

Ministry of Education

Operational Guidance During COVID-19 Outbreak

EarlyON Re-Opening

Version 2 - November 2020

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Highlights of Changes

- Updated information on how the ministry is tracking the re-opening of sites (see section: Tracking Re-Opening of Sites).
- Updated guidance on EarlyON service delivery including: information on why pre-registering for programs and services is important, and what may qualify as a reasonable exception (see section: Pre-registering for Programs and Services).
- Updates to the types of written health and safety protocols providers must have in place (see section: Health and Safety Protocols).
- Revised guidance around cleaning and disinfection of EarlyON Centres to reflect updated practices and to align across the early years sector (where applicable) (see section: Cleaning and Disinfecting EarlyON Centres).
- Updated guidance around space/group capacity requirements and examples for grouping of participants within an EarlyON setting to reflect updated advice on reducing contact (see section: Physical Distancing, Space/Group Capacity, and Grouping).
- Updated guidance around safe sign-in procedures to reflect updated advice (see section: Safe Sign-in Procedures).
- Updated language on the use of equipment and toys to clarify when toys and equipment should be cleaned and disinfected (see section: Equipment and Usage of Toys).
- Addition of a new section on outdoor programming to provide best practices for conducting outdoor activities (see section: Outdoor Programming).
- Updated guidance on the use of masks, personal protective equipment and hand hygiene (see section: Guidance on the Use of Masks, Personal Protective Equipment, and Hand Hygiene), including:
 - Clarifications to the description of masking and eye protection requirements to distinguish between the requirements for staff, parents or other adults, children in grade 4 and above, and younger children (grade 3 and under).
 - Additional guidance on how to properly wear and use masks and eye protection.
- Addition of new sub-section on PPE Supply.
- Addition of new section on food and drink to provide guidance on the safe consumption of food and drink within the EarlyON setting (see section: Food and Drink).
- Revised guidance around screening practices including information on how to conduct safe in-person screens. Inclusion of the provincial screening tool is also provided (see section: Screening for Symptoms).
- Clarification that attendance records must include both individuals receiving programs and services as well as all individuals who enter the EarlyON Centre. Clarification is also provided on what additional information must be recorded (see section: Attendance Records).

- Addition of a new section on monitoring and responding to reports of COVID-19 to provide updated guidance on symptomatic individuals within the EarlyON setting (see section: Monitoring and Responding to Reports of COVID-19 Symptoms in an EarlyON Setting).
- Addition of a new section on outbreak management to provide guidance on when an outbreak may be declared (see section: Outbreak Management).
- Revised guidance on reporting to the ministry, clarifying what information needs to be reported as well as updated direction that suspected cases of COVID-19 do not need to be reported to the ministry (see section: Reporting Confirmed Cases to the Ministry).

OVERVIEW

The Ministry of Education (the ministry) has developed this guidance document to support partners in continuing to deliver EarlyON Child and Family programming during the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak.

This guidance document is intended to support the following partners:

- Consolidated Municipal Service Managers and District Social Service Administration Boards (CMSMs and DSSABs);
- EarlyON Child and Family Centre service providers; and,
- District School Boards.

The information found within this guidance document is meant to support partners in reopening EarlyON Centre programs and to provide clarification on operating with enhanced health and safety measures. This guidance document will be modified as applicable when these restrictions can be lifted and/or amended to reflect new advice at that time.

This guidance document has been designed for use in conjunction with the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* (CCEYA) and its regulations, and the *Ontario Child Care and EarlyON Child and Family Centres Service Management and Funding Guideline 2020* (2020 Guideline). **In the event of a conflict between this document and the Guideline, this document will prevail. Advice of the local public health unit must be followed, even in the event it is different from the guidance in this document.**

On September 1, 2020, EarlyON Child and Family Centres were permitted to re-open in-person programming and services with enhanced health and safety measures. All EarlyON Child and Family Centres may continue to operate with enhanced health and safety measures in place.

As always, **the top priority for the ministry will be the health and safety of the children, families and staff**, and we will monitor the COVID-19 outbreak situation closely. Should there be a need to return to stricter health and safety measures, the ministry will revise this guidance under the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

The ministry is requesting school boards, Consolidated Municipal Service Managers/District Social Services Administration Boards and EarlyON program providers, in collaboration with local public health units, work together to ensure that EarlyON Centres located in schools are able to re-open with these measures in place. The ministry understands that district school board protocols may differ from those of EarlyON Centres and recommends that partners work together to align protocols and

procedures where needed. To support consistency for children and families, the ministry has revised this guidance document, where possible, to align with the provincial [Guide to reopening Ontario's schools](#), the [Operational guidance: COVID-19 management in schools](#), as well as the information at the [COVID-19 reopening schools webpage](#).

