

Gretchen's House Child Care Centers COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan

Last edit 8/17/2020

This plan is in compliance with guidance from the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA) and the Center for Disease Control (CDC), as well as the Washtenaw County Health Department and our consulting pediatrician, Dr. Andrew Hashikawa.

Monitoring Symptoms of COVID-19

Gretchen's House will monitor symptoms of COVID -19 as recommended by the State of Michigan. The necessary supplies will be provided daily including wipes, thermometers (touchless if possible), tissues, face masks, etc. Staff members will be trained on monitoring procedures and specific staff will be assigned to conduct monitoring at each site. Pick up and drop off times and procedures will be restructured to minimize the potential spread of COVID-19.

These procedures will be followed to insure the proper screening of staff, children, parents, and visitors for COVID-19 symptoms.

Children

- Understanding that a fever is the key indicator for young children, children will be excluded from care if their temperature is above 100.4 degrees. Staff will watch for signs of cough and/or diarrhea in addition to fever as it can be suggestive of coronavirus.
- Prior to arrival:
 - Families will take their child's temperature before coming to the facility.
 - Families will complete a form before dropping off their child, confirming that the child does not have fever, shortness of breath, or cough.
- When Children arrive:
 - Staff will make a visual inspection of the child for signs of illness which could include flushed cheeks, rapid breathing or difficulty breathing (without recent physical activity), fatigue, or extreme fussiness.
 - Children will wash their hands upon entering the classroom

Staff do not need to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) if you can maintain a distance of 6 feet.

- Staff will continue to monitor symptoms throughout the day and monitor temperatures when children appear ill or "not themselves."
- Each center will identify a staff person who will be responsible for handling questions and reporting about COVID-19 concerns. All Employees will know who this person is and how to contact them.
- When children have a fever alone, or a fever with a cough and/or diarrhea they will be referred to their primary care physician. A physician's note *may* be required for return to the program.

Staff

- As part of Michigan's essential workforce, Staff are eligible and will be required to be tested for COVID-19 before returning to work. Further testing may be required, based on potential or confirmed exposures, as recommended by a physician or the Health Department.
- Prior to staff arrival:
 - Staff will take their temperature before coming into the center.
 - Staff will be required to fill out a form to self - screen for cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, change in smell or taste, and diarrhea.
- Directors will verbally follow up with staff about symptoms of illness
- Staff will wash their hands upon entering the classroom.
- Staff arriving with fever above 100.4 or other symptoms will be sent home. They will need to stay home until they are cleared for work by their physician.
- Staff will be asked to report contact with anyone outside of work who has had a documented case of COVID-19. Staff will be instructed to self-quarantine if they have been exposed to COVID-19, following the guidance of the local CDC recommendations.

Families

- Gretchen's House will share with families the importance of the COVID -19 health and safety guidelines and encourage transparency with communication.
- Families will be informed in advance of daily temperature checks and the protocol for sending children and staff home.

Before a **child** is provided care, families will be asked to report possible illness if anyone in their household shows symptoms or has tested positive for COVID-19, including the child or family members if they or their children experience possible symptoms or have a positive test.

Visitors

- Gretchen's House will restrict non-essential visitors, volunteers, and activities including groups of children or adults from coming into the building.
- When it is necessary to have an essential visitor for repairs, deliveries, inspections, etc. they will be required to wear a mask and adhere to social distancing recommendations.

Social Distancing

Maintaining Consistent Groups

- Gretchen's House is following the recommendations for groups of 10 children or fewer as much as possible. We may have preschool or school age groups that go up slightly, to maintain continuity of care for children. We recognize the social/emotional needs of children to be with their same peer group and teacher. Group sizes may increase as our region moves through the re-opening phases defined by the State.

- Consistent adults will be scheduled with consistent groups of children.
- Children and adults will be assigned to designated classrooms and will not regroup with other classes during the day (see common spaces, below).
- Contact with external adults and between groups of children will be avoided.
- We will place cribs, cots and mats at least six feet apart, when possible. Place bedding in head-to-toe positioning. This means children will be sleeping in opposite directions. If one child has their head at the top of the cot/mat, the child on the other cot should have their toes at the top of the cot/mat.

