



# Back to Child Care During COVID-19

**MSDCC Strategies to Promote Health and Safety**



# Why is physical distancing important?

Experts believe COVID-19 is mainly spread through respiratory droplets (Public Health Ontario).

The droplets can carry the virus to other people's bodies or surfaces they might touch.

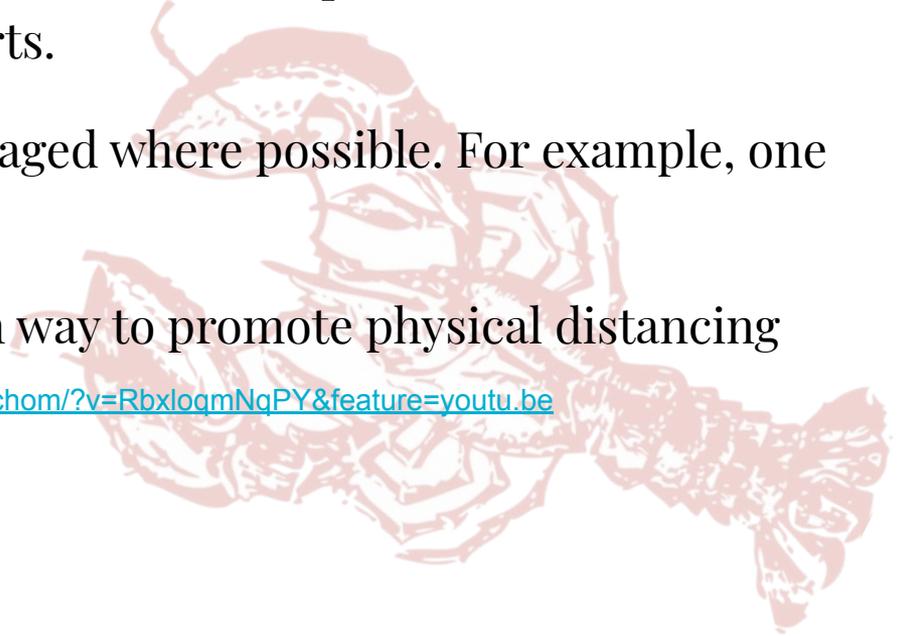


# What do Ontario and Toronto guidance documents recommend for distancing measures?

Distance **between** cohorts must be maintained. For example, toddler cohorts are completely separate from preschool cohorts.

Distance **within** cohorts should be encouraged where possible. For example, one cohort has two bubbles in each room.

Check out the Lobster Walk, which is a fun way to promote physical distancing with children, at this link: <https://www.youtube.cwatchom/?v=RbxloqmNqPY&feature=youtu.be>



# What else should we be considering?

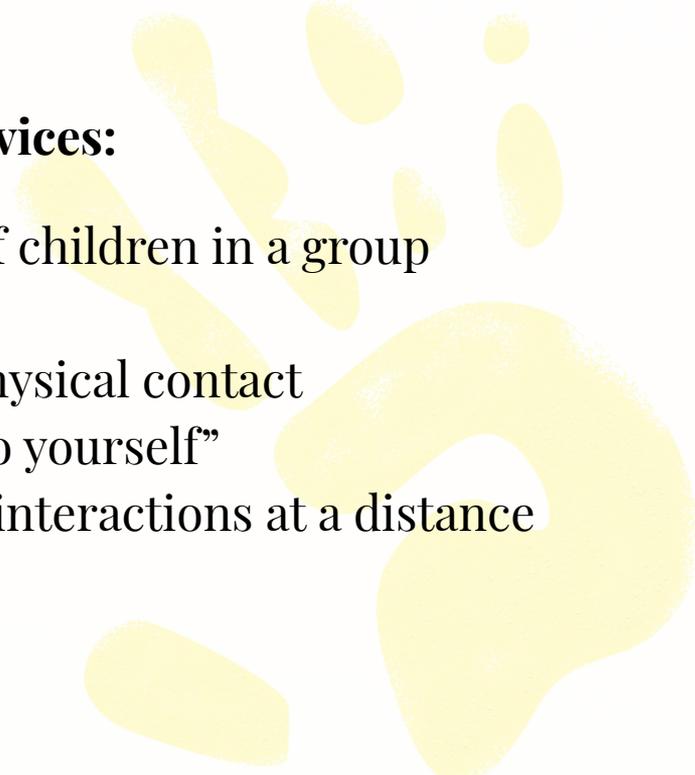
The Ministry of Education emphasizes the importance of play and exploration within programs.

