



**EDUCATION
AND CARE**

Tasmanian Early Childhood Education and Care COVID-19 Guidance

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION	3
COVID-19 SAFE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES	4
Mandatory COVID-19 safe requirements.....	4
Vaccination (<i>not mandatory</i>).....	4
Check in TAS – QR Code Protocols.....	5
PLANNING AND PREPARATION	6
Worksafe Covid-19 Safety Plans.....	6
Case and Outbreak Management Plans.....	6
Masks and face coverings.....	7
Adults.....	7
Children.....	7
Physical distancing.....	8
Regular and effective cleaning of service premises.....	9
Ventilation.....	9
MEETING YOUR REGULATORY RESPONSIBILITIES	10
Policies and procedures.....	10
Reporting requirements for confirmed positive COVID-19 cases.....	10
RISK MANAGEMENT PLANNING	11
Educator to child ratios.....	12
Waivers.....	12
Attendance.....	12
Excursions.....	13
FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS FOR COVID-SAFE PRACTICES	13
Visitors.....	13
Orientation for new families.....	13
Events and gatherings.....	13
IDENTIFYING AND MANAGING CASES OF COVID-19 IN YOUR SERVICE	14
Managing Sick Staff.....	15
Managing Sick Children.....	15
VISITS FROM THE REGULATORY AUTHORITY	15

Introduction

The Tasmanian early childhood education and care sector has remained open throughout the pandemic to support essential and/or permitted workers and their families. However, with the Tasmanian border opening in mid-December, our communities will be exposed to cases of coronavirus.

We can protect our community using COVID-safe measures and responding appropriately to identified cases and/or outbreaks of COVID-19. To do this, the education and care sector will need to implement and embed practices that reflect current health advice and respond to all public health directives.

This practical guide addresses practice and policy considerations to support services to continue to provide a safe care and learning environment for children while minimising the risk of COVID-19 being spread.

Should a positive case arise, the guidance provided will assist the most effective response measures to keep your service safe. Services should ensure that they apply this guide with consideration of their own context.

This guide should be read in conjunction with Tasmanian Public Health advice, noting that advice may be updated at any time.

The key components of this practical guide:

- **COVID safe practices**
- **Meeting your regulatory responsibility**
- **Managing COVID positive cases in your service**

The Education and Care Unit gratefully acknowledges the support and assistance of the ACT, VIC and NSW Regulatory Authorities. These RAs generously shared valuable insights and resources which informed the development of this guidance.

COVID-19 safe policies and procedures

Early childhood education and care services should continue to consider and revise their COVID-19 safety plan and policy and procedures to support changes to practice.

Services should also review and revise their existing policies and procedures set out in regulations 168 and 169 of the National Regulations to ensure that their policies and procedures address all mandatory requirements as well as recommended practices in this document.

Mandatory COVID-19 safe requirements

COVID-19 safe requirements are based on Tasmanian Public Health advice and must be followed by Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services.

Both In-scope and Out-of-scope (licensed) services are obligated to ensure that they are up to date with all legal requirements and apply these in practice, at all times.

Key requirements for services include:

- Check in TAS protocols
- COVID-19 Safe Plans and /or Case and Outbreak Management Plans
- Mask wearing
- Strong hygiene practices
- Physical distancing
- Regular and effective cleaning
- Vaccination status for staff is managed in line with Tasmanian Public Health requirements (now mandatory)

Vaccination (*mandatory from 8/1/2022*)

Vaccination is the leading public health prevention strategy for COVID-19 to protect ECEC workers and children who attend services, including their families.

The Tasmanian and the Australian Governments are working together to ensure that COVID-19 vaccinations are available to the community. All Tasmanians aged 12 and over can get vaccinated for free. Vaccinations for 5-11 year-old children are scheduled to be available early in 2022.

On 14 December 2021, it was announced that vaccination is now mandatory for all staff working on an education and care site. Public Health recommends all adults working at an ECEC service across Tasmania should have two doses of the vaccine. The mandate means that staff must receive at least one dose of the vaccine by 8 January 2022.

For information about COVID-19 vaccines and the vaccine roll out, visit the Tasmanian Coronavirus website page [COVID-19 Vaccination](#). The Services Australia website also provides information on how to access proof of your [vaccination](#).