Child Care and Before and After School Programs were also permitted to operate at full capacity as of September 1, 2020. Please refer to the [Child Care Re-Opening Operational Guidance During COVID-19 Outbreak](#) and [2020-21 Before and After School Kindergarten to Grade 6 Policies and Guidelines](#) for more information. The health and safety guidance aligns with this document, where applicable, and includes program specific guidance as well.

You may wish to visit the [provincial COVID-19 website](#) regularly for current information, as well as the [Public Health Ontario public resources page](#) for information to help stop the spread, find sector specific resources, including helpful posters, mental health resources, and other information.

If you have further questions or require clarification, please contact your Ministry of Education Early Years Advisor directly.

PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES DURING COVID-19

The ministry recognizes that while the focus of this guidance document is on the health, safety, and operational measures that are required to safely deliver EarlyON Child and Family programs during the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak that it is also critical to keep the well-being of children and families at the forefront by continuing to provide a welcoming and caring environment.

[How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years \(HDLH\)](#) continues to be the guide to support learning through relationships for those working with young children and families during the COVID-19 outbreak. As the cornerstone of EarlyON programs, HDLH remains a key support for children, families and educators as we navigate the challenges of these difficult times together.

Ensuring children's health and physical well-being is important, but we also know that early years programs play a critical role in supporting their learning, development, and emotional well-being. The values, foundations for learning, and pedagogical approaches in HDLH can also help to guide discussions on ways to ensure children's emotional well-being and capacity for learning continue to be nurtured.

Now more than ever, HDLH is a key support for children, families and educators as Ontario recovers from the challenges of this unprecedented time. We know it is critical to put measures in place to support the immediate health and safety needs of children, families and educators; however, emotional well-being should be given the same level of care and attention. Children need responsive and caring relationships and environments that support exploration, play and inquiry, which have a long-term impact on children's mental health, well-being and capacity to learn.

The ministry has developed a resource entitled [Building on How Does Learning Happen?](#) that provides pedagogical approaches to re-opening child care and early years settings. This resource shares ideas, reflective questions and lessons learned from child care and EarlyON to help to support child care and early years settings as they work to provide healthy physical, social, and emotional spaces for children and their families as they gradually re-open.

Mental Health Supports for Children and Families

This is a challenging time for children and their families. EarlyON Centres can play an important role in helping children understand the current situation in a way that is honest, accurate, and minimizes anxiety or fear. The following resources may help to support EarlyON Centre staff with talking to children and families about COVID-19.

Additional Resources

- [School Mental Health Ontario](#) – Resources for Educators, Parents and Students Related to COVID-19, 12 Easy and Fun Mental Health Practices To Try With Your Children At Home
- [Centre for Addiction and Mental Health](#) – How Do I Talk To My Children About COVID-19 and Its Impact?
- [Mind Your Mind](#) – Staying on Top of Your Game During A Pandemic
- [Centres for Disease Control and Prevention](#) - Talking with children about Coronavirus Disease 2019: Messages for parents, school staff, and others working with children

TRACKING RE-OPENING OF SITES

CMSMs/DSSABs are responsible for updating the EarlyON website with information on EarlyON programs located within their region through the EarlyON Centre Location Administration Application. The service system manager administrators for each CMSM/DSSAB can indicate that an EarlyON Child and Family Centre is open to the public for in-person programming and services using the “pre-registered programs” option when editing their location description. It is important that CMSMs/DSSABs make timely updates to reflect the current status of their programs and services. The ministry will collect information on the re-opening of sites across the province from the updates made by CMSMs/DSSABs in the EarlyON Centre Location Administration Application. If you have questions or require technical support, you can email earlyon@ontario.ca.

MEETING MANDATORY CORE SERVICES

CMSMs/DSSABs and providers are required to continue delivering mandatory core services including:

- supporting early learning and development,
- engaging parents and caregivers, and
- making connections for families.

Recognizing that service delivery methods may have shifted as a result of COVID-19, EarlyON Centres can continue to deliver high quality programs and services that support early learning and development, engage parents and caregivers, and make connections for families through a variety of methods that support the health, safety and well-being of children and families.

SERVICE DELIVERY

Re-opening EarlyON Centres

EarlyON Child and Family Centres were permitted to re-open with in-person programming as of September 1, 2020. All in-person programs and services must be offered with enhanced health and safety protocols and physical distancing measures in place.

