



Mississippi State Department of Health Public Health Guidance for the Prevention and Control of COVID-19 in Child Care Facility Settings

Introduction

Mississippi is experiencing substantial and high levels of transmission of COVID-19, with increased cases, hospitalizations, and numerous outbreaks in multiple settings. The proportion of cases and hospitalizations among children <18 years of age is rapidly increasing. Additionally, 4 deaths among children <18 years of age have been reported in Mississippi.

The primary driver of the increased cases, hospitalizations and deaths is the emergence of the Delta variant in Mississippi. The Delta variant is the predominant strain in Mississippi, is much more contagious, and spreads three times as easily compared to other strains.

The overwhelming majority of cases, hospitalizations and deaths are among unvaccinated persons, though there have been some infections, hospitalizations and deaths seen in fully vaccinated persons. Some fully vaccinated persons who become infected may be contagious.

With the levels of transmission high across the state, we anticipate cases and outbreaks in many different settings, including child care facilities. Child care facilities need to be prepared now for the continued surge in transmission we anticipate over the coming weeks and continue to put in place measures to reduce transmission and maintain a safe child care environment.

This guidance is intended to supplement, not replace, the CDC guidance and provide MSDH specific recommendations for continued child care facility operations for the 2021-2022 year.

Please review the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention updated COVID-19 Guidance for Operating Early Care and Education/Child Care Programs available at [COVID-19 Guidance for Operating Early Care and Education/Child Care Programs](#) This CDC guidance may be updated with new CDC recommendations for child care programs as they become available.

MSDH Public Health Guidance and Recommendations Key Points

- **Consistent with CDC Public Health Guidance, MSDH recommends universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students (ages 2 and older), and visitors to child care facility settings, *regardless of vaccination status.***
- **MSDH recommends that all unvaccinated individuals exposed to COVID-19 are immediately quarantined for 14 days and excluded from the child care setting for the full quarantine period (see Isolation, Contact Tracing, Quarantine, and**



Identifying Exposed Individuals section for allowable alternatives to the full 14-day quarantine period in individual exposures).

- **MSDH recommends that all COVID-19 exposed individuals get tested 3-5 days following exposure** (fully vaccinated persons do not have to quarantine after exposure but it is recommended that they get tested).
- **Outbreaks:** An outbreak is defined as ≥ 3 cases of COVID-19 in a classroom or group within 14 days.
 - In an outbreak setting, quarantine and exclusion from the setting is recommended for all unvaccinated exposed persons in the outbreak group.
- **Child Care Facility Dismissal/Closure Considerations:** The child care facility may consider dismissal/closure of the entire facility under the following conditions:
 - If ≥ 3 individual classroom settings, defined groups, or defined buildings are experiencing simultaneous outbreaks, or
 - If multiple absentees or exclusions of students and staff are leading to disruptions in facility functioning and safety as determined by the child care facility
 - If decided upon by the child care facility, dismissal should be for at least 14 days to interrupt transmission

MSDH Public Health Guidance

I. Vaccination

MSDH recommends that all eligible teachers and staff receive COVID-19 vaccination.

Vaccination remains the primary public health prevention strategy to end transmission and allow for safe participation of in-person and indoor activities. Child care facilities should continue to promote COVID-19 vaccination for all eligible teachers and staff.

Advantages of having the eligible teachers and staff fully vaccinated (2 weeks after the second dose of vaccine in a 2-dose series, or 2 weeks after a single dose vaccine):

- ***Keep the environment safe for child care operations.***
- ***Lower the risk of transmission and reduce the severity of illness if infected.***
- ***Limit disruptions to child care facility operations***
- ***If exposed to COVID-19, no quarantine is necessary for fully vaccinated individuals unless symptoms develop, keeping teachers and staff fully engaged.***

II. Universal Indoor Mask Use

Consistent with CDC Public Health Guidance, MSDH recommends universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students (age 2 and older), and visitors to child care facility settings, regardless of vaccination status.



Consistent and correct mask use by all students, teachers, staff, and visitors regardless of vaccination status is vital to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Children under the age of 2 should not wear a mask.

In general, people do not need to wear masks when outdoors, but masks should be considered in crowded outdoor settings or during activities of close prolonged contact with other students/teachers/staff.

III. Physical Distancing

MSDH recommends at least 6 feet of physical distancing whenever possible and universal indoor mask wearing.