Prepare Physical Spaces

- Toys and objects which cannot be easily cleaned or sanitized will be removed between use.
- Rooms will have a “used toy box” to hold toys that need to be cleaned before reuse.
- Duplicates and alternative toys will be kept handy for rotation into the room, to replace those that are removed for cleaning.
 - Toys that are mouthed or handled excessively by a child will be rotated out and replaced with clean toys.
 - Dishwasher-safe toys should be put run through the dishwasher when possible.
 - Wooden toys should be cleaned appropriately on at least a daily basis, or more frequently after being mouthed.
 - Cloth toys will be monitored and rotated out after use (see cleaning guidelines).
- Rearrange seating to distance children as much as possible and limit the number of children sitting together.
 - This is especially true for mealtimes.
 - We will not provide family style meal service. Teachers will serve children's individual meals. Children will eat together, but they will not serve themselves.
- Use touchless trash cans to provide a hands-free way to dispose of tissues and contaminants.
- We will ensure ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible. Open windows and doors, if possible, considering children's safety.
- Gretchen's House will make certain water is safe by taking steps to ensure all water systems and drinking fountains are safe to use. (our Facilities Manager will have completed this task prior to the centers reopening, following CDC guidelines).

Limit, or Eliminate, Use of Common Spaces

- Common spaces, such as gyms, playgrounds and living room areas, will not be used by mixed groups of children.

- There will be an established schedule for individual groups to use these spaces.
- The schedule includes designated time and an identified staff member designated to clean these areas between groups.
- There will be no field trips or special events that convene larger groups of children or families.
- We will eliminate use of shared water and sensory tables. This play will be done with individual bins for each child.

Drop Off and Pick Up Times

To minimize the potential spread of COVID-19, we will limit the number of individuals in the facility—at drop off, pick up, and throughout the day. We will restructure drop off and pick up times to allow for maximum social distancing.

- Hand hygiene stations will be stationed at the entrance of the facility so children and parents can clean their hands when they enter. Soap and water or hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol will be available. Hand sanitizer will be kept out of the reach of children and used under adult supervision.
- Adults will be required to wear masks during drop off and pick up, and upon entering the building.
- We will stagger arrival and drop off times and plan to limit direct contact with parents to the extent possible. Each center and classroom will establish routines to minimize the number of people in the building or room at any time. This may include:
 - Staff meeting children at curbside, near the facility, and escorting them into and out of the building.
 - Centers with space available having families drop off and pick up in the lobby, with accommodations for social distancing clearly communicated.
 - Directing parents to drop off and pick up at the classroom's outside entrance, rather than going through the building.
- These practices will be balanced with the impact on a child's transition time, the parent's work schedule, and continuity of staffing.
- Families should limit their drop-off and pick-up to one adult, in order to minimize the number of people in the building.
- We will remind parents to avoid congregating in a single space or a large group.
- The CDC offers additional guidance for how to minimize potential spread of the virus during pick up and drop off and can be made available to staff.

Limit Non-essential Visitors

- We will restrict non-essential visitors, volunteers, and activities including groups of children or adults.
 - Licensing consultants are considered essential visitors.

- Tours will be limited during this period.
- Food and other deliveries will take place at the center's outside door. Prior arrangements will be made to allow staff time to accept the delivery and put food away.

Transportation

Non-essential travel will be avoided. If travel is necessary, vehicles or seating arrangement will be modified to allow for social distancing.

- Vehicles must be cleaned and sanitized before each use, including the return ride of the same trip.
- Everyone in the vehicle will wear masks.
- All staff will limit non-essential work-related travel and participate in training and technical assistance virtually whenever possible.

Cleaning, Disinfecting and Hygiene Practices

We will reinforce the best practices we already use with children and staff members to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Hand Washing

We will reinforce our regular health and safety practices with children and staff. We will wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. This is especially important after blowing your nose, coughing, sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food.

- We will continue to implement CDC handwashing guidelines. Wearing gloves does not replace appropriate hand hygiene. Wash hands at the appropriate times, regardless of whether gloves were worn.
- Soap and water are the best option, especially if hands are visibly dirty. If you use hand sanitizer, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry.
- We will continue to cover coughs with a tissue or sleeve. The CDC has flyers we may print and post in our facilities.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

We will continue to use robust cleaning protocols on at least a daily basis for items touched frequently. This may require designated cleaning staff. Research indicates that children touch items at significantly higher rates than adults.