Check in TAS – QR Code Protocols

QR Code protocols assist Public Health to undertake contact tracing and identify where COVID-19 is being spread throughout communities.

On 1 May 2021, the [Check-in TAS QR Code](#) was made mandatory at all workplaces, retail businesses and event premises. The TAS Check-in code may be used by In-scope and Out-of-scope (licensed) education and care services, if this is considered appropriate.

Information about setting up a Check in TAS QR code for organisations and businesses can be found on the [Tasmanian Public Health website](#). Services can also access the most up-to-date advice on Check in TAS QR codes from the website.

If services consider the use of the TAS Check-in QR Code would assist with monitoring visitors for contact tracing, you may choose to:

- Register with the Tasmanian Government to set up a Check in TAS QR code for their business
- Display the Check in TAS QR code visibly at the service
- Take reasonable steps to ensure all essential visitors, including staff members, check in using the code

You may then encourage all visitors to check in using the TAS Check-in QR Code if the person has interacted with the service, no matter how minor the interaction might be. Children under 16 years are excluded from this requirement and do not need to check in, although a parent may wish to sign them in as a dependent.

Family Day Care (FDC)	Out of School Hours Care (OSHC)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Check in TAS QR Code will need to be displayed during all operational hours in businesses, including in a Family Day Care service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All OSHC services are encouraged to have a separate Check in TAS QR code as they are a separate business and contained in a specific location within the school.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All families and visitors to your FDC residence should be encouraged to check in using the Check in TAS QR code on entry, to ensure that contact tracing is possible, should a risk arise at your service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parents and carers who enter school buildings to drop off and pick up their children should be encouraged to use the QR code for both the school and the OSHC premises.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Families and visitors to the residence operating as a FDC service are required to check in using a hard copy option, if unable to use the Check in TAS QR code.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To encourage use of the Check in TAS QR code in OSHC services, you may wish to highlight the importance of this for contact tracing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Household members and educators who permanently reside at the residence do not need to check in.	

Planning and preparation

The opening of the Tasmanian border and increased contact with interstate and international visitors will undoubtedly result in the spread of COVID-19.

Tasmania education and care services need to consider the implications of our community adjusting to 'living with coronavirus'. Being prepared for cases of coronavirus will help you to respond well and quickly and minimise disruption to services and activities.

It is recommended that the focus should be on implementing **COVID-safe measures** to minimise the risk of transmission of the virus and **protect** your service community.

Worksafe Covid-19 Safety Plans

[COVID-19 Safety Plans](#) outline how your service meets the minimum standards for managing the risks of coronavirus to keep educators, children, families and service contacts safe.

Services are encouraged to prepare for the impacts of the border opening by reviewing and updating their existing COVID-19 Safety Plans.

The Tasmanian Government's *COVID-19 Safe Workplaces Framework* includes Safe Workplaces Guidelines and minimum standards, which include a COVID-19 Safety Plan and/or checklist. The Worksafe Tasmania website provides [COVID-19 Safe Workplace guidelines and resources](#).

Additional information is available on the Tasmanian Government's [coronavirus website](#). This website also provides a range of [useful resources](#).

Case and Outbreak Management Plans

Case and Outbreak Management Plans describe how you will prepare and respond to a confirmed case or cases of COVID-19 in your service.

The Tasmanian Government has developed a framework for how to plan and prepare for positive cases of coronavirus in our workplaces. Released in November 2021, the framework [Living in a COVID Vaccinated Community – Case and Outbreak Management framework for Tasmanian Workplaces and Settings](#), provides guidance for people likely to be responsible for and involved in responses to outbreaks of COVID -19.

The Tasmanian Government advises that a smaller business may choose to include details of planned responses to confirmed cases in their COVID-19 Safety Plan.

Information about developing a Case and Outbreak Management Plan can be found on the Tasmanian Government's [coronavirus website](#).

Masks and face coverings

There are situations when wearing a mask is mandatory in Tasmania. Wearing a mask is required at public events or events where more than 1,000 people are gathered.

Services can access the most up-to-date advice on the situations where face masks must be worn under the Tasmanian Government's COVID-19 Guidelines on the use of face masks in [keeping yourself safe](#).

Adults

Wearing masks is **not currently** mandatory in ECEC settings. Masks may be worn by adults (staff and visitors) to minimise the risk of spreading or contracting coronavirus.