The ministry recognizes that not all EarlyON Centres and programs will be able to resume immediately for public health reasons and/or due to other community related considerations. CMSMs/DSSABs may wish to leverage a variety of service delivery methods as part of their re-opening plan to continue delivering EarlyON Child and Family programs during the ongoing outbreak. CMSMs/DSSABs who are considering re-opening may take a phased or gradual approach to re-opening EarlyON Centres which may include offering targeted services based on community need. It is recommended that CMSMs/DSSABs who are able to re-open EarlyON Centres for in-person offerings consider ways to prioritize programs/services and families with the greatest need during this difficult time. Approaching service planning through this equity lens helps to remove barriers to access and better ensures that EarlyON programs and services continue to remain accessible to all children and families in Ontario during the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak.

During this phase of the COVID-19 outbreak, the ministry requires that EarlyON Centres continue offering virtual services, where possible, so that children and families can access programs and services without having to attend an EarlyON Centre in-person.

CMSMs/DSSABs have the flexibility to allocate their EarlyON funding to support in-person, virtual, outdoor or mobile programming and services.

Pre-registering for Programs and Services

Providers are required to develop policies and processes that require families to reserve and/or register in advance of participating in programs and services in-person. Pre-registering for programs and services ahead of time is an important measure that helps to promote enhanced health and safety by:

- Safely collecting information of participants for the purposes of contact tracing;
- Promoting advanced screening of participants before entering an EarlyON Centre;
- Providing important communication to participants on enhanced health and safety measures in advance of attending in-person programs and services;

- Enabling EarlyON Centres to maintain and manage group/space capacity;
- Supporting safe and timely sign-ins and preventing crowding/waiting at entrances; and
- Helping to organize programming options that support an enhanced level of health and safety (e.g., such as participants registering for multi-week programs).

Providers must follow their reservation/registration policies and processes for all children and families entering the EarlyON Centre and/or participating in programs and services.

Where required, registration policies and/or processes may permit reasonable exceptions to the pre-registration requirement that support the unique needs of families while continuing to meet health and safety requirements, this includes:

- the ability to safely screen all individuals before they enter the EarlyON Centre (see section on Screening for COVID-19 Symptoms); and
- the collection and maintenance of daily records of anyone entering the EarlyON Centre and the approximate length of their stay (see section on Attendance Records).

Communication with Families

Communication with families regarding enhanced health and safety measures in EarlyON Centres is important to promote transparency and to ensure children and families are safely interacting in EarlyON Centres. Health and safety policies and procedures, and information regarding program operation should be shared with families prior to attending a centre. Providers should also remind attendees of health and safety measures, including requirements and exceptions related to masks, and related centre policies and procedures when they arrive at a centre for programming and/or services.

EarlyON Centres in Schools

School boards play a critical role in the child care and early years sector. Schools provide an environment where services can be co-located and integrated for the purpose of reducing transitions, building cohesion and alignment across early years pedagogy and stronger connections between children, families, and early years and school professionals and educators. Now more than ever, school board leadership is vital to supporting comprehensive and continuous education.

As mentioned previously, the ministry is requesting school boards, CMSMs/DSSABs and EarlyON Centre program providers, in collaboration with local public health units, work together to ensure EarlyON Centres located in schools are able to re-open and

continue to have access to their spaces within schools.

All EarlyON Child and Family Centre providers should follow the health and safety requirements set out by the Ministry of Education as well as guidance provided by the school board and local public health unit for centres located in schools. The Ministry understands that district school board protocols may differ from those of EarlyON Centres and recommends that partners work together to align protocols and procedures where needed, including policies for the use of shared spaces such as hallways.

Mobile Programming

Where programming is being offered in a shared setting (e.g., a community centre), providers should work in collaboration with the local public health unit and those sharing the space to follow public health advice.

Outdoor Programming

Outdoor programming is **strongly** encouraged as a program delivery model as it can easily allow for safe, physically distanced activities for children and families. Where programming is being offered in a shared setting (e.g., park), providers should work in collaboration with the local public health unit to follow public health advice.

Virtual Programming

EarlyON Centres are required to continue offering virtual services, where possible, so that children and families can access programs and services without having to attend an EarlyON Centre in person.

Virtual programming remains the safest way to deliver EarlyON programs and services to children and families during the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak.

CMSMs/DSSABs can allocate their EarlyON funding to support virtual programming and services.