- Common areas require at least a daily deep clean (for example, sinks, bathrooms, doorknobs, tabletops, and shared items). Areas used by more than one group of children should be cleaned and disinfected between groups.

- We will clean toys frequently, especially items that have been in a child's mouth. Teachers will closely supervise to ensure that toys are cleaned after each child uses them (especially if a child has mouthed the toy). Each room will be prepared with a set of clean duplicates and a "used toy box" for heavily used items to be rotated out.

Items from Home

- We will remind families to limit the number of items brought into the facility, because this can be a way to transmit the virus. For example, whenever possible, children should be brought into the center without car seats.
- Comfort items may be especially needed during this time of transition, as they may reduce stress for children and caregivers. Children may have access to their comfort items whenever needed, however when not in use, efforts should be made for these items to be placed in a cubby or bin. If possible, comfort items should remain at the center to avoid cross contamination from another site. Items should also be washed at least weekly at home or at the center.

Safety Equipment

Personal protective equipment (PPE) is necessary in many settings to keep individuals safe. Child care providers do not need to wear N95 or surgical masks, smocks, or face shields, however, other protective equipment is appropriate. Gretchen's House staff will use these guidelines, as well as technical assistance from the [United States Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#).

Masks or Cloth Face Coverings: For Staff Members

According to the Executive Order 2020-77, employers must develop a preparedness and response plan that includes when, where, how, and if employees are required to wear cloth face coverings. Michigan State licensing currently recommends a cloth face covering as a best practice.

- Gretchen's House will make masks available to all staff. By Executive Order, Governor Whitmer required all employers whose workers perform in person work to provide non-medical grade face coverings to their workers. This includes childcare providers. Cloth face coverings, such as a homemade mask, scarf, bandana, or handkerchiefs, are best. N95 masks and surgical masks are not recommended at this time. The CDC provides more guidance for how to properly wear and sanitize a cloth face covering.
- Staff who wish to provide their own masks may do so. Staff will be expected to properly wear and sanitize their personal masks, in accordance with CDC guidance (above).
- Teachers and all other adults will be required to wear masks when inside the classroom. They may remove their mask outside, if they are able to socially distance from other adults.
- Teachers who are on breaks or working outside their classrooms, away from children, and other center staff (Directors, Office Managers, or others) will be required to wear masks inside the center, and on center vehicles with children or other staff.

- When working outside the building, staff may choose not to wear a mask if they are able to remain at least 6 feet from other people.
- Staff who are cleaning shared spaces, inside or outside, should wear masks.
- Staff who attend a gathering with 10 or fewer people from outside their household should try to minimize their contact with others attending the gathering. It is encouraged that you wear a mask and social distance from others. You will not be required to quarantine after attending a gathering of this size, but we ask that you be mindful of your close interactions with others.
- Staff who attend an event with more than 10 people should wear a mask and social distance while at the event. If wearing a mask or social distancing are not possible, staff will be required to quarantine for 14 days after the event before they return to work.

Attend to children's social emotional health

- Teachers will need to use strategies to prepare children for seeing their caregivers in masks and attend to children's emotional responses to this new normal. One option is for caregivers to share a picture of themselves with and without the mask in advance of a child's return to care.
- Teachers will have time and training prior to children's return, to implement these strategies.
- Teachers will be provided see-through masks, so children can see their facial expressions more easily. It is important to remember that children's social emotional development relies on the 'serve and return' interactions that are a critical part of high-quality care giving. Gretchen's House encourages staff to keep this in mind as they interact with children. When social distancing is possible from other adults, staff should be intentional about showing children their face and facial expressions.
<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/serve-and-return/>
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Masks or Cloth Face Coverings: For Children

- Medical professionals recognize that many young children will not reliably wear a mask, and a mask may result in increased touching of the face which would negate the purpose of the mask. Young children will take the masks off multiple times a day and in the process the mask will touch the floor and other objects making them a potential source of infection.
- Gretchen's House will follow the Executive Order regarding the required use of masks.