Services may consider the following:

- Ask that masks are worn by staff when engaging with other adults, such as during pick-up and drop-off, and in administrative areas of the service, including staff rooms.
- Request all adult visitors to wear masks when visiting service.

Tasmanian Public Health will issue advice on local restrictions and requirements about wearing masks in ECEC settings and updated information will be made available.

If Public Health issues a direction to wear masks, a staff member that has medical exemption in line with Public Health's advice from the mask wearing requirement should ensure physical distancing is practiced where possible.

Children

In accordance with current Tasmanian Public Health advice, masks need not be worn by children under 12 years of age.

Children attending Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) and Vacation Care services will follow mask wearing requirements in accordance with Public Health advice.

Physical distancing

The risk of spreading COVID-19 can be reduced through physical distancing among staff members, children and visitors to education and care services.

Services can access the most up-to-date advice on physical distancing from Tasmania's [coronavirus website](#).

The below measures should be carried out to support physical distancing within services:

- Ensure physical distancing between adults of 1.5 metres wherever possible.
- *If* wearing a face mask becomes mandatory, adults or children who have a medical exemption should practice physical distancing wherever possible.
- Where possible and applicable, sleep children at least 1.5 metres apart or head to toe to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission.
- Avoid any non-essential activities that involve close personal contact.
- Encourage appropriate outdoor programs to support physical distancing while considering sun-safe practices.
- OSHC services may choose to consider use of different play spaces for different age cohorts as part of their COVID-19 Safety Plan.

Services may also consider the following controls to reduce direct contact with others:

- Install barriers to create appropriate physical distance at sign-in areas, and seated areas.
- Modify shifts and rosters, or pick-up and drop-off times to reduce peak periods.
- Have staff collect and send-off children at the entrance of premises.



Regular and effective cleaning of service premises

Effective cleaning of a service premises can slow the spread of illness and thorough cleaning will be required after a case is suspected or confirmed.

COVID-19 is most likely to spread from person to person through:

- direct contact with a person while they are infectious (while they are sick and in the 48 hours before they became sick)
- contact with droplets when an infectious person near you coughs or sneezes without covering their mouth and nose
- touching objects or surfaces that were recently contaminated with the virus from an uncovered cough or sneeze from a person with the infection, and then touching your mouth or face.

Services can help prevent the risk of COVID-19 transmission at the premises by optimising and maintaining high standards of hygiene. The following hygiene and cleaning practices should be implemented by services to protect the health of educators, children, families and service contacts:

- Personal hygiene, including diligent hand hygiene practices
- Routine cleaning, including increased frequency of cleaning
- Using cleaning principles recommended by Public Health and/or promoted by the Tasmanian coronavirus website
- Use of recommended personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Deep clean practices, as directed by Public Health

Services can access the most up-to-date advice on cleaning after a confirmed case of COVID-19 by accessing the Tasmanian Government's [COVID-19 guidelines for ECEC services](#).

Ventilation

Regulation 110 requires indoor spaces to be well ventilated. COVID-19 has raised the need to be even more vigilant about ventilation.

Well-ventilated spaces reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission because infectious particles are more quickly diffused in the open air than in spaces with less ventilation. Increasing indoor air ventilation and using outdoor spaces where possible is an important strategy in reducing the risk of aerosol transmission by increasing circulation of outdoor air. This strategy must be supported by the other COVID-safe practices in this document, including hygiene and physical distancing.

To mitigate the risk of transmission while indoors, services should reduce the number of people in an indoor space at any one time, by separating children and educators into small groups and encouraging them to use different areas of the service; and reduce the amount of time children spend indoor together.

Services can access the most up-to-date advice on ventilation from the [Safe Work Australia website](#).

Meeting your regulatory responsibilities

Policies and procedures

It is recommended that you review your service's policies and procedures for health and hygiene practices (regulation 77(1)(a)) and dealing with infectious diseases and illness (regulations 85, 88, 168 and 169).

You can:

- Refer to the best-practice tool [Staying Healthy - Preventing infectious diseases](#) in early childhood education and care services which provides advice on concepts of infection control, monitoring illness in children, procedures issues for staff, fact sheets on diseases common to education and care services forms, and useful links.
- Call the public health hotline on 1800 671 738 for advice if needed.

