
  - This information must immediately be reported to your Certification Representative or the appropriate Regional Office which can be found [here](#).
  - In addition, programs located in any of the following 6 counties or 4 municipalities with local health departments must report to their respective local health department listed below. All other programs must report to the PA Department of Health, 1-877-PA-HEALTH or 1-877-724-3258.
    - [Allegheny County Health](#): 412-687-2243
    - [Bucks County Department of Health](#): 800-383-0371
    - [Chester County Health Department](#): 610-344-6225
    - [Erie County Department of Health](#): 814-451-6700
    - [Montgomery County Health Department](#): 610-631-3000
    - [Philadelphia Department of Public Health](#): 800-722-7112
    - [Allentown Bureau of Health](#): 610-437-7760
    - [Bethlehem Health Bureau](#): 610-865-7000
    - [Wilkes-Barre City Health Department](#): 570-821-1111
    - [York City Health Bureau](#): 717-849-2221

## REMAIN INFORMED:

The CDC COVID resource pages are recommended as the primary source of up-to-date and accurate information. As recommendations regarding the mitigation of COVID-19 continue to evolve, child care providers are urged to stay up-to-date on the most recent [CDC Guidance for Operating Child Care](#). As OCDEL identifies updates to the CDC guidance, the weekly Certification RECAP will be used to flag new information for providers. To sign up for weekly RECAP updates visit [CERTIFICATION SERVICES NEWS – THE PENNSYLVANIA KEY \(pakeys.org\)](#).

## NEXT STEPS

Child care providers must:

1. Read this Announcement and share with appropriate staff.
2. Implement plans to comply with the Acting Secretary of Health's [Order](#) on or before Sept. 7, 2021.
3. Stay up to date on the most recent [CDC Guidance for Operating Child Care](#).
4. For additional resources on COVID-19 developed for early learning programs in Pennsylvania click [here](#).
5. Direct all questions and comments to your child care Certification Regional Office.

<b>Certification Regional Office of Child Development and Early Learning:</b>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Central Region 800-222-2117;</li><li>• Northeast Region 800-222-2108;</li><li>• Southeast North and Southeast South Region 800-346-2929;</li><li>• Western Region 800-222-2149.</li></ul> |
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## Appendix A COVID-19 Certification Requirements: OCDEL Guidance Chart

Area of Compliance	Provider Type	Legal Citation	Regulatory Language
<b>Wearing a face mask</b>	Child Care Center	55 Pa. Code §3270.14	A facility shall be operated in conformity with applicable Federal and State laws and regulations. State agencies whose regulations may relate to the operation of a facility include the Department of Environmental Resources, the Department of Labor and Industry, the Department of Health, the Department of Education and the Department of Transportation
	Group Child Care Homes (GCCH) Family Child Care Homes (FCCH)	55 Pa. Code §3280.14	
		55 Pa. Code §3270.21 55 Pa. Code §3280.20 55 Pa. Code §3290.18	Conditions at the facility may not pose a threat to the health or safety of the children
<b>Reporting diseases (positive COVID-19 cases)</b>	Child Care Center Group Child Care Homes (GCCH) Family Child Care Homes (FCCH)	55 Pa. Code §3270.136(d) 55 Pa. Code §3280.136(d) 55 Pa. Code §3290.136(d)	A facility person who knows of a communicable disease for which 28 Pa. Code Chapter 27 (relating to communicable and noncommunicable diseases) requires reporting, or who knows of a group expression of an illness which may be of public concern, whether or not it is known to be of a communicable nature, shall report it promptly to the appropriate division of the Department of Health as specified in Chapter 27, or to a local department of health.
<b>Utilizing the DHS Licensed Facility COVID Data Tool and/or reporting to child care certification staff</b>	Child Care Center Group Child Care Homes (GCCH) Family Child Care Homes (FCCH)	55 Pa. Code §3270.136(d) 55 Pa. Code §3280.136(d) 55 Pa. Code §3290.136(d)	A facility person who knows of a communicable disease for which 28 Pa. Code Chapter 27 (relating to communicable and noncommunicable diseases) requires reporting, or who knows of a group expression of an illness which may be of public concern, whether or not it is known to be of a communicable nature, shall report it promptly to the appropriate division of the Department of Health as specified in Chapter 27, or to a local department of health.
<b>Informing parents of suspected outbreaks</b>	Child Care Center Group Child Care Homes (GCCH)	55 Pa. Code §3270.136(b) 55 Pa. Code §3280.136(b) 55 Pa. Code §3290.136(b)	The operator shall inform parents of enrolled children when there is a suspected outbreak of a communicable disease or an outbreak of an unusual

Area of Compliance	Provider Type	Legal Citation	Regulatory Language
	Family Child Care Homes (FCCH)		illness that represents a public health emergency in the opinion of the Department of Health