CHILD MINDING AND RESPITE CHILD CARE

Child minding and respite child care as outlined in the *Ontario Child Care and EarlyON Child and Family Centres Service Management and Funding Guideline 2020* in accordance with the requirements under the CCEYA, **may not be offered at this time**. Partners will be notified when this restriction has been lifted.

HEALTH AND SAFETY REQUIREMENTS

Working with Local Public Health Unit

While the ministry is providing guidance on how to operate EarlyON Centres during the COVID-19 outbreak, CMSM/DSSABs and EarlyON Centre providers must follow the advice of the local public health unit when establishing health and safety protocols, including how to implement any provincial direction or local public health direction on health and safety guidance.

The ministry recognizes that this may result in local and regional differences in these protocols, but given the varying impact of COVID-19 in different communities, it is important to follow the advice of the local public health officials to keep children and families safe in their respective communities.

You can find information on your local public health unit [here](#).

Health and Safety Protocols

Every EarlyON Centre provider must ensure that there are written policies and procedures outlining their health and safety protocols for EarlyON Centres, including in-person, mobile and outdoor offerings. These policies and procedures must be consistent with any direction from local public health and include information on how the EarlyON Centre will operate to prevent and minimize the impact of COVID-19 in an EarlyON setting, including, at a minimum, the following:

- Cleaning and Disinfecting EarlyON Centres;
- Physical Distancing, Space/Group Capacity, and Grouping;
- Safe Sign-ins;
- Equipment and Usage of Toys;
- Outdoor Programs (if offered);
- Mobile Programs (if offered);
- Requirements on the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE);
- Consumption of Food and Drink;
- Screening for COVID-19 symptoms;
- Attendance Records;
- Monitoring and Responding to Reports of COVID-19 Symptoms;
- Outbreak Management;
- Reporting;

- Staff Training;
- Shift Scheduling; and
- Return to Work for Symptomatic Persons or Confirmed Cases.

EarlyON providers may wish to consult the COVID-19 [Preparedness and Prevention in Elementary and Secondary \(K-12\) Schools checklist](#) for infection prevention and control guiding principles and mitigation strategies that may be useful in helping reduce the risk of the introduction and spread of COVID-19 in EarlyON Child and Family Centres.

Note, under the [Occupational Health and Safety Act \(OHSA\)](#), employers must take every reasonable precaution to protect the health and safety of workers. Please see the [guide on developing a COVID-19 workplace safety plan](#) to support you in fulfilling this obligation.

Cleaning and Disinfecting EarlyON Centres

- Please refer to Public Health Ontario's [Environmental Cleaning fact sheet](#) for information on cleaning.
- EarlyON Centre premises should be cleaned daily. In addition to the existing cleaning protocols that were in place pre-COVID-19, frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected at least twice a day at a minimum, however, more frequent cleaning and disinfection may be necessary, depending on the frequency of use and extent of soilage.
 - Frequently touched surfaces, including any used toys and materials, should be cleaned and disinfected in between program sessions. Providers are also encouraged to promote frequent, proper hand hygiene before and after using shared toys/equipment and materials.
- Shared objects (toys and equipment etc.) and spaces (rooms, bathrooms etc.) should also be cleaned between each use, and only one group at a time should access any shared space/equipment.
- It is recommended that EarlyON program providers keep a cleaning and disinfecting log to track and demonstrate cleaning schedules.
- Existing practices should be reviewed to determine where enhancements might be required, including frequency and timing of cleaning and disinfection, areas to clean and/or disinfect, choice of cleaning products, and child safety, staffing, signage, and PPE use when cleaning.
- It may also be helpful to keep an inventory to determine items to be stored, moved, or removed altogether to reduce handling or the challenges associated with cleaning

them (for example, porous or soft items such as stuffed toys, area rugs, fabric upholstered seating).

- Information from [Public Health Ontario](#) provides best practices for cleaning and disinfecting, including:
 - which products to use, including disinfectants with Health Canada Drug Identification Numbers (DINs);
 - how to clean and disinfect different materials, including minimum surface contact time; and
 - other items to remember, including checking expiry dates of cleaning and disinfectant products and following the manufacturer's instructions.
- Where an individual is suspected of having COVID-19 in an EarlyON setting:
 - Establish a protocol to determine contaminated areas and carry out cleaning and disinfection, including timing, when to return to use, methods of cleaning, PPE to be used while cleaning, and waste disposal.
 - Identify areas that may require cleaning plus disinfection (items used by the individual and all surfaces within 2 metres of the ill person) versus cleaning alone (such as a hallway or room where the individual has passed through).
 - Use disposable cleaning equipment, such as disposable wipes, where possible.
 - Remove all items that cannot be cleaned (paper, books, etc.) and store them in a sealed container for a minimum of 7 days.
- The ministry understands that in an EarlyON setting, equipment and toys may be required to deliver programs or services. Ensure that only toys made of material that can be cleaned and disinfected are used (e.g. avoid plush toys, communal playdough) or are single use and are disposed of at the end of the day (e.g. craft supplies).