You should provide educators, staff parents and carers with updates on your service's policies and procedures and help them to implement these across the service.

Reporting requirements for confirmed positive COVID-19 cases

All services must notify the Education and Care Unit (ECU) as the Regulatory Authority for Tasmania in the event of a positive Covid-19 case.

All notifications should be entered via National Quality Agenda IT System ([NQAITS](#)) or via [email](#) (for out-of-scope services only) and must:

- Be made within the prescribed timeframe for the notification type
- Be made regardless of whether the parent, family or carer has requested further action or information about the incident or complaint
- Contain accurate information e.g., time of incident and the names of people involved

It is important that services submit the notification of a positive case within the required timeframe and provide details of any actions taken to mitigate the risk of spreading the virus.

Tasmanian Public Health may provide direction in relation to a positive case of COVID-19 linked to your service. This may regarding an educator, staff member or child that is a confirmed positive case.

You should:

- Comply with any direction given by Public Health.
- Notify the ECU by submitting a notification of incident or if for any reason a decision is made to close or reduce the number of children attending the service through [\(NQAITS\)](#) or via [email](#) (if you are an out-of-scope service).

Although you must notify us within 24 hours of closure, we ask that you notify us as soon as possible.

When your service re-opens or partially reopens, log back in to [NQAITS](#) and amend this notification to reflect the reopening date or email the ECU ecu.comment@education.tas.gov.au.

Please provide details of:

- the date of the reopening or partial reopening of your service, and
- any remedial action taken in response to directions by Public Health. For example, the nature and extent of cleaning.

Risk Management Planning

Services and providers can further improve their preparedness for COVID-19 by mitigating risks using these measures:

- Ensure up-to-date emergency contact details are in NQA ITS. These details will be used should Public Health need to contact your service after hours.
- Identify children with compromised immunity or complex health care needs. Work with families to update any medical management, risk-minimisation and communications plans as required (regulations 90 and 168).
- Regular upkeep of personal hygiene and handwashing for all children and staff within your learning programs and activities, as required under regulation 77.
- Identify a suitable area for children who may be showing [symptoms](#) of COVID-19 to await pick up by their parent/carer. This area should be away from other children. Ensure that contact with other adults is limited to one person and that person has appropriate PPE.
- Consider checking with casual educators and staff for availability in the event of critical educator and staff absences.
- Visit [SafeWork Tasmania](#) for information on managing the risk of COVID-19 to those at your service.
- Ensure that you:
 1. Keep updated on [restrictions and support provided to businesses in Tasmania](#).
 2. Are familiar with the [ECU's COVID-19 Response Plan – Education and Care](#) to understand how we will work in response to the impacts of cases of COVID-19
 3. Have developed a [COVID-19 Safety Plan](#) using the resources available on the Tasmanian coronavirus website.

Approved providers must ensure that matters relating to health and safety are set out in their service policies and procedures and must take reasonable steps to ensure that the nominated supervisor and staff members follow these policies and procedures.

Educator to child ratios

The health, safety and wellbeing of children in education and care remains the priority, therefore adequate supervision and educator-to-child ratio requirements continue to apply.

It may be difficult for services to know how many children will be attending on a given day and which staff members will be present, particularly if the children, their families, and your educators are impacted by an identified case of COVID-19.

If your service is unable to meet the educator-to-child ratios after taking all reasonable steps and having explored all available options to meet the ratio requirements, you may consider applying for a waiver.

Waivers

As the Tasmanian regulatory authority, the ECU **may** grant waivers for staff qualifications, if all options to meet regulations have been explored. A waiver for ratios may be granted in **exceptional** circumstances.

Waivers related to COVID-19 are considered:

- on a case-by-case basis
- for services clearly demonstrating a lack of staff capacity to meet ratios
- with priority to be fast-tracked, as long as there is no increased risk to staff or children's safety.

The Education and Care Unit will consider the period a waiver is granted for, so that services do not have to reapply each day they are unable to meet the ratio requirements.

If the service's circumstances remain the same after the waiver expires, it may be extended upon application.

To apply for a waiver, the service will need to submit an application via the NQA ITS. Please note that the ECU will waive fees for waiver application relating to COVID-19.

