



#StayStrongNC

ChildCareStrongNC

Managing COVID-19 Cases in Child Care Facilities

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NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**

Current Public Health Guidance

North Carolina is moving forward together to a new phase of the pandemic based on changes in community trends and treatments that are now available. This means moving from a COVID-19 crisis response to communicable disease prevention and management.

Have questions about this guidance?
Reach out to
dcdee.communications@dhhs.nc.gov.

Child care facilities are strongly encouraged to continue implementing layered prevention strategies to reduce the risk of COVID and all communicable diseases in child care settings. Promoting vaccination, ensuring families of children and staff know to stay home when they are sick, hygiene and cleaning all remain critical tools to slow the spread and lower the risk of COVID-19 and [other communicable diseases](#) in child care and communities.

Child care programs should consider developing a communicable disease policy which includes COVID-19 to inform staff and families of how they will plan to prevent and manage communicable disease.

Prevention Strategies

Child care programs in North Carolina should follow guidance from [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and local health authorities with the following exception:

Mask exemptions are allowed in North Carolina when children and staff return to child care following an exposure or 5-10 days after a COVID-19 infection. Exemptions to mask use include:

- children under age 2
- children between 2 and 5 who cannot wear a mask safely due to an inability to
 - wear a mask correctly
 - avoid frequent touching of the mask and their face
 - limit sucking, drooling, or having excess saliva on the mask
 - remove the mask without assistance
- children who are sleeping or anyone actively eating or drinking
- persons who cannot wear a mask, or cannot safely wear a mask, for reasons related to a disability
- adults for whom wearing a mask would create a risk to workplace health, safety, or job duty

Documentation of an exemption is not required.

Child care programs are required to:

- **Exclude symptomatic children and adults and positive COVID-19 cases from the child care facility following the specific criteria and exemptions listed in the table below, as required by [NC GS § 130A-144](#).**
- **Immediately report cases of COVID-19 among children or staff to the local health department, as required by [NC GS § 130A-136](#) and [Communicable Disease Rule 10A NCAC 41A .0101 \(50-52\)](#).**

Exclusion from child care for positive COVID cases is required following the specific criteria and exemptions listed in the table below.

Summary Table for Returning to Child Care

Exclusion Category	Scenario	Criteria to return to child care
Positive antigen test without symptoms	Child/staff person has tested positive with an antigen test (including an at-home antigen test) but does not have or develop symptoms of COVID-19.	<p>If the child/staff person takes a repeat PCR/molecular test performed in a laboratory within 48 hours of his/her positive antigen test, and that PCR/molecular test is negative, the positive antigen test can be considered a false positive and the person can immediately return to child care; OR</p> <p>If the child/staff person does not take a repeat PCR/molecular test, or takes one within 48 hours and it is also positive, he/she can return to child care 5 days after the specimen collection date of the first positive test, as long as he/she did not develop symptoms. The person should continue to mask for an additional 5 days to minimize risk of infecting others, unless an exemption to mask use applies. Isolation should begin starting from the date of his/her first positive test. The person may remove their mask sooner following 2 sequential negative antigen tests 48 hours apart.</p> <p>The person is not required to have documentation of a negative test in order to return to child care.</p>
Positive PCR test without symptoms	Child/staff person has tested positive with a PCR/molecular test but the person does not have and does not develop symptoms.	<p>Person can return to child care 5 days after the specimen collection date of his/her positive test as long as he/she did not develop symptoms. The person should continue to mask for an additional 5 days to minimize risk of infecting others, unless an exemption to mask use applies. The person may remove their mask sooner following 2 sequential negative antigen tests 48 hours apart.</p>
Positive antigen or PCR test with Symptoms	Child/staff person has symptoms of COVID-19 and has tested positive with an antigen test (including an at-home antigen test) or PCR/molecular test.	<p>Child/staff person can return to child care when</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He/she completes 5 days of isolation*; AND • It has been at least 24 hours since he/she had a fever (without using fever reducing medicine); AND • Other symptoms of COVID-19 are improving. <p>The person should continue to mask for an additional 5 days to minimize risk of infecting others, unless an exemption to mask use applies. The person is not required to have documentation of a negative test in order to return to child care. The person may remove their mask sooner following 2 sequential negative antigen tests 48 hours apart.</p>
Symptoms without COVID-19 test	Child/staff person has symptoms of COVID-19 but has not been tested for COVID-19 nor has visited a health care provider. Therefore, the person who has symptoms is presumed positive.	<p>Child/staff person can return to child care when</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He/she completes 5 days of isolation*; AND

Exclusion Category	Scenario	Criteria to return to child care
or alternative diagnosis		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It has been at least 24 hours since he/she had a fever (without using fever reducing medicine); AND Other symptoms of COVID-19 are improving. <p>The person should continue to mask for an additional 5 days to minimize risk of infecting others, unless an exemption to mask use applies. The person may remove their mask sooner following 2 sequential negative antigen tests 48 hours apart.</p>
Symptoms with negative COVID-19 test or alternative diagnosis	<p>Person has symptoms of COVID-19 but has received a negative test for COVID-19* or has visited a health care provider and received an alternate diagnosis that would explain the symptoms of COVID-19.</p> <p>*In a person with symptoms, a negative test is defined as either (1) a negative PCR/molecular test or (2) a negative antigen test (including an at-home antigen test) if the person has a low likelihood of SARS-CoV-2 infection.**</p> <p>**See CDC guidance for interpretation of antigen tests. It is recommended, however, that a negative antigen test in a symptomatic person be followed by a PCR test or repeat antigen tests every 2-3 days while symptomatic.</p>	<p>Child/staff person can return to child care when</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It has been at least 24 hours since he/she had a fever (without using fever reducing medicine); AND Other symptoms improving for at least 24 hours. <p>Note: The health care provider is not required to detail the specifics of the alternate diagnosis.</p>

For individuals with COVID-19, day zero (0) is:

- the day symptoms start (if person has symptoms)
- the day of specimen collection for individuals with no symptoms.



Resources for Early Educators

- NCDHHS: [Protect Them from COVID-19 flyer](#)
- NCDHHS: Coping and Resilience
 - For early educators and staff – [Hope4Healers](#) or **919-226-2002**
 - For families – [Hope4NC](#) or **1-855-587-3463**
 - [Address the Stress!](#) – for child care professionals
 - [Address the Stress!](#) – for family child care professionals
- NC Child Care Health and Safety Resource Center: [Child Care Health Consultant Network](#)
- Local Health Departments: [Contact Information by County](#)
- CDC: [Operational Guidance for K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs to Support Safe In-person Learning](#)

HOPE 4 HEALERS

The NC Department of Health and Human Services, in partnership with the North Carolina Psychological Foundation, created Hope4Healers, a confidential mental health support for early educators and child care staff who are on the front lines of the pandemic. The child care workforce is essential, both for NC families with young children and our economy. NCDHHS aims to support these individuals and their families with a timely, easily accessible helpline. The Hope4Healers helpline is staffed 24/7 with counselors trained in helping.