## What to expect in child care

This guidance is based on the [ChildCareStrongNC Public Health Toolkit](https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/media/3091/open) from the NC Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS). The Toolkit describes prevention strategies that child care programs can implement to help control the spread of COVID-19, including:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * vaccination * mask-wearing under certain circumstances * keeping children in consistent groups (cohorting) | * cleaning and hygiene * ventilation | * monitoring children and staff for signs of illness and exclusion. |

Programs may use a combination of prevention strategies to reduce the spread of illness. Child care policies may be revised based on the needs of the program and updated recommendations from health professionals.

## Before Going to Child Care:

### Stay up-to-date on current COVID-19 information

Get updates about the [current COVID-19 situation in North Carolina](https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/dashboard) from NC DHHS.

### Get vaccinated

[COVID-19 vaccines](https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/vaccines) are safe and effective at protecting you and your child from severe illness, hospitalization, and death. Protect yourself and your child by ensuring your entire family is fully vaccinated and up-to-date on any additional doses or booster shots for which you are eligible.

## When at Child Care:

Masking   
Unless an exemption to mask wearing applies, children are:

**Exemptions to mask use:**

* children under age 2
* children between 2 and 5 who cannot wear a mask safely due to an inability to
  + wear a mask correctly
  + avoid frequent touching of the mask and their face
  + limit sucking, drooling, or having excess saliva on the mask
  + remove the mask without assistance
* children who are sleeping or actively eating or drinking
* required to wear a well-fitting masks following a COVID-19 infection upon return to child care for 10 days from:
  + the day symptoms start (if child has symptoms)
  + the day of specimen collection for children with no symptoms.
* recommended to wear well-fitting masks after a known COVID-19 exposure for 10 days after the last known exposure.

Mask wearing throughout the day for children who have not had a COVID-19 infection or who have been exposed may become optional for your child in child care in certain situations. However, local health authorities may decide that mask wearing must continue, and your facility may have a policy in place requiring masking. Ask your child care provider for details on what is happening in the facility and community.

Masks continue to be recommended in indoor settings for:

* people at high risk for severe disease from COVID-19
* people who are not up-to-date on any COVID-19 vaccinations for which they are eligible. (Children under 5 are not yet eligible for vaccination.)

**CDC provides guidance** [on how to select, properly wear, clean, and store masks](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html)**.**

### Daily Health Checks

Talk to an early educator during drop off about your child’s health since they were last in care, including:

* any signs or symptoms of illness or injury, including symptoms of COVID-19
* any accidents, unusual events, or injuries that have occurred and
* any mood or behavior changes.

### Identify Symptoms of COVID-19

Staying home when sick is necessary to keep contagious illnesses, including COVID-19, out of child care programs and prevent spreading the virus to other children and staff. After a person is exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19, symptoms may appear **2-14 days later.**

Symptoms of COVID-19 can be very mild or severe and include:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * Fever | * Fatigue | * Nausea or vomiting |
| * Chills | * Muscle or body aches | * Diarrhea |
| * Cough | * Headache | This list does not include all possible symptoms and it may change as new information is discovered. |
| * New loss of taste or smell | * Sore throat |
| * Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing | * Congestion or runny nose |

Share **any symptoms** or test results with the facility. **Keep children at home if:**

* they have symptoms of illness. Contact a healthcare provider to discuss care for your child. Consider having your child tested for COVID-19 to determine whether others may have been exposed.
* they have a positive COVID-19 test or have been diagnosed with COVID-19 by a health care provider.

The NC Child Care Rules require exclusion if a child has certain symptoms and if he or she:

* is unable to participate comfortably in activities, as determined by staff members of the program or
* has symptoms that result in a need for care that is greater than the staff can safely provide without compromising the health and safety of other children.

## Returning to Child Care

The child care program will let you know when your child can safely return to child care, based on guidance from the [ChildCareStrongNC Public Health Toolkit](https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/media/3091/open), the local health department, and facility policy.

### Exposure to COVID-19

The staff at your child’s facility should notify you if your child has been exposed to COVID-19 while in care. Exposuremeans that a person has been within six feet of someone who is contagious with COVID-19 for a total of 15 minutes. The 15 minutes is a total amount of time throughout the day. For example, five minutes at a time three times during the day.

If your child has been exposed to COVID-19 in any location, watch for any symptoms of COVID-19 to develop. If any symptoms develop, keep your child at home and seek guidance from a health care professional.

Children who have been exposed to COVID-19 should:

* wear a well-fitting mask for 10 days after the last known exposure, unless an exemption to mask wearing applies
* be tested on day 5 after exposure unless he or she tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 90 days.
  + If your child develops symptoms, have them tested immediately.
  + You may also choose to have your child tested immediately when you are notified of the exposure to start isolation period sooner if the test is positive.

Child care facilities are no longer required by the NC Department of Health and Human Services to exclude children following an exposure to COVID-19 unless:

* the child develops symptoms **OR**
* the child tests positive or is diagnosed with COVID-19 by a health care provider, regardless of whether the child has symptoms or not **OR**
* local public health authorities require exclusion following exposure **OR**
* the facility has a policy to exclude children following exposure.

However, you may choose to keep your child at home following an exposure, even if they have not developed symptoms, until the results of your child’s COVID-19 test are known.

Contact your child care provider for questions regarding the toolkit.

If you have additional questions, please reach out to [dcdee.communications@dhhs.nc.gov](mailto:dcdee.communications@dhhs.nc.gov)