For advice on lodging a waiver application and meeting requirements due to COVID-19, please contact us by:

- Calling 616 55 425
- Emailing your Point-of-contact authorised officer

Attendance

Ensure your COVID-19 Safety Plan includes details of how you will manage attendance in the event of an outbreak and clearly communicate this to families to help minimise confusion and concerns. You may wish to consider:

- Limiting staff moving between services
- Ask families to advise whether their children are attending other services and discuss risk management with them
- Keep a register of staff and children who may be moving between services to assist with contact tracing

- Managing drop-off and pick up times to minimise the contact between adults. For example:
 - staggering drop-off and pick up times
 - limiting entry into the premises
 - asking parents and carers to use masks
 - provide additional support to children with specific needs

Excursions

It is recommended that services conduct appropriate risk assessments before proceeding with excursions.

Services should conduct a risk assessment (regulation 100), consider Public Health advice and, plan to minimise risks to the health, safety and wellbeing of educators, children and families.

Choose outdoor excursions where possible and avoid excursions that:

- require the use of public transport or
- visiting venues where there are likely to be large numbers of people
- include visiting aged care facilities

Further considerations for COVID-safe practices

Visitors

Services are encouraged to consider the following measures to manage parents, carers and visitors:

- exclude non-essential visitors
- exclude persons with symptoms of COVID-19
- encourage staff to be vaccinated, including contractors and support staff
- ensure that COVID-safe practices are adhered to by all visitors

Authorised Officers from the ECU are permitted to enter a service premises at any time education and care is being provided. All authorised officers working for the ECU are fully vaccinated.

It is ECU policy that authorised officers visiting services will adhere to the COVID-safe practices outlined in the service's COVID-safe plan.

Orientation for new families

Follow current Public Health advice when planning and implementing orientation visits to the service.

Consider alternative ways to manage information sharing and introductions to educators:

- confirm visitors are symptom free and adhere to the service's COVID-safe practices
- develop risk assessments in consultation with parents and carers, particularly for children with additional support needs
- provide a combination of online and face to face orientation sessions
- use outdoor environments for meetings, where possible

Events and gatherings

Non-essential events and gatherings should not be held during periods of high community transmission of the coronavirus and/or during an outbreak of COVID-19.

A risk assessment should be undertaken to determine whether an event or gathering should proceed. COVID-safe measures should be implemented, such as:

- sharing and adhering to the service's COVID-safe plan
- using a Check in TAS QR code
- utilising outdoor spaces only
- maintaining physical distancing
- providing hand wash and masks to promote personal hygiene practices
- ensuring thorough cleaning practices are used following the event

Further information is provided on the coronavirus website - [gatherings, density and physical distancing](#) and a useful [factsheet](#) has been developed by Work Safe Tasmania.



Identifying and managing cases of COVID-19 in your service

Anyone who has even the mildest coronavirus symptoms should not attend the service and should be immediately tested. They should isolate until they receive a negative test result and only return to the service when free of symptoms.

COVID-19 symptoms include but are not limited to:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Shortness of breath
- Runny nose
- Loss of smell and/or taste
- Muscle joint pains
- Diarrhoea
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Extreme tiredness

Managing Sick Staff

- Instruct staff not to attend if they feel unwell.
- If staff attend and appear unwell, send them home.
- Encourage unwell staff to get tested for COVID-19. They should receive a negative test and be symptom-free before returning to the service.
- Close contacts of positive cases should not attend the service unless cleared by Public Health.

Managing Sick Children

- Communicate with all families asking them to keep unwell children at home.
- If a child appears unwell on drop off, ask the parent/carer to take them home.
- If a child appears unwell while in care, contact the child's family to collect them as soon as possible.
- If possible, and your supervision and ratio requirements allow, keep the child in isolation until they are collected.
- Encourage families to get their child tested. They should receive a negative COVID-19 test and be symptom-free before returning to the service.

Visits from the Regulatory Authority

The ECU may continue service visits to check regulatory compliance and protect children's safety and wellbeing.

All Authorised Officers will follow best practice hygiene and current health advice when attending services. As per the health advice, non-essential visits may not proceed during periods of high community transmission rates or during an outbreak. Services will be notified as required.