Summary of requirements:

Phase	Environment	Staff	Children Ages 2-3	Children Ages 4-11	Children Ages 12 and up	Parents and visitors
Phases 1-4	Classrooms, Small Groups, and Homes	Required	Should be encouraged*	Should be encouraged*	Required	Required
	Common spaces	Required	Should be encouraged*	Required	Required	Required
	Outside with social distancing	Not required	Not required	Not required	Not required	Not required
	Transportation	Required	Required	Required	Required	Required
Phase 5	All environments	Providers are strongly encouraged to continue wearing cloth face coverings as described in phases 1 through 4.				

- * Although cloth face coverings are not required in these settings, they should be encouraged if tolerated.

- If children do wear masks, ensure children can remove the face covering without assistance.
- Cloth face coverings should never be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or anyone unable to remove the face covering without assistance. The American Academy of Pediatrics provides tips for how to help children be more comfortable wearing cloth face coverings and provides more information to inform your decision about whether to require children in your care, over age 2, to wear cloth face coverings.

Gloves

- We will continue our current practice of using gloves to prevent the spread of illness. Staff should wear gloves when handling contaminants, changing diapers, or cleaning. Gloves are not recommended for broader use.
- Gloves will be provided for the above purposes. Staff members should wash hands before putting gloves on and immediately after gloves are removed. Gloves are intended for single use and should be discarded in a covered container.
- When serving food to children without a utensil, staff should use food service gloves. Staff members should wash hands before and after wearing these gloves, as well.

Communication Protocol for Families

Gretchen’s House will provide families the protocol for reporting symptoms, positive test results and policies on when children will be excluded from care.

- Anyone who becomes symptomatic will be isolated and sent home immediately.

- Gretchen's House will notify the local health department and our licensing consultant if a child or staff member tests positive for COVID-19.
- The center will notify families if a child or staff member tests positive for COVID-19. This will be done verbally *and* with written notice on the classroom family board.
- If it is determined that any individual who was present at the facility tests positive for COVID-19, Gretchen's House will contact our licensing consultant and the local health department for next steps.
- Staff and families must report to Gretchen's House if they become symptomatic or receive positive COVID-19 test results.
- To determine whether to close the classroom or entire center, Gretchen's House will seek guidance from our local health department. If an individual in a classroom is identified with a positive test for COVID-19 the classroom will be closed, cleaned and everyone in that classroom should be quarantined for 14 days or the current recommendation.

Isolation Procedures

Gretchen's House understands our critical role in helping communities limit the spread of the virus. People who become ill while in care will be isolated.

- If a child becomes ill, the child will be isolated in a designated location until the child can be picked up.
- Proper health and safety precautions will be taken while the child is waiting to be picked up. This includes staff wearing masks, gloves and disinfecting the space once the child has been picked up.
- If a staff member begins to feel ill during the day, they will be sent home immediately.
- Gretchen's House will contact our local health department for guidance and best practices and to determine if the classroom or center must close.

Set Guidelines for Returning to Care and Work

Staff members and children should stay home and self-isolate if they show symptoms of COVID19. It can be challenging to determine when to isolate young children because they are ill more often than adults, and the cause of a fever is sometimes unknown.

If a staff member or child has a fever or a cough, providers should follow their child and staff illness policy. At this time, it is recommended that children be fever free for 24 hours before returning to care (even if other symptoms are not present). A physician's note may be required for return to the center.

If a staff member or child exhibits multiple symptoms of COVID-19, you suspect possible exposure, or an individual tests positive for COVID-19, the individual must stay home until:

- Has been fever-free for at least 72 hours without the use of medicine that reduces fevers AND

- Other symptoms have improved AND
- At least 10 days have passed since your symptoms first appeared.

Most children and staff members can return to care/work based on improved symptoms and the passage of time. Local health departments may recommend that some individuals (for example, immunocompromised individuals) receive two negative tests in a row, 24 hours apart.

Partnering and Communicating with Staff Members

Proactively Contact Staff Members

Administrative staff and/or Directors will reach out to all staff members to:

- Determine when they will return to work.
- Discuss concerns or questions staff members have about returning to work and discuss how you can address them together.
- Discuss any health concerns/conditions which may make a staff member at higher risk for complications if exposed to COVID-19. Take care to respect employee's privacy. Staff with underlying health conditions or at higher risk will consult with their primary care physician before returning to work.
- We will continue to share the steps we are taking to make our facilities as safe as possible.

