



FAMILY CONSIDERATIONS FOR  
CLASSROOM AND GROUP  
SETTINGS DURING COVID-19

For children receiving Early  
Intervention Services

# WHERE TO BEGIN

The information contained in this guide is current as of Sept. 20, 2020. Please keep in mind, guidance may change as the situation with COVID-19 evolves.

The Bureau of Early Intervention Services and Family Supports (BEISFS) recognizes families need to have access to and navigate a lot of information as they consider resuming classroom or group-based settings for their child.

This information includes:

- The status of COVID-19 in your area.
- The guidance provided to your Early Intervention (EI) program and providers, and other early childhood partners.
- How to stay informed.
- What your family's comfort level, and benefits and potential risks of classroom or group settings.

## Considerations

Think about and share with your child's team:

- What questions do you have about the health and safety of your child and family?
- What are the benefits and potential concerns for your child and family?
- What goals or outcomes are your priorities right now for your child and family?



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# HEALTH AND SAFETY PLANS

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El Preschool Programs (Intermediate Unit, School Districts or Elwyn), PA Pre-K Counts, Head Start and child care programs are required to develop health and safety plans. These health and safety plans should be individualized and based upon the needs and design of the programs.

Programs are required to share their health and safety plans in a way stakeholders (including families) can access. This may be on a website, provided in writing as part of a parent handbook, through social media, etc.

Although each program is required to develop its own health and safety plan, there are elements required to be addressed within their plans.

If you have questions about how your program is making decisions about health and safety practices, please reach out to your EI team and/or your early childhood program.

For information on the guidance provided to El Preschool and Pre-K programs see [Guidance and Resources for Pre-K to 12 Schools](#).

## REQUIRED ELEMENTS

Face Coverings or Face Masks  
Cleaning, Sanitizing, Disinfecting, Ventilation  
Social Distancing and Other Safety Protocols  
Monitoring Children and Staff Health  
Other Considerations for Children and Staff

These metrics are available for every county in Pennsylvania and can be found at the [COVID-19 Early Warning Monitoring System Dashboard](#).

## YOUR COMMUNITY & COVID-19

The safe return to classroom and group settings that allow for in person Early Intervention (EI) services will look different across Pennsylvania's communities and depend upon a variety of factors, one of which is the spread of COVID-19.

The Departments of Education and Health have recommended two standard public health metrics (incidence rate and the percent positivity) be used to identify counties as having low, moderate, or substantial community transmission of COVID-19.

EI Programs, as well as school district funded Pre-K, PA Pre-K Counts, and some Head Start programs, are encouraged to consider these levels as they determine their instructional and service delivery models.

Child care programs are considered essential programs. They may continue to operate in person. However, their health, safety, and operational procedures may change, depending upon level of community transmission.

Transmission in the County	Incidence Rate/100,000 Residents (Most Recent 7 Days)	AND/OR	PCR Percent Positivity (Most Recent 7 Days)
Low	<10	AND	<5%
Moderate	10 to < 100	OR	5% to <10%
Substantial	> 100	OR	> 10%

# COVID-19: WHO IS AT RISK? HOW IS IT SPREAD?

Everyone is at risk for COVID-19

- Everyone is at risk of getting COVID-19.
- Older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions may be at higher risk for more severe illness (including pregnant women).
- You can become infected by coming into close contact (about six feet or two arms lengths) with a person who has COVID-19.
- COVID-19 is spread from person-to-person.
- You can become infected from respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks.
- You may also be able to get it by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it, and then by touching your mouth, nose, or eyes.

As you review your program's health and safety plan, consider the following:

- Screening of children and staff
- Social distancing
- Cleaning, disinfecting, ventilation

You may also have additional considerations for your family.

- What are my child's and family health factors that may increase risk of more severe illness?
- Who else does my child and family interact with that might be at a greater risk?
- Do these considerations affect my comfort level?
- Is there anything that could make me feel more comfortable?



Resource: [Deciding How To Go Back To School](#)  
from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

# WHAT YOUR CHILD'S SETTING MIGHT LOOK LIKE

EI preschool classrooms, as well as other early childhood classrooms, will develop individualized policies and procedures to address the health and safety needs within their programs. Here are a few areas you may see impacted.

## Transportation and Pick up/Drop off

If your child is transported, there may be procedures for screening prior to entering the vehicle, limiting capacity to a smaller number of children, and/or arranging seating differently.

Screening of staff and children will occur. Screening and the transition for your child into their program may occur outside.