Physical Distancing, Space/Group Capacity, and Grouping

Physical Distancing

- EarlyON programs and services must be offered in a way that maintains physical distancing. EarlyON Centres must implement a physical distancing policy of at least two metres amongst all individuals at all times. Note: this does not apply to parents/children living in the same home.
- In the event physical distancing cannot be maintained, the usage of a medical mask and eye protection by staff provides an extra protective measure in addition to observing proper hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and avoiding touching of the

face.

Space/Group Capacity

- EarlyON providers are required to establish and have a policy addressing maximum space and group sizes. These size limits should include participants and staff, to reduce the transmission and spread of COVID-19. In determining these space and group sizes, EarlyON providers must consider:
 - gathering limits specified by the Government of Ontario (e.g. according to the level of the public health region in the COVID-19 Response Framework);
 - room capacity where program(s) are being offered and the ability for participants to maintain physical distancing requirements of at least 2 metres;
 - local municipal by laws; and
 - advice provided by local public health units.
- It is further recommended that EarlyON providers consider how to group participants when offering in-person programs and services in order to minimize and reduce the risk of exposure to and transmission of COVID-19 to the greatest extent possible. For more information please refer to the section on 'Grouping of Participants in EarlyON'.
- The ministry recognizes that physical distancing between young children in an EarlyON Centre may be difficult. Suggestions to promote physical distancing in an environment with children include:
 - planning activities that do not involve shared objects or toys;
 - when possible, moving programs outside to allow for more space; and
 - singing only in alignment with the requirements set out in in [Reopening Ontario \(A Flexible Response to COVID-19\) Act, 2020](#)

Grouping of Participants in EarlyON

- It is recommended that EarlyON providers group (cohort) participants when offering in-person programs and services to the greatest extent possible. Grouping participants reduces the number of exposures that increase the risk of exposure to and transmission of COVID-19. Below are some examples of how providers could group participants and limit the interaction amongst groups of participants to the greatest extent possible. These examples are not intended as an exhaustive list and providers may consider additional approaches that best meet the needs of their communities:
 - Encouraging participants to attend only one EarlyON location in person and accessing virtual programs on other days.

- Scheduling dedicated time to provide 1:1 support for information and referrals;
- Limiting registration within an EarlyON Centre so participants can attend in-person once a week;
- Offering registration for multi-week programs (e.g., all ages playgroup) offered at 2 pm every Tuesday where the same group of participants participate every Tuesday;
- Offering registration for multi-day programs (e.g., toddler playgroup) offered at 10 am from Monday – Friday where the same group of participants participate all week.

Safe Sign-in Procedures

- EarlyON Centres must develop policies and procedures for safe sign-ins including establishing how physical distancing can be maintained.
- Pre-registering for programs and services ahead of time helps to promote safe and timely sign-ins for children and families. Further suggestions to promote safe in person sign-ins include:
 - Display signage at the entrance explaining hand hygiene, physical distancing, symptom screening and usage of masks (as applicable);
 - Consider using signage/markings on the ground to direct families through the entry, where to wait, and how to exit;
 - Encouraging one-way traffic flow throughout the space;
 - Encourage hand hygiene by providing hand sanitizer containing 60%-90% alcohol content at the entrance with signage demonstrating appropriate use (see [How to Wash Your Hands](#));
 - Conduct frequent cleaning and disinfection of high-touch surfaces; and
 - If storage for personal items is required (e.g., strollers, diaper bags, etc.), it is recommended that policies be developed to promote physical distancing when accessing the space as well as regular cleaning.

Equipment and Toy Usage and Restrictions

- The ministry understands that in an EarlyON setting, equipment and toys may be required to deliver programs or services. EarlyON Centres are encouraged to limit usage of shared toys and equipment where possible. The following requirements should be followed regarding the use of toys and equipment:
 - EarlyON Centres should remove and discontinue use of any toys made of porous materials (e.g., plush toys) as they cannot be effectively cleaned and disinfected.
 - Toys and equipment should be cleaned and disinfected between users as

well as between program groups.