Regardless of the COVID-19 restrictions in place, Authorised Officers will take the following precautions when visiting services:

- Authorised Officers that attend your service will be fully vaccinated and will meet your COVID-19 Safety Plan requirements.
- Authorised Officers will monitor the latest health advice and changes to restrictions as they

emerge, and in consultation with their manager, ensure that their work plans continue to reflect the current situation.

- Authorised Officers who have attended identified hotspots are required to follow the guidance of Public Health in relation to isolation requirements and will not conduct service visits in accordance with directives.
- Authorised Officers need to comply with any additional requirements services have established to minimise risk, such as temperature checks. If you have a COVID-19 declaration which all visitors to your service must read and sign, the Officer will sign this.
- Where possible, officers are required to spread out the frequency of visits to minimise risk of transmission between services.
- Where possible, visits will be arranged for the least busy times for your service and avoid drop-off and pick-up times. Authorised Officers will discuss scheduling with services for announced visits.
- Due to the increased likelihood of community transmission, circumstances may result in visits being cancelled at short notice. This may arise due to Public Health directives, service closures or the ill health of an Authorised Officer.
- Where possible, the Authorised Officer will minimise contact with service staff and maintain physical distancing by keeping at least 1.5m from others. If possible, discussions should be undertaken in the outdoor area or another well-ventilated space (avoiding small office spaces).



Appendix I – Quick Links

Knowing where to find current advice, information and resources will assist you to stay up to date and help protect your staff, children and families from community transmission of the coronavirus.

Website Information	Link:
TAS coronavirus website – home page	Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)
- Check in TAS app information	Check in TAS Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)
- Prepare for a case or outbreak	Preparing your business for COVID-19 cases and outbreaks Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)
- Case and outbreak response	Case and outbreak response Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)
- Safety and contact status information	Keeping-our-community-safe_v3.0.pdf (coronavirus.tas.gov.au)
- COVID-19 Safety Plans	COVID-19 Safety Plans Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)
- Case and Outbreak Management Plans	Case and Outbreak Management Plans Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)
- Cleaning and disinfecting after a case	Cleaning and disinfection after a case Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)
Work Safe Tasmania – home page	WorkSafe Tasmania
Coronavirus page	Coronavirus (COVID-19) (worksafe.tas.gov.au)
- Vaccination information	COVID-19 Vaccinations (worksafe.tas.gov.au)
- Safe workplaces framework	COVID-19 Safe Workplaces Framework (worksafe.tas.gov.au)
- Incident notification for COVID	Incident notification for COVID-19 (worksafe.tas.gov.au)
- Health and mental wellbeing resources	COVID-19 health and mental wellbeing resources (worksafe.tas.gov.au)
- Business and employment resources	COVID-19 business/employment resources (worksafe.tas.gov.au)
Tasmanian Council of Social Services	TasCOSS
Preparation and advice	COVID-19 Preparation and Advice Tasmanian Council of Social Service Inc (tascoss.org.au)
Australian Government Dept. of Education, Skills and Employment	Early Childhood - AG - dese.gov.au

- Early Childhood	Early Childhood - AG- dese.gov.au
- COVID-19 Information - ECEC sector	COVID-19 information for the ECEC sector - AG - dese.gov.au
- Announcements, including support	Announcements- AG - dese.gov.au
- COVID-19 update	COVID-19 update: AG support for child care extended until 30 June 2022 - dese.gov.au
- Child Care Subsidy	Child Care Subsidy - Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Australian Government (dese.gov.au)
- Local absences Information sheet	Coronavirus (COVID-19) information sheet - periods of local emergency and absences for child care providers and services - AG - dese.gov.au
Australian Government Dept of Health	Australian Government Department of Health
- COVID-19 health alert page	Coronavirus (COVID-19) health alert Australian Government Department of Health
- Health hotspots and support	Hotspot for the purposes of Commonwealth support extended for the Municipality of Katherine Australian Government Department of Health
- Protect yourself and others	How to protect yourself and others from coronavirus (COVID-19) Australian Government Department of Health
ACECQA – home page	www.acecqa.gov.au
- Coronavirus information	Coronavirus (COVID-19) information ACECQA
Education and Care Unit – home page	Home - Education and Care
- Coronavirus (COVID-19)	Coronavirus (COVID-19) - Education and Care
- ECU Living with COVID-19 Response Plan	ECU-Living with COVID-19-Response-Plan