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MEMORANDUM

TO: Licensed Child Care Providers

FROM: The Office of Child and Family Services

DATE: August 19, 2020

SUBJECT: Frequently Asked Questions following July 31, 2020 Updated Guidance

This information is subject to change as OCFS responds to changing circumstances.

Guidance will be updated and distributed as new information becomes available.

Q: We have remained open for close to 6 months, maintaining our rigorous cleaning, sanitizing, handwashing, etc. and there have been no cases in our center and very few in our area as a whole. It seems like what we are doing is working. Why the change now?

A: Maine continues to be proactive in its approach to slowing the spread of COVID. Success has been due to effective public health responses and societal responses to physical distancing, face coverings, outdoor settings, and other strategies. We need to continue effective public health responses as schools move toward opening (in various ways), outdoor interactions decrease in the fall and winter, and the seasonal cold and flu season arrives.

Evolving scientific evidence shows that face coverings work in the prevention of transmission of the virus, along with rigorous cleaning, physical distancing, sanitizing, and handwashing. With fewer people staying at home, there is more possibility of transmission, so it is important to do all that we can to reduce the risk of spread of the virus in the community.

Q: With many schools in the State shortening the school day, there will be a greater need for longer hours of after school care. Will there be an extension of the option to serve additional school-aged children?

A: The decision to approve serving additional school-age children is made by Child Care Licensing Specialists in conjunction with their supervisor on an individual basis. A blanket approval is not in place. This will continue during the State of Civil Emergency period.

Q: What if none of my families want me or their children to wear a mask?

A: The current expectation is that all adults and staff in the child care and children age 5 and up are required to wear a face covering.

Q: Are there medical exemptions or exemptions for children with special needs?

A: Staff or children with a known or documented health condition and children with special needs may use a face shield that comes below their chin and extends on both sides of their face to cover their ears.

Q: Can you provide guidance on writing health policies related to COVID-19?

A: Health policies should be based on the guidance from the CDC for child care and the guidance from OCFS for child care. You may also access technical assistance from Maine Roads to Quality (MRTQ) for support in developing additional health policies related to COVID-19. You can fill out a request for consultation at the following weblink: <https://mrtq.org/onsite/>

Q: How long does a child or staff need to be symptom-free before returning to the program, some people are saying that schools are requiring 72 hours?

A: A child or staff with symptoms should be seen by a medical provider to determine if they are in need of testing for COVID-19. If the medical provider determines that a child or staff does not need COVID testing, then they can return to the program when they have been symptom-free for 24 hours, with no fever-reducing medication. If they do need testing, they need to follow the guidance of the medical provider and wait for the results of any testing, as well as be symptom-free for 24 hours with no fever-reducing medication.

Q: What is the guidance for face coverings while sleeping?

A: Face coverings are not required during rest/naptime. We recommend maintaining 6 feet of distance between cots/mats, if possible, and arranging children in an alternating head-to-foot position.

Q: Why outside masking?

A: Face coverings should be worn outside when physical distancing is not feasible to reduce the risk of transmitting the virus. Face coverings are not required during swimming activities as face coverings should not get wet.

Q: As an adult, I find myself touching my face and tugging at my mask more than I would normally touch my face at all. How will providers keep children from doing this?

A: Wearing a face covering to reduce or prevent the spread of the virus outweighs the risk associated with the touching behavior. It is important to remind children to wash their hands frequently.

Q: Where does the 2 year old age guideline come from? What changes when they turn 2 to suggest they should start wearing a mask?

A: The CDC has recommended that face coverings should be worn by all individuals above the age of 2. There is a risk of suffocation for a child younger than 2 years of age.

Q: Are there dangers of carbon dioxide intake for staff and children wearing masks for any extended periods of time?

A: Face coverings have not been shown to restrict the amount of oxygen your body gets or increase the amount of carbon dioxide breathed in.

Q: How can mask breaks be implemented in a child care program?

A: Face covering breaks could occur outside or near an open window if not able to be outside while maintaining 6 feet distancing from others.

Q: Does the 5-year-old mask mandate apply to children in mixed age preschool classrooms (who likely turn 5 during the school year) or only to those 5-year olds in school age programs?

A: It is a requirement for children 5 years old and up to wear a face covering. Face coverings for children ages 2 to 4 is recommended while in care. To make it more equitable in mixed age groups, providers may wish to consider introducing face coverings for all children over age 2.