- If sensory materials (e.g., playdough, water, sand, etc.) are offered, they should be provided for single use only.
- Blankets or sheets should ideally be provided by families for their children, but if supplied by the centre, they are to be laundered in between uses.

Outdoor Programming

- Provider must ensure that there are written policies and procedures outlining the health and safety protocols for outdoor offerings.
- Providers must adhere to the gathering limits set by the Government of Ontario and local municipal by-laws.
- The use of masks is not required outdoors for adults or children if physical distancing of at least 2 metres can be maintained between individuals.
- Encouraging proper hand hygiene before and after using shared outdoor structures is advised.
- Toys and equipment should be cleaned and disinfected between users as well as between program groups.
- Personal items such as sunscreen should not be shared.

Guidance on the Use of Masks, Personal Protective Equipment, and Hand Hygiene

- Providers must ensure that there are written policies and procedures detailing the requirements on the use of PPE and must ensure that these policies and procedures are consistent with the information in this section as well as any direction provided by their local public health unit.
- Parents/guardians are responsible for providing their child(ren) (if applicable) and themselves with a non-medical mask(s) or face covering when participating in EarlyON programs and services in-person.

Expectations for Staff

- All EarlyON staff are required to wear medical masks and eye protection (i.e., face shield or goggles) while inside the EarlyON premises, including in hallways and staff rooms.
- The use of medical masks and eye protection is for the safety of EarlyON staff. This is very important when working in a setting with young children who may not be

wearing face coverings (i.e. under the age of two).

Other Adults (caregivers/parents/essential visitors)

- All other adults (parents/caregivers/essential visitors) are required to wear a face covering or non-medical mask while inside the premises, including hallways and other shared areas (see information about the use of face coverings on the provincial [COVID-19 website](#)).

Children

- All children in grade 4 and higher are required to wear a non-medical mask or face covering while inside the premises, including hallways and other shared areas.
- All younger children (aged 2 through grade 3) are encouraged, but not required to wear a non-medical mask or face covering while inside an EarlyON setting, including in hallways.
- Masks are not recommended for children under the age of two.
- See information about the use of masks on the [provincial COVID-19 website](#).

Exceptions/Exemptions

- The use of masks is not required outdoors for adults or children if physical distancing of a least 2-metres can be maintained between individuals.
- Reasonable exceptions to the requirement to wear masks are expected to be put in place by EarlyON Centres. Exceptions to wearing masks indoors could include circumstances where a physical distance of at least 2 metres can be maintained between individuals, situations where a child cannot tolerate wearing a mask, reasonable exemptions for medical conditions, etc.
- EarlyON Centres should document their requirements and exemptions related to masks (e.g. within their COVID-19 policy). Please note that while providers may choose to set out in their policy that a doctor's note be acquired for an exception related to a medical condition, it is not a requirement of the ministry and is discouraged as a general practice.

Safe Masking Practices

- You should wash your hands before putting on a mask and after removing the mask. Refer to [Public Health Ontario resources](#) for how to properly put on and take off

masks and eye protection.

- Additionally, masks should be replaced when they become damp or visibly soiled.
- Please keep in mind that it may be difficult to put on a mask and eye protection properly (i.e. without contamination) after having removed them, particularly given the spontaneous interactions that can occur when working with young children in an EarlyON setting.

Hand Hygiene

- EarlyON staff should perform and promote frequent, proper hand hygiene (including supervising or assisting participants with hand hygiene).
- Hand washing using soap and water is recommended over alcohol-based hand rub when hands are visibly soiled. Refer to [Public Health Ontario's How to Wash Your Hands fact sheet](#).
- Using hand sanitizer containing 60%-90% alcohol content when hands are not visibly soiled.

PPE Supply

- To support the healthy and safe operation of in-person EarlyON Child and Family programs, a supply of medical masks and eye protection (i.e., face shields) is being procured and delivered through the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services to CMSMs/DSSABs/providers on a monthly basis. EarlyON providers should communicate with their CMSM/DSSAB partner to initiate a supply of PPE from the Province of Ontario or make changes to an existing supply. CMSMs/DSSABs can then request these new supplies or changes to existing supplies by contacting their Early Years Advisor.
- CMSMs/DSSABs and program providers should secure and sustain an amount of PPE and cleaning supplies that can support their current and ongoing in-person operations. Additional PPE is an eligible expense of the Federal Safe Restart funding allocation. The Ontario Together Portal has a [Workplace PPE Supplier Directory](#) that lists Ontario businesses that provide PPE.