This guidance is made with an understanding of the potential physical constraints and other barriers in classroom settings in child care facilities.

IV. Isolation, Contact Tracing, Quarantine, and Identifying Exposed Individuals

MSDH recommends child care facilities continue to isolate and exclude COVID-19 infected students, teachers, and staff and continue contact tracing to identify exposed individuals for quarantine and exclusion from the school setting.

Rule 1.12.2 (3) states: “Parents of all children shall be notified of a contagious illness in the child care facility as soon as possible.”

COVID-19 Infected Individuals and Isolation Period

- MSDH recommends individuals who test positive for COVID-19 be excluded from the child care facility setting and remain in **Isolation** for a full 10 days from the onset of symptoms and are fever free for 24 hours (or excluded for 10 days from the date of the test if asymptomatic).
- Asymptomatic individuals with a positive rapid COVID-19 test who have a negative molecular based COVID-19 test within 48 hours of the rapid positive do not require further exclusion and may return to the school setting. This only applies to molecular based tests as the confirmatory testing (i.e., PCR) and does not include antigen test or antibody tests.

Contact Identification (Exposed Individuals)

MSDH recommends child care facilities continue **Contact Tracing** to identify all individuals who are in close contact to COVID-19 within the facility.

COVID-19 Exposure Definition: The current definition of exposure to COVID-19 remains 15 minutes of cumulative contact over a 24-hour period at <6 feet. An infected person can spread



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COVID-19 up to 2 days before they have symptoms or 2 days prior to positive test if they have no symptoms, therefore, contacts should be identified who were exposed up to 2 days prior to onset or test date accordingly.

Unvaccinated individuals who meet this definition of exposure to COVID-19 should quarantine and get tested 3-5 days after exposure, however, the following exceptions to recommended quarantine apply:

- ***Fully vaccinated persons in close contact with an infected person do NOT have to quarantine unless they develop symptoms (fully vaccinated persons are recommended to receive COVID-19 testing 3-5 days after exposure to rule out infection).***
- People who have tested positive for COVID-19 within the past 3 months and recovered do not have to quarantine or get tested again as long as they do not develop new symptoms.
- In all other settings the standard definition of close contact applies for unvaccinated individuals.

Quarantine Period

Students, teachers, and staff who are not fully vaccinated and are identified as close contacts to COVID-19, as outlined above, should be in **Quarantine** for a full 14 days. There are additional options to the 14-day quarantine period from the child care setting as follows:

- 10-day option: Quarantine can end after 10 days if the individual has no symptoms during the entire 10-day period, or
- 7- day plus test option: If the individual has no symptoms for 7 days and has a negative COVID-19 test (molecular or antigen) collected on day 5, 6, or 7 of the quarantine period, the quarantine period can be discontinued quarantine after 7 days.
- ***Fully vaccinated students and teachers/staff do not require quarantine after contact to an infected person.***

V. Outbreaks and Child Care Facility Dismal Considerations

MSDH recommends the following considerations for outbreaks and child care facility dismissals:

- **Outbreaks:** An outbreak is defined as ≥ 3 cases of COVID-19 in a classroom or group within 14 days.
 - In an outbreak setting, quarantine and exclusion from the child care setting is recommended for all unvaccinated exposed persons in the outbreak group.
- **Dismissal Considerations:** The child care facility may consider dismissal of the entire student/staff under the following conditions:



- If ≥ 3 individual classroom settings, defined groups, or defined buildings are experiencing simultaneous outbreaks, or
- If multiple absentees or exclusions of students and staff are leading to disruptions in facility functioning and safety as determined by the child care facility.
- If decided upon, dismissal should be for at least 14 days to interrupt transmission

VI. Exclusion When Sick

All students, teachers, and staff who have symptoms of any infectious illness, regardless of vaccination status, should stay home from the child care facility and be evaluated by their healthcare provider.

Students, teachers, and staff should not be allowed to return to the facility until symptom and fever free for at least 24 hours, or if COVID-19 is diagnosed, until the isolation criteria for return to normal activity are met.

VII. Considerations for New Enrollment

Consider monitoring any new children enrolling at your facility. If a child has been placed on quarantine by another child care center that child should remain on quarantine for the full quarantine period prior to attending a new child care center.

If you have questions please feel free to reach out to your licensing official, and we will do our best to help you make an educated and informed decision based on the information provided. Thank you for all you do for our children!