

January 21, 2022

Child care facilities  
Licensees and managers

Dear child care licensee or manager:

Re: Updated COVID-19 Response and Child Care Facilities

COVID-19 guidelines are currently being updated in order to take into account the increased transmissibility and decreased severity of the Omicron COVID-19 variant of concern which is currently circulating in BC. On January 19, 2022, the BCCDC updated the [Public Health Guidance for Child Care Settings](#); my team and I encourage that you review this updated guidance.

As an operator of a child care facility, you may become aware of one or more cases of COVID-19 among your staff or children. Northern Health Medical Health Officers are providing the following direction for symptomatic and confirmed cases of COVID-19 among staff or children:

**Symptomatic staff or children:**

- On January 17, 2022, the BCCDC updated provincial [COVID-19 testing guidelines for BC](#). According to the new guidelines, many staff and children will not be eligible for testing.
- The management of COVID-19 is now more like the management of other respiratory infections we have seen in the past:
  - Staff or children that are exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms should stay home until they feel well enough to return to regular activity.
  - [COVID-19 symptoms](#) are updated regularly by the BCCDC; however, if symptoms are consistent with a previously diagnosed health condition and are not unusual for that individual, they can continue to attend the child care setting.

**Confirmed case(s) of COVID-19 in staff or children:**

- Staff or children testing positive for COVID-19 by PCR or rapid antigen test should isolate for 5 days, regardless of vaccination status.

**Household or other close contacts of symptomatic staff or children, OR household or other close contacts of confirmed case of COVID-19:**

- Staff or children who are contacts may continue to attend the facility, regardless of vaccination status, unless they develop symptoms and/or test positive for COVID-19.

Northern Health Medical Health Officers acknowledge that this reflects a significant change in public health guidance as it pertains to COVID-19 management; we are shifting from a risk elimination approach to a risk reduction approach. The rationale for this is several fold:

- The incubation period for the Omicron variant is very short. As such, contact management is no longer an effective strategy to mitigate transmission risk.
- The vast majority of COVID-19 illness in children is mild as is the vast majority of COVID-19 illness in fully vaccinated adults.
- Safe child care is critically important for the health and wellbeing of both children and families; we want to encourage child care licensees and managers to feel comfortable in operating safely as we transition out of the COVID-19 pandemic response.
- Finally, this significant change in COVID-19 management approach is taking place across all sectors in BC and is not specific to child care settings.

Child care facilities are essential services. The severity of the COVID-19 virus no longer requires that facilities are closed for public health reasons unless directed to do so by a Medical Health Officer. Facilities experiencing illness amongst staff may need to close for operational reasons if they are unable to maintain staff to child ratios as required under the Child Care Licensing Regulation. If you have further questions or concerns and are considering a facility closure for operational reasons, contact your licensing officer.

For more information on COVID-19 in child care settings, please join the [virtual discussion](#) on January, 26, 2022 at 7:00 pm PST, where public health professionals will address questions that have arisen in the child care sector.

Please also visit the Northern Health website for [child care providers](#) for current information and resources.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your local licensing officer.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Raina Fumerton MD, MPH, FRCPC  
Medical Health Officer  
Northern Health