**Health and safety as well as emotional well-being should be given the same level of care and attention.**

It is likely not practical to enforce strict physical distancing in elementary children, especially during periods of play (Sick Kids). Strategies can facilitate close interactions while minimizing the number of potential exposures (Sick Kids).

# How are other centres in Ontario encouraging distancing without confinement?

## City of Toronto Early Learning & Child Care Services:

- Set up environments to reduce the number of children in a group
  - Organize children into small groups
  - Spread the children out to minimize direct physical contact
  - Children are reminded to “keep your hands to yourself”
  - Planned activities and games promote social interactions at a distance
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# Continued: How are other centres in Ontario encouraging distancing without confinement?

## YMCA

- Tables are pushed together so children can play on each side while maintaining social distance

## Earl Haig Community Daycare Centre

- Environment set up to encourage children to spread out
- Children's activities are planned/provided as individual activities
- Children are spread apart for meals and snacks
- Sensory play activities are removed



# Continued: How are other centres in Ontario encouraging distancing without confinement?

**Andrew Fleck Children's Services, Ottawa**

- Once the children have completed active screening, they are deemed to be healthy and encouraged to play.
- Staff promote physical distancing and set up activities that encourage small group play
- Emphasis is placed on being outside as much as possible

# What models can we look to outside of Ontario?

## Denmark's early childcare openings

- Fixed cohorts of 3 - 6 children
- Dedicated staff (Hathaway)
- Emphasis placed on outdoor play, even when it's "rainy and grim"
- Each group has their own designated activity bag (disinfected daily)

## Taiwan's elementary schools

- Widespread but not perfect mask use, including young children (CBC)
- Folding plastic shields set up on desks during mealtimes

# What are the advantages and disadvantages of approaches that allow for more contact between children?

Policies that allow more contact may increase the risk of transmission. We do not yet know if this risk is small or large.

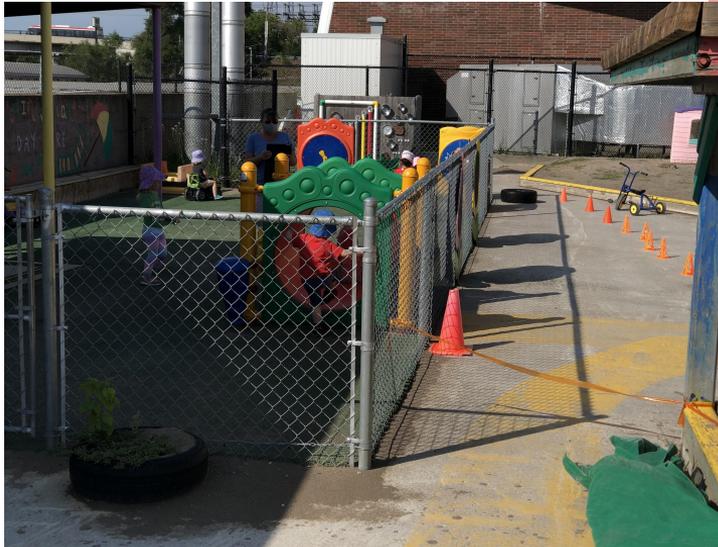
Strict distancing may also have social and emotional consequences that cannot be measured.

The reality of this scenario is that increasing enrollment makes some contact unavoidable. **Thus, it is worth taking measures that go above and beyond modest regulatory requirements.**

# How can we go above and beyond the regulatory requirements?

## Make use of the outdoors

- Increase time outside as much as possible (Harvard's Schools for Health, 8)
- Ensure children are well-dressed for the elements outdoors (e.g. rain, cold, etc.)



## OUR PLAN

- All rooms will continue to maximize time outside for programming and play.
- There will be 6 feet of space between each cohort at all times.

# Examples of social play that naturally encourages physical distancing

- Two kids are across from each other at a long table, with the same toys, for example two sets of blocks. Even though they do not share blocks, teachers can encourage imitation, discussion and interaction ("look, he's building an airplane")
- Jenga - two kids play with different sets, but they take turns and try to be the last to knock over their tower as usual
- 'Special' non-transparent toy bags given to each kid, so they can pull out the surprise and discuss it
- They noted that Montessori activities are already mostly distanced and individual, so there may be room to borrow ideas there
- This article on teaching a 'lobster walk' to encourage kids to back up and make space in a playful way - we will definitely be using this one at the playground:  
<https://redtri.com/how-a-lobster-can-help-teach-your-kids-social-distance/>

# Continued: How can we go above and beyond the regulatory requirements?

## Cohort size

- Maintain low enrolment and make cohorts as small as feasible (Sick Kids, 14)
- Physically divide room to create small cohorts



## OUR PLAN

- We will continue to operate with consistent cohorts.
- As numbers increase, we will divide each cohort into two bubbles. We will implement a barrier between these bubbles.
- Within bubbles, we will group tables together to allow for socializing while maintaining physical distance.

