



COVID-19 Response

Early Parenting Centres

Introduction

This information provides guidance to Early Parenting Centres (EPCs) to support the continued delivery of services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic via safe and alternative means.

This guidance should:

- Build upon the pandemic and business continuity planning already underway by the EPC sector. These plans should be continually reviewed and refined to align with current COVID-19 advice.
- Inform alternative modes of service delivery and support the continued delivery of services to infants, children and families without compromising the health and wellbeing of clients or the workforce.

Please note that separate guidelines will be issued for the *COVID-19 Child and Family Services - PASD response*.

General advice

Guidance is current at the date of publication. As the pandemic progresses, settings are likely to change. Services should refer to <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/health-services-and-general-practitioners-coronavirus-disease-covid-19> or ring clinical advice line **1800 675 398** to seek current advice if unsure.

All services are encouraged to:

- Keep up-to-date with current COVID-19 advice and information for health providers on the Department of Health and Human Services' website: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>
- Refer to <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/health-services-and-general-practitioners-coronavirus-disease-covid-19> for the guidelines for health services and general practitioners, including transmission reduction and physical/social distancing measures
- Stay up to date by following the Chief Health Officer on Twitter (<https://twitter.com/victoriancho?lang=en>) to and subscribe to the newsletter by emailing: COVID-19@dhhs.vic.gov.au

Services should also be aware that for vulnerable patients or vulnerable health practitioners, new bulk-billed non-admitted items have been introduced for telehealth. Further information can be found at <http://www.mbsonline.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/news-2020-03-01-latest-news-March>

Alternative models of service delivery

DHHS recommends that EPC providers **develop and implement actions** to move to an alternative service delivery model for infants, children and families based on several principles:

- Ensure the **continued delivery of services** with priority given to anyone assessed as having complex needs where it is deemed that failure to provide urgent intervention may significantly impact on the immediate health wellbeing or safety of the child and ensure that back up plans are in place if there are workforce shortages or staff are redirected to other duties
- Deliver services in **different and safe ways** which contribute to the reduction of COVID-19 infection and transmission rates for workers and the community. This includes **reducing face to face contact** and aligning with **current COVID-19 physical distancing advice**

- **Prioritise access as needed** and in consideration of workforce availability to those people that need services the most, based on vulnerability, risk and need
- Ensure that Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is prioritised and used in accordance with current DHHS advice at <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/health-services-and-general-practitioners-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>

Key Actions

1. **Prioritise continued delivery of EPC services** in different ways which contribute to the reduction of COVID-19 infection and transmission rates for workers and the community
2. **Replace face to face contact** and align with current COVID-19 physical distancing advice wherever possible by using telephone or electronic consultations, including Skype and Zoom instead of home visits, day stay programs and residential programs
3. **Ensure priority access for EPC services** is given to anyone assessed as having complex needs where it is deemed that failure to provide urgent intervention may significantly impact on the immediate health wellbeing or safety of the child
4. **Prioritise and consider specific appropriate responses** for groups including:
 - Aboriginal families
 - Culturally and Linguistically Diverse families
 - Child Protection, Orange Door/ChildFirst and Family Services clients PASD clients (QEC and Tweddle) (Note, EPC's delivering residential PASDS are to refer to the COVID-19 Child and Family Services guidelines)
5. **Practice** universal precautions and infection control procedures at both individual and service level, including for example regularly cleaning phones, keyboards and shared spaces
6. Identify and reach out regularly (via phone/electronics) to high risk clients who may be vulnerable during periods of social isolation and physical distancing
7. **Prioritise essential** face to face appointments **only** for at risk or high needs clients and practice standard infection control precautions. If face to face support is deemed **professionally essential**, please follow current DHHS guidance to stay safe: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/health-services-and-general-practitioners-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>
8. Decisions about the need to conduct a short face visit is at **service provider discretion** in line with clinical judgement and business continuity/pandemic plans.
9. **Only use full PPE in accordance with current DHHS guidance** at <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/health-services-and-general-practitioners-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>. Advice on the correct usage of PPE, including how to put PPE on and take it off is available at <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus> under the heading 'resources for health professionals'. Given the worldwide PPE shortage, DHHS will provide additional advice about the provision of PPE for the delivery of **essential AoD** services for suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases.
10. If it is assessed that there are **no alternatives** and a **residential service is required** for the safety and wellbeing of the child and family member, manage COVID-19 risks in line with advice from DHHS and the Commonwealth Government on actions for residential facilities. While these guidelines focus on aged care services, the principles are applicable to EPC settings <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-transmission-reduction-measures#actions-for-residential-aged-care-facilities> **AND** <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidelines-for-outbreaks-in-residential-care-facilities>

EPC workforce health and availability

If EPC service providers or staff are concerned that an employee or employee's family member may have or have been exposed to COVID-19, they should:

- Follow DHHS advice on <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>
- Contact the 24 hour/7 day per week dedicated COVID-19 hotline [1800 675 398](tel:1800675398)
- EPCs can refer to the 24 hour/7 day per week **Maternal and Child Health Line 13 22 29** which will continue to provide telephone advice to parents and families across Victoria.
- As EPC services are scaled back to essential services, staff may need to be redirected to support other essential services, such as telephone support. Providers should look at options for flexible staffing arrangements to support continuation of core services.

Service agreements, funding and reporting

DHHS recognises the critical role of EPCs in the health and wellbeing of infants, children and families.

The Department has published advice on the Funded Agency Channel addressing the funding implications for services during the COVID-19 pandemic. This advice can be found at <https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/funding-and-service-delivery-responding-covid-19>.

Agencies should be reassured that DHHS:

- Will continue to provide funding and will not recoup funds for suspended services
- Understands funding may need to be redirected by services to implement alternative service delivery responses
- Understands that participation rates and targets may be impacted by COVID-19
- Expects that current year unspent funding will be rolled over to the following financial year to support EPC programs

Services should have a prior discussion with their DHHS Area Agency Performance and System Support (APSS) Manager about any service closures or major service changes that will require significant redirection of funding.

To receive this publication in an accessible format, email covid-19projectmanagementoffice@dhhs.vic.gov.au

For more information about COVID-19, call the Coronavirus Health Information Line on 1800 020 080.

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