Food and Drink

- EarlyON programs and services must be offered in a way that maintains physical distancing of at least 2 metres amongst all individuals, at all times, including when consuming food and/or drink.
- Providers may want to consider the following best practices regarding food and drink provision:

- Promoting proper hand hygiene before and after eating.
- Promoting safe masking practices before and after eating, including safely storing their mask when not in use.
- Ensuring there are no buffet or self-serve methods of providing food or drink.
- Ensuring that there is no sharing of food items among participants.
- If food/snack is being provided the following practices are followed:
 - Food is served in individual portions.
 - Proper hand hygiene is practiced when staff are preparing food and all individuals practice proper hand hygiene before and after eating.
 - There is no sharing of items (i.e. salt shaker, serving spoon etc.)
- Ensuring that if a microwave needs to be used that it is cleaned and disinfected after each use.

Screening for Symptoms

- All individuals must self-screen every day before arrival at the EarlyON Centre.
- A [screening tool](#) is available to support parents/caregivers, children, staff/providers and essential visitors in meeting this requirement.
- EarlyON providers, in consultation with local public health and the service system manager, may develop their own screening tool or screening solution (i.e. checklist, online form, survey, email, paper form, etc.), but these should align with criteria in the provincial screening tool.
- Self-assessment tools should be made available to staff to ensure awareness of possible symptoms of COVID-19.
- Parents and caregivers should be reminded of the screening requirement when reserving or registering for programs online or by phone where possible.
- Signs should be posted at entrances to the EarlyON Centre to remind staff, parents/caregivers, and essential visitors of screening requirements.
- In the event that an individual is not screened prior to arriving at the EarlyON Centre, active (in-person) screening should be available when necessary.
 - If an individual is screened at the EarlyON Centre, screeners should take appropriate precautions when screening and escorting participants into the centre, including maintaining a distance of at least 2 metres from those being screened, or being separated by a physical barrier (such as a plexiglass barrier).
 - A process should be in place to ensure those waiting in line are physically

distanced from one another.

- Alcohol-based hand rub containing 60% to 90% alcohol content should be placed at all screening stations. Dispensers should not be in locations that can be accessed by young children.
- Individuals who do not pass the screening are not permitted to attend the program, and must stay home. Please see below for more details. A failed screen does not need to be reported to the local public health unit.
- You may wish to consult the [Province's COVID-19 website](#) for information and resources on COVID-19 symptoms, protections, and seeking health care.

Attendance Records

- In addition to attendance records for all children/parents/caregivers/essential visitors that receive in-person programs and services, all EarlyON Centres are responsible for maintaining daily records of anyone entering the centre.
- These records must include all individuals who enter the premises (e.g., staff, cleaners, people doing maintenance work, people from partner organizations).
 - Records are to be kept on the premises and along with name and contact information must include an approximate time of arrival and time of departure for each individual.
 - Records must be kept up-to-date and available to facilitate contact tracing in the event of a confirmed COVID-19 case or outbreak (i.e., records can be made available to public health within 24 hours of a confirmed COVID-19 case or outbreak).
- Where possible, contact information should be obtained electronically (e.g., via online form, survey, or e-mail) or by phone prior to arrival at the EarlyON Centre.

Monitoring and Responding to Reports of COVID-19 Symptoms in an EarlyON Setting

- All EarlyON and early years sector partners, together with Ministry of Health and Public Health, will work closely to monitor and respond to reports of COVID-19 symptoms.
- Anyone who is symptomatic, does not pass screening, or has been advised to self-isolate by the local public health unit must not be permitted to enter the EarlyON premises and should stay at home (this includes children, parents/caregivers, staff, students, and other essential visitors).
- A list of symptoms, including atypical signs and symptoms, can be found on the Ministry of Health's COVID-19 [website](#)

- Providers must ensure that there are written policies and procedures for responding to symptomatic individuals in an EarlyON setting. These protocols should consider what procedures should be followed in the event a staff, child, parent, caregiver or essential visitor becomes ill while in the EarlyON Centre premises.
- If an individual becomes ill while in the EarlyON setting:
 - The ill individual is immediately separated from others in a separate room, where possible, and leave the EarlyON premises as soon as possible.
 - Anyone providing care to the ill individual should maintain as much physical distance as possible. If physical distancing is not possible the person providing care should wear a medical mask and eye protection, and be trained on proper use of PPE, including donning and doffing. If tolerated, the ill individual should also wear a medical mask.
 - Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette should be practiced while the ill individual is waiting to leave or be picked up.
 - Cleaning of all areas the ill individual was in should be conducted as soon as reasonably possible after the ill individual leaves (see section on Cleaning).
 - Symptomatic individuals and/or their parent/guardian should be advised to use the [online self-assessment tool](#) and follow instructions which may include seeking medical advice or going for testing for COVID-19 as appropriate, or as advised by their medical provider.
 - Communication protocols to update and inform necessary stakeholders while maintaining confidentiality of the ill individual should be initiated (e.g. service system manager, if located in a school contact the school). Note, suspected cases of COVID-19 do not need to be reported to the ministry.
 - Persons who test positive may not return to the EarlyON setting until they are cleared by the local public health unit. Note, that individuals do not need to provide a medical note or proof of negative result to return to the program.
 - Regular EarlyON operation can continue unless directed otherwise by the local public health unit.
 - The local public health unit will provide any further direction on testing and isolation of those who are identified as potential close contacts, if necessary. In most instances testing and isolation would only be recommended for contacts of a confirmed COVID-19 case.