# Continued: How can we go above and beyond the regulatory requirements?

## Staff

- Staff do not move between cohorts (Ministry of Ed., Operational Guidance)
- Staff do not risk exposing one another during lunches/breaks (e.g. stagger staff time out of the room and/or encouraging them to go outside)
- Provide paid sick-leave for staff (Decent Work and Health Network; Home Depot)



## OUR PLAN

- We limit the number of staff in the staff room.
- We use tape to mark chairs that should not be used to ensure physical distancing is maintained.
- Staff are encouraged to take breaks and lunches outdoors, or to go home.
- As of September 1st, staff will be required to wear masks and face shields at all times.

# Continued: How can we go above and beyond the regulatory requirements?

## Ventilation

- Work with HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning) experts to increase the number of outdoor air exchanges and improve filtration (Harvard's Schools for Health, 32, 35)
- Open windows where possible (Harvard's Schools for Health, 34)
- Deploy air purifiers (Harvard's Schools for Health, 35)



## OUR PLAN

- We have purchased a standalone LEVOIT Air Purifier with a H13 True HEPA Activated Carbon Filter. It captures 99.97% of airborne droplets, particles, allergy, pet dander, smoke, dust, cooking smells, mold, and eliminates odors.
- We will be purchasing two smaller units for each of the other rooms as there is a dividing wall.
- We will continue to keep our windows open as much as possible.
- We are servicing our air conditioning systems and looking at improving the air exchange.

# Continued: How can we go above and beyond the regulatory requirements?

## Other policies

- Share harm reduction materials with families (i.e. information on which activities are relatively high risk, e.g. indoor dining, exercise, larger gathering, sharing food, etc.)
- Consider encouraging and supporting mask use while indoors for children ages 3 and up
- Discourage singing and shouting indoors



## OUR PLAN

- Children grades 4 and up are required to wear a mask indoors.
- This requirement may change as there are currently discussions recommending children ages 2 & up to wear masks in schools. If this happens, we will update our strategies accordingly.
- We continue to implement and improve all current best practices.

# Additional resources and information

- Government of Canada on “Going out: Personal and social activities during the COVID-19 pandemic”  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks/going-out-personal-social-activities-during-pandemic.html#a1>
- Download COVID-19 Alert application:  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19/covid-alert.html>

## Check your risk level

Ask yourself	Lower risk	Higher risk
How much COVID-19 is spreading in your community right now?	Activities are lower risk if COVID-19 isn't spreading in your community.	Activities are higher risk if COVID-19 is spreading in your community.
Will the people at the activity or event be from your small and consistent social circle or will they be strangers?	Risk is lower when you have limited contact with people outside of your household or small and consistent social circle.	Risk is higher when you have more contact with people outside of your household or small and consistent social circle.
Are you or somebody in your home or close social circle at <b>increased risk of more severe illness</b> if you or they get COVID-19?	The event or activity has a lower risk if it involves limited or no contact with people who are at higher risk of developing severe illness from COVID-19.	The event or activity has a higher risk if those at risk of developing severe illness will be in attendance, including older people and anyone with an existing medical condition.
Does the event or activity take place in a large, open space or small, enclosed space? Can you follow <b>physical distancing</b> and <b>good hygiene practices</b> ?	Risk is lower when you're in open, well-ventilated spaces where you can practise physical distancing and good hygiene practices, such as washing your hands.	Risk is higher when you're in smaller, crowded or enclosed spaces, where you may be unable to maintain a physical distance from others and practise good hygiene, such as washing your hands.
Is the activity indoors or outdoors?	Risk is lower when the event or activity takes place outdoors.	Risk is higher when the event or activity takes place indoors.
Will there be few people or crowds?	Risk is lower when you're at an event or setting with fewer people.	Risk is higher when you're at an event or setting with a large number of people.
Will the interactions you have with others be short or long?	Risk is lower when you have short interactions with people.	Risk is higher when you spend a long period of time with people.
Are you able to follow <b>personal preventive practices</b> ?	Risk is lower if you're able to follow personal preventive practices.	Risk is higher if you're not able to follow personal preventive practices.

Thank you for attending.

We are open to your suggestions. Please feel free to reach out to us on HiMama at any time.

We will be sending a copy of this presentation via HiMama.