Family members may not be permitted into the program or classroom settings.

## Classroom Environment

Classrooms may be arranged to limit the number of children coming in contact with one another.

Children may only be interacting with one teacher and smaller groupings of children.

Some items or materials may be removed to allow for physical distancing. Materials that are not easily cleaned or disinfected may be removed. Materials or items from home may be prohibited.

There may be visual or other cues to help children maintain physical distancing and remind them of new routines and procedures.

More frequent hand washing for children and staff.

More frequent cleaning and disinfecting toys, materials and high touch surfaces.



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## Resources for face coverings/masks

- [Helping Kids Get Used to Seeing and Wearing Masks](#) (Nationwide Children's)
- [Mask Wearing Toolkit](#) (Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities)
- [Mask Mythbusters: 5 Common Misconceptions about Kids & Cloth Face Coverings](#) (American Academy of Pediatrics)
- [Wearing a Mask and Communication](#) (Pennsylvania Autism Services, Education, Resources, and Training Collaborative) These resources provide a guide for families and caregivers on how to work with loved ones on getting comfortable wearing a mask, different types of masks based on individual needs, as well as information on communicating while wearing masks for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- [Wearing a Mask Social Story](#) Available in Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Burmese and Russian (Pennsylvania Autism Services, Education, Resources, and Training Collaborative)
- Additional information is included in the [Resources for Masks for Children](#).

# FACE COVERINGS & EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTINGS

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EI and early childhood staff are required to wear cloth face coverings.

Children two years old and older are required to wear a face covering as described in the Order of the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health Order for Universal Face Coverings, unless they fit one of the exceptions included in Section 3 of the Order.

Section 3: Exceptions to Face Covering Requirement include:

- Individuals who cannot wear a mask due to a medical condition, including those with respiratory issues that impede breathing, mental health condition, or disability.
- Individuals who would be unable to remove a mask without assistance.

- Individuals who are under two years of age.
- Individuals who are communicating or seeking to communicate with someone who is hearing-impaired or has another disability, where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication.

The Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) recognizes helping young children to be comfortable wearing face masks may be challenging. It is important to help children feel more secure wearing a face mask when around other children and adults.

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# TRANSITION TO CLASSROOM OR GROUP SETTINGS

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Transitions for children and families may involve a variety of feelings and emotions.

You may have additional questions or concerns with transitions during COVID-19. Having a clear understanding of what to expect (for both you and your child) can help ease your concerns. It can also set the stage for a positive transition to support your child's growth and development.

## Considerations for Transitioning to Classroom or Group Settings

- Before transitioning into a classroom or group setting consider practicing routines and activities that may be new (for example: hand washing, covering sneeze and coughs, wearing a mask, as appropriate for your child).
- Talk to your child's program about items and materials that can or cannot be brought from home. If you are concerned a favorite comfort item will be missed, collaborate with your child's program to find alternatives.

- Be clear about drop off/pick up procedures.
- Talk to your child about what the procedures will look like.
- Learn about what a typical day might look like and what to expect in the classroom.
- Share this information with your child. How is the program reinforcing and teaching new routines (for example: visual schedules or visual reminders)?
- Share with the program what has worked in your family and any additional information that may help support your child.

## Resources to Support Your Child's Transition into their Preschool/Group Setting

Sharing Information between home and school

[My Teacher Wants to Know](#) (English) [My Teacher Wants to Know](#) (Spanish)  
[Greetings while social distancing](#) (English and Spanish)





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# STAYING INFORMED & ADDRESSING CONCERNS

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## Stay Informed & Remain Aware

### Stay Informed & Remain Aware

- Know what your child's providers are doing to keep your child healthy and safe.
- Ask questions and share any concerns with your EI team.
- Continue to monitor your child and other family member's health. Share information with your child's program if your child or family member has symptoms or have had contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 or is showing symptoms of COVID-19.
- Keep up to date on guidance related to COVID-19.

### Addressing Concerns

A first step in addressing a concern related to your child's Early Intervention services is to reach out to your child's EI Team/EI Program. If your concern is related to your child's early learning classroom, begin the conversation with your child's teacher or the Director of the program. If your concerns persist, or if you are having difficulty reaching your child's EI team, email BEISFS at [RA-ocdintervention@pa.gov](mailto:RA-ocdintervention@pa.gov)

### Additional Resources For EI Families

For additional information related to Early Intervention Services during COVID-19, including recorded Family Information sessions visit the [Supporting Families During COVID-19 page](#).

