

# Important COVID-19 Update for Licensed Childcare Facilities

Dear Childcare Staff and Families:

Thank you for all you are doing to protect yourselves, your families, and our community from COVID-19.

As we know, the Omicron variant can spread very quickly and the way we manage COVID-19 in the childcare setting had to change to reflect that reality. **Intensive case and contact follow-up with cohort dismissal is no longer an effective strategy for the virus that moves very fast.** Instead of focusing on where the virus is, we need to predict where it will be going and minimize transmission with public health measures. These measures in licensed childcare facilities remain extremely robust and transmission in childcare has been very low.

This change in our approach is not only better suited for a virus like Omicron but it also minimizes unnecessary disruptions to daily routines of many families that rely on access to daycare. As we see widespread transmission of COVID-19 in the community, it is not surprising to expect a higher rate of absences in the childcare setting, as well as other settings, particularly this time of year as other respiratory viruses frequently circulate. This higher rate of absence is not indicative of increased risk in the childcare environment. Childcare settings remain lower risk settings in terms of transmission compared to most other community settings including households.

With the changes to the provincial testing strategy, we know that the number of cases and contacts no longer has the same value as it did last year. We are supportive of the changes in provincial guidance as well as the operational systems which are in place to support this framework. Whether an individual knows for certain they have COVID-19, or another respiratory illness, it does not change the outcome of having to stay home when you are sick to avoid spreading illness to others.

## Here are some important changes:

- KFL&A Public Health will no longer be dismissing cohorts.
- Individuals who are only exposed at childcare with all required public health measures in place are not generally considered high-risk contacts due to the health and safety measures in place.
  - A case may identify someone in the childcare program as a high-risk contact if there was prolonged, unprotected, close interactions with the case (e.g., close, unprotected contact in a staff room).
- If a parent or guardian of a child, or staff member has been told by a case that they may have been exposed to a positive case while at childcare, they should monitor for symptoms and get tested (if eligible).
  - If the contact does not have symptoms, has not been told to isolate due to an exposure to a case or symptomatic individual in the community, and continues to pass the daily childcare screening, they can attend childcare.
- Any dismissals or closures of a childcare facility will be based on operational requirements (e.g., staffing shortages) determined by the childcare facility.
- Parents or caregivers will NOT receive a letter from Public Health to advise them of a case of COVID-19 at childcare or that their child was a high-risk contact.
- Due to the change in testing availability and the rapid spread of Omicron, it is not possible to know about or follow up with every confirmed or presumed COVID-19 case.
- Molecular testing (PCR or rapid molecular testing) has been prioritized for certain high-risk groups. In general, children and childcare staff are not eligible for a molecular test.
- Anyone who tests positive on a rapid antigen test is considered to have COVID-19. They do not need to get a confirmatory molecular test or notify Public Health, but should notify their high-risk contacts of their exposure. More information can be found at [Ontario.ca/exposed](https://ontario.ca/exposed) and [kflaph.ca/Selfisolation](https://kflaph.ca/Selfisolation).

## Update on Absenteeism Reporting

- Staff and parents or guardians are asked to inform the childcare facility of absences regardless of the reason.
- Childcare facilities are encouraged to monitor, and report defined levels of absences in the number of children or staff (**approximately 30% above their baseline**) to **KFL&A Public Health**.
- Continue to use established mechanisms for reporting child and staff absences if a gastrointestinal outbreak is suspected.
- KFL&A Public Health will support the childcare facility with informing families and recommending any necessary steps to improve the health and safety at the childcare facility.

## Enhanced Public Health Measures

The Ministry of Education, in consultation with the Ministry of Health, is responsible for providing operational guidance for childcare. To best protect children, staff and our community, Ontario's **Operational guidance during COVID-19 outbreak: child care** provides the requirements for child care programs to operate with enhanced health and safety protocols during the COVID-19 outbreak.

In KFL&A, most childcare-related cases up to the end of 2021 were acquired in the community. While the risk of exposure in childcare facilities cannot be completely eliminated, our experience so far has shown that transmission within childcare facilities is lower than (or equivalent to) levels of community transmission. In other words, we all need to control community transmission to prevent COVID-19 from spreading into childcare.

With the increased transmissibility of Omicron, it is even more important that we all continue to follow public health measures such as:

- screening,
- masking,
- maintaining physical distance,
- limiting our number of contacts,
- staying home when symptomatic, and
- getting vaccinated (when eligible).

This approach is similar to how we manage other respiratory viruses, such as influenza, RSV, or rhinovirus.

Vaccination remains the best defense against the highly transmissible Omicron variant. High vaccination rates, for those who are eligible, help to keep childcare facilities safe. In the KFL&A area, there are a variety of community vaccination clinics, including larger clinic sites, mobile and pop-up clinics, and clinics at pharmacies, schools, and in primary care offices. For more information on locations, times, and opportunities to walk in or book an appointment, visit [kflaph.ca/Vaccine](https://kflaph.ca/Vaccine).

For more information on COVID-19, including fact sheets, symptoms and screening, self-monitoring, self-isolation, testing, and vaccines, visit [kflaph.ca](https://kflaph.ca). If you have questions, please call 613-549-1232 and follow directions to the call centre.

Sincerely,



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