Q: Can we get more guidance around masks at mealtime? Will all children have to be 6 feet apart while they eat?

A: Face coverings are not required during meal times. If possible, OCFS suggests staggering meals, eating outside when possible and the use of barriers as a way to maintain 6 feet of distance.

Q: School spacing requirements are 3 feet. Does this mean the requirements in child care have changed as well?

A: The Department of Education is allowing for 3 feet of distance when combined with other measures outlined in their list of safety requirements including, but not limited to, wearing face coverings, proper hand washing and symptom checks. Distancing guidelines have not changed for child care providers.

Q: Is it going to be acceptable for children to go from a before care program to school and from school to after care?

A: Yes, it is acceptable and is one of the reasons children age 5 and up are required to wear face coverings in child care, as they will likely be going back and forth between the school setting and child care program.

Q: What is the expectation for enforcing the mask policy when a child refuses to wear it?

A: We are asking that providers work with children in care at developing this requirement just like you would with anything new. We know this will be a process and will take some time. Please visit the following websites for some helpful tips on children wearing face coverings:

<https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/cloth-face-coverings/> and <https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/subtopics/covid-19-everyday-challenges/>.

Q: I am concerned about the development of infants' emotional health if they never see the smiles of their caregiver. I'm also concerned that my voice will be muffled so speech development may be affected. How can I wear a face covering and still support their emotional health and development?

A: OCFS encourages the use of cloth face coverings, cloth face coverings with a clear insert, or clear face shields as deemed developmentally appropriate and necessary.

Q: Why do family child care programs need to implement the face covering requirement? We work so closely with these children, they become family. We are not a big facility with rotating staff.

A: In addition to children going back to school as our state continues to move toward reopening, we know that many families are out in the community more and interacting more with others. As a result, even a small child care program may be at increasing risk of exposure to the virus.

Q: I'm a family child care provider; is it an expectation that my partner and children wear masks inside of our home?

A: A household member who does not work in a caregiving role and is in a separate space not used for child care in the home is not expected to wear a face covering. If the same household member is in the child care space and around the enrolled children, they are expected to wear a face covering.

Q: How will I maintain full enrollment if my families aren't in favor of masks?

A: If you are a licensed provider and have open enrollment for child care in your program, please fill out the [Licensed Child Care Capacity Update](#) form. Additionally, the Program Portal is now live on the Child Care Choices website. The Program Portal has been developed to allow individual programs to update their information displayed on Child Care Choices including number of openings, listed by age, and if the program accepts Child Care Subsidy Program (CCSP) funding. To do so visit the Program Portal login at:

<https://search.childcarechoices.me/providerlogin.aspx>

Q: Why aren't other organizations that work with children expected to follow the same mandate (karate places, rec programs, etc.)?

A: OCFS licenses child care facilities, family child care providers and nursery schools. The OCFS guidance is for those providers holding a child care license.

Q: Can face shields be worn instead of a cloth face covering?

A: OCFS encourages the use of cloth face coverings, cloth face coverings with clear insert, or clear face shields as deemed developmentally appropriate and necessary.

Q: Who will provide the face coverings and is there money to cover the costs of them if providers have to?

A: This decision is at the discretion of the child care. The child care may provide the face coverings or request that staff and children come with their own clean face coverings. If the child care provides them, they can use the CCDBG CARES Act grants to cover the costs or they will have an opportunity to be reimbursed through the Coronavirus Relief Fund application that is forthcoming.

Q: What licensing action will be taken? What are the violations going to look like?

A: OCFS will respond to providers who articulate or demonstrate refusal to require face coverings by taking the following action:

1. Provide verbal warning, support/technical assistance necessary to come into compliance.
2. Continued failure will be documented on an inspection report as violation of Rule with a Plan of Action to come into substantial compliance within 10 business days.
3. Directed Plan of Action with requirement to come into compliance within 3 business days and required technical assistance.
4. Issuance of Notice of Conditional License (Provider will have appeal rights in accordance with Title 5).
5. Failure to come into substantial compliance while on a Conditional License will result in the issuance of a Notice of Void (Provider will have appeal rights in accordance with Title 5).

Q: Is there a waiver option for a parent to sign?

A: No, it is not an option for a parent to sign a waiver form.

Q: Can a red, yellow, green system be used to determine if use is needed?

A: No, this is not an option currently.

Q: Can the use of air cleaners, allow for masks not to be worn?

A: No, face coverings will still need to be worn even with the use of air cleaners.