

March 15, 2020

Guidance for Child Care Centers and Early Education Programs

In response to the unprecedented public health emergency that Illinois is facing as a result of the spread of COVID-19, Governor Pritzker has announced that all K-12 non-residential, public and private schools must close March 17 through March 30. This mandate extends also to any early childhood program for children ages birth through five located in public schools or in private schools.

The purpose of the school closure is to maximize “social distancing.” Social distancing actions are taken to restrict when and where people can gather to stop or slow the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) or other infectious diseases in communities. The school closures will be most effective in slowing the spread of the virus if the overwhelming majority of children, including children under age 5, stay at home or in very small group settings throughout the closure period.

At this time, the Governor has not mandated that child care centers licensed by the Department of Children and Family Services (or legally license-exempt centers outside of schools) close. However, centers **are allowed** to close if they so choose. In deciding whether to close, child care center leaders should consider whether they serve many parents who still need to work outside of their homes (e.g., health care workers, first responders, grocery store clerks, etc.) and whose ability to work would be limited if the center closed. If programs do decide to remain open, they are strongly urged to follow the [guidance for child care centers](#) provided by the Centers for Disease Control. Resources are available on the Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development [web site](#).

Early education programs funded through ISBE are advised that their funding will not be affected by a decision to close their program in response to the public health emergency. Similarly, the Office of Head Start has issued guidance that Head Start and Early Head Start programs will not be penalized for closing during the public health emergency. The Chicago Department of Child and Family Services will also not reduce funding due to closures or low attendance during this period. And IDHS is developing a simplified waiver process for the 80% attendance requirement in the Child Care Assistance Program for being paid for all eligible days for all enrolled children (look for further guidance on this process in the coming days). For programs funded by any or all of these funding streams, programs are expected to continue to pay all staff per their regular work schedule during any closures due to the public health emergency.

If your program does decide to close, we request that you report this by visiting <https://forms.gle/VKfM8AZn2q6dTF8PA> and completing the form for reporting closure.

IDHS will be providing further guidance on the Child Care Assistance Program in the coming days. The Department of Children and Family Services will likewise be providing guidance in the coming days about issues related to licensing. Finally, we are monitoring the federal package that is moving through Congress that has the potential to significantly help small businesses like child care providers, and will share with you as soon as possible the relevant benefits that any federal legislation will provide.

We are committed to supporting our child care providers through this health emergency, and appreciate all that you are doing to support children, families and your communities.

Marc Smith, Acting Director, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

Grace Hou, Secretary, Illinois Department of Human Services

Carmen Ayala, State Superintendent, Illinois State Board of Education