Share Employees' Rights

Under [Executive Order 2020-36](#), employees may not be discharged, disciplined, or otherwise retaliated against for staying home when he or she is at particular risk for infecting others with COVID-19. See the Executive Order for complete details on whether employees must be paid and when they must return to work.

Create a Staffing Plan

- Administrative staff and/or Directors will assess staffing needs based on projected enrollment, the need to limit exposure across groups, and the need to practice social distancing.
- Staffing plan will include substitutes and alternative center staff to address potential need to quarantine staff or allow for longer absences from work than normal.

Train Staff

Gretchen's House will provide employees with training about COVID-19. This includes how COVID-19 is transmitted, the distance the virus can travel, how long the virus remains viable in the air and on surfaces, signs and symptoms of COVID-19, steps employees must take to notify employers of signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and a suspected or confirmed diagnosis, and measures the employer and employees are taking to limit the spread of the virus (including PPE).

- Gretchen's House will ensure staff are provided training opportunities to better understand COVID-19 and care for children safely. Examples of these trainings:
 - [Caring for children in care during COVID-19](#), from the federal Office of Head Start. This training can be counted towards the required annual training for licensed providers.
 - [Preventing and managing infectious diseases in Early Education and Child Care](#), free from the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- We will use on-line training and meetings when possible. We will limit in person staff meetings no more than 10 people. We will maintain social distancing requirements.

Provide Resources to Support Children's Social Emotional Needs

Gretchen's House Administration and Center Directors will partner with staff to develop a plan to support the emotional reactions of children returning to child care. Some children will be relieved, some will have initial challenges with separation from their parent(s), some may demonstrate anger at the "disappearance" of their child care provider, and some may act out toward other children. Whatever the reactions, staff may need some new tools in their toolkit to assist the child with emotional regulation.

Provide Resources to Support Staff Members' Social Emotional Needs

To ensure the well-being of the children, Gretchen's House Administration is committed to promoting the well-being of their teachers and caregivers, and to providing them with the emotional and administrative supports necessary during this time of re-integration, and in the months ahead.

As essential workers in the COVID-19 pandemic, child-care providers may have worries about their own physical or psychological health, and the potential risk to their family members at home. Because young children internalize the stress of the adults who care for them, Gretchen's House will provide supports and services to the child care providers to ensure their emotional well-being.

Strategies to "help the helpers" can include professional development supports such as access to behavior health consultation, and reflective consultation, which can help providers remain emotionally available, sensitive, and responsive to the needs of the infants and young children they care for.

Other Considerations

Food Service

Gretchen's House will continue to provide meals for children at the center, with the following modifications to mitigate cross contamination or spreading of germs.

- We will maintain the same safety precautions established for classrooms and other center spaces in the kitchen. This includes:

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- We will schedule consistent staffing for food preparation and clean up, to minimize contact with shared food and equipment.
 - Kitchen staff will wear gloves and masks during food preparation and clean up. Gloves will be changed between activities, and we will follow the handwashing guidelines outlined in this document.
 - We will continue to strictly follow our regular protocol for disinfecting food prep surfaces before, during, and after use.
 - Each center will establish a routine for delivering food to classrooms. We will ensure that food goes directly from the kitchen to the classrooms where it will be served promptly.
- We may adjust center menus to limit the amount of food handling by cooks and teachers, to provide individual service to children. Any changes will comply with current Gretchen's House nutritional guidelines.
 - We will wash dishes with our established sanitizing method (three step or dishwasher). Clean dishes will be promptly stored in a covered location, to avoid contamination.
 - As stated above, we will not provide family style meal service. Teachers will serve children's individual meals. Children will eat together, but they will not serve themselves food or beverages.
 - Teachers will seat children at a distance and limit the number of children at the table when possible, during mealtimes.
 - When setting up for meals, we will refrain from placing dishes on tables until individual children are being served in their designated seats, with food already on the plates.
 - We will establish clean up routines as appropriate to the individual needs in each classroom. We will minimize the number of people handling used tableware, and children will not have access to food or tableware used by another child.