



To: Governors

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Subject: Child Care Needs During COVID-19 Closures

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Introduction

During the unprecedented time of COVID-19 precautions, child care is an essential service for working families, especially for those who play a role in the public health system (e.g., first responders and hospital personnel). States must make difficult decisions about whether to keep child care programs open to support workers who rely on the services, or to close programs in an effort to mitigate virus spread and protect children and providers. States are also working on ways to provide care for school-aged children of essential service employees.

Emerging State Models in Meeting Child Care Needs

As of March 25, 2020, many states have a plan to address the child care needs of essential workers for both school-aged children and young children. States have chosen three main courses of action: (1) closing all child care other than for essential workers; (2) leaving child care open, but relaxing some child care regulations; and (3) opening up additional, temporary provisional child care sites for essential workers. All three of these actions seek to accommodate child care needs, while prioritizing the CDC's recommendations about sanitizing and keeping group sizes small.

1. Child care closures except for essential workers: Several states have chosen to completely close child care centers except for essential workers through the Governor's recommendation or executive order. These closings align with the rationale used to close K-12 and institutions of higher education to help prevent the spread of the virus. States such as [Alabama](#), [Illinois](#), [Kentucky](#), [Massachusetts](#), [Pennsylvania](#), and [Rhode Island](#), have all chosen to close center-based child care, with exceptions for children of essential workers. [Vermont](#) has also closed child care except for essential workers, and has now classified the child care teachers as essential workers, as well.
2. Leaving child care open, but relaxing some child care regulations: States that have made the decision to keep child care centers open indefinitely may have chosen to give guidance on relaxed regulations in order to create temporary solutions to child care demand for essential workers. Several states have removed key barriers for families such as eliminating co-payments for parents, [Wisconsin](#), extending income eligibility for child care subsidies, [New York](#), and extending subsidies to siblings of children who already qualify, [Louisiana](#).

3. Opening up additional temporary provisional child care sites for essential workers: States recognize the need for child care of both young and school-aged children of essential workers. Setting up temporary provisions for this child care population include actions such as setting up emergency licensing for child care, like in [Ohio](#). Several states have also extended child care to meet the needs of essential workers through eligibility requirement changes, such as in [New Mexico](#). Other states and localities are working to convert or repurpose libraries and recreation facilities ([San Francisco](#)) to accommodate additional children through emergency child care. States are assisting with this by waiving zoning and other requirements that hinder start-up child care, like in [Maryland](#), and creating directives for alternative child care plans for essential workers, like in [Oregon](#). Finally, to meet the needs of school-aged children of essential workers, several states including [California](#) and [Minnesota](#) are requiring K-12 schools to set up arrangements for children of essential workers.

Considerations for Governors

In deciding how to meet child care needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, governors offices should consider the following:

- Issue robust guidance to child care and licensed family child care providers: State lead agencies for child care and licensed family child care should release detailed guidance on how to proceed during this unprecedented time. The guidance should include which regulations have been suspended, instructions on providing child care safely following the CDC's recommendations, information on who to contact with questions and a frequently asked questions document, if possible. [Louisiana](#) has provided robust guidance and many other states have issued provisional guidance through their lead agency for child care or their department of early learning.
- Leverage federal flexibility around child care regulations: The Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care has released guidance on both [flexible spending during state emergencies](#) and [regulation flexibilities relevant to COVID-19](#). Governors should encourage lead agencies for child care to take advantage of these flexibilities to ensure child care demand for essential workers is met. This can be done through several key provisions:
 - Ensuring providers receive subsidy reimbursement payments from the state based on the number of children enrolled in the center, not their attendance, like [North Carolina](#) and [Mississippi](#).
 - Waiving parent co-pays to providers, like in [New Mexico](#).
 - Delaying monitoring visits and licensing renewals for providers, like in [Utah](#).
 - Changing and expanding eligibility requirements for child care subsidy so that essential workers can quickly enroll their children in slots during the crisis, such as [Oregon](#)'s expanded eligibility and increased income limits.

- Consider key supports for the child care workforce: Most child care teachers earn poverty level wages, and many do not have access to key benefits such as paid leave. As child care businesses are forced to close their doors due to COVID-19, many child care teachers will be left without an income for the foreseeable future. For child care centers that remain open, teachers must choose between protecting their families and earning an income. Key actions that can help to alleviate these issues include:
 - Declaring child care workers as essential employees, like in [Virginia](#) and [Wisconsin](#).
 - Extending unemployment benefits to child care workers.
 - Aligning child care workers status with Head Start, PreK and K-12 teachers who will receive paid leave.
 - Head Start teachers will have guaranteed pay through the [Office of Head Start – COVID-19 Wages and Benefits](#) program.
- Address the needs of child care and family child care providers as small businesses: Many child care centers and family child care providers are small business owners. They work on razor thin margins normally and are now suffering devastating losses as private pay parents are forced to care for their children at home. Consider providing temporary grants to support child care, like in [Indiana](#) and [Tennessee](#) and including child care in state plans to support small businesses.

Supplemental Resources:

- [State tracker of child care status](#) displays each state’s emergency child care status and links to associated guidance and agency pages (Source: The Hunt Institute).
- [Interactive map of child care need](#) for essential employees by state and locality (Source: Yale University and Child Care Aware of America).
- Head Start [Guidance on COVID-19](#) and [Disaster Recovery Flexibilities](#).
- ACF Guidance on [Temporarily Repurposing Head Start and Early Head Start Centers: Partnering to Support Emergency Child Care During the COVID-19 Crisis](#).
- Additional State Examples:
 - [Colorado issued approval of new and relocated child care operations during the COVID-19 crisis](#).
 - [Iowa Department of Human Services provides temporary emergency child care for essential workforce](#) and establishes an [online portal](#) so families can search for available child care by location and type of service.