Staff

- Providers must have written policies and procedures outlining the return to work policy for staff who test positive for COVID-19 as well as policies for staff who are symptomatic/have a suspected case of COVID-19.

- Staff who are presenting with new or worsening symptoms should be advised to use the [online self-assessment tool](#) and follow instructions which may include seeking medical advice or going for testing for COVID-19 as appropriate, or as advised by their medical provider.

Outbreak Management

- An outbreak may be declared by the local public health unit when:
 - within a 14-day period, there are two or more laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 cases in children, parents/caregivers, staff or other essential visitors with an epidemiological link (e.g. cases in the same room, cases that are part of the same EarlyON program cohort) where at least one case could have been reasonably acquired their infection in the EarlyON setting.
- The local public health unit will work with the provider to determine whether epidemiological links exist between cases and whether transmission may have occurred in the EarlyON setting.
- If the local public health unit declares an outbreak, they will direct appropriate next steps, which could include a partial or full closure of the EarlyON Centre.
- If the public health unit determines that partial or full closure of the EarlyON setting is required, CMSMs/DSSABs must update the ministry through their Early Years Advisor, see section on ‘Reporting Confirmed Cases to the Ministry’.

Reporting Confirmed Cases to the Ministry of Education

Previously, CMSM/DSSABs were required to report all suspected cases of COVID-19 to the ministry. Currently, only where a staff, child, parent/caregiver, or essential visitor has a confirmed case of COVID-19 (i.e. a positive COVID-19 test result) and/or program closure, CMSMs/DSSABs must:

- report this to the ministry by contacting their Early Years Advisor and including the following information:
 - Name and address of EarlyON Centre;
 - Name of school board, if located in a school;
 - Name of school, if located in a school;
 - Who tested positive (i.e. child, parent/caregiver, staff, student, essential visitor);
 - Whether the centre closed (full or partial) and the date of the closure; and
 - Optional: Short description of the situation.
- report to the local public health unit and provide any materials (e.g., daily attendance records) to public health officials to support case management and contact tracing and other activities in accordance with all applicable legislation, including the [Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act](#).

Public health officials will determine any additional steps required, including but not limited to how to monitor for other possible infected staff, parents/caregivers, children and essential visitors and the declaration of an outbreak and closure of rooms and/or entire EarlyON setting.

If the public health unit determines that partial or full closure of the EarlyON setting is required, CMSMs/DSSABs must update the ministry through their Early Years Advisor.

Note, CMSM/DSSABs are no longer required to report suspected cases of COVID-19 to the ministry.

OTHER OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Staff Training

CMSMs/DSSABs must ensure that training that is aligned with local public health unit direction is provided to all EarlyON Centre program staff, including any students completing post-secondary educational placements, on the health, safety and other operational measures outlined in this document plus any additional local requirements in place. CMSMs/DSSABs are not required to develop or deliver the training directly but must ensure that it is provided to all EarlyON program staff.

- New training is not required with each iteration of this guidance, but should be offered in a way that includes EarlyON staff and post-secondary students at least once, whether they re-opened in September or later.
- This may include instruction on how to properly use PPE, how to properly clean and disinfect the space and equipment, how to ensure daily screening is completed, how to keep daily attendance records, and what to do in the case that someone becomes sick, including how and when to report.

Liability and Insurance

EarlyON providers may wish to consult with their legal counsel or insurance advisor about any other considerations for operating and providing EarlyON Centre programs and service during this period.

DATA REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

CMSMs/DSSABs may continue collecting information on the data elements outlined in the 2020 Guideline, where possible; however, the ministry understands that this may be difficult to do during this time. The ministry will provide further information on the collection of data elements for 2020 at a later time.