



Stakeholder Reference Group

Communique 26 – April 2024

ECU SRG membership:

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander	Vacant
Australian Childcare Alliance	Vacant
Catholic Education Tasmania	Natasha Williams
Centre based care - long day care	Chris Symons, Centre Director, Rainbow Childcare and Early Learning Centre
Centre based care - OSHC	Tamieka Archer
Local Government provider representative	Kate Whitbread, Glenorchy City Council
Early Childhood Australia, Tasmania Branch	Annette Barwick
Early Childhood Educators of Tasmania	Sandra Mazengarb
Family Day Care Council Tasmania	Angela Stanley-Gasparin
Independent Schools Tasmania	Mark Seager, Early Years Consultant
Out of Scope services	Tracey Roberts, Wombats Child Care Centre
United Workers Union	Alicia Smith
Parents & Families	Vacant

The ECU SRG met 23 April 2024. The information below reflects the discussion and outcomes from the meeting.

For information on the Education and Care Stakeholder Reference Group (ECU SRG) and the purpose behind our quarterly meetings, please see the [Terms of Reference](#)¹ on the [ECU website](#)².

1 ECU Staffing Update

Recruitment for the Manager, Education and Care Unit position and for a Policy and Communication Officer position is underway. The ECU is also recruiting to backfill a Regulatory Officer role in the Policy and Engagement space for a period of 12 months.

2 SRG Member Update

Alicia Smith has joined the ECU SRG as United Workers Union representative. Australian Childcare Alliance, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Parents and Families representative positions remain vacant.

The details of ECU SRG members can be found in the [Stakeholder Reference Group section of the ECU website](#)³.

3 Gastro Enteritis Infection, Prevention and Control

The Tasmanian Infection Prevention & Control Unit (TIPCU) remind services they must notify Public Health if they have (or suspect they have) an outbreak of gastroenteritis. An outbreak is defined as two or more people with diarrhoea and/or vomiting within a 48 hour period.

It is important to report outbreaks of gastroenteritis so they can be supported, managed and resolved safely. Gastro illnesses are more common and potentially more severe in babies and children under five years old. Illness in ECEC settings can reflect illness in the community more generally, so reporting also helps Public Health to monitor trends across the state. Each viral gastro outbreak helps Public Health to identify that there are not more problematic issues at hand, like foodborne diseases or contamination.

Co-notification to the Environmental Health Unit inside Public Health is a routine part of TIPCU's outbreak support. This means your local council's Environmental Health Officer could reach out or offer an onsite assessment if relevant to your setting.

Public Health will communicate regularly with your service during the outbreak.

Notifications should be made by direct email to cdpugastro@health.tas.gov.au or by calling the Public Health Hotline on 1800 671 738 (select *Communicable Diseases* option).

Please see the *Gastroenteritis Outbreaks – Public Health Guidance for Childcare Facilities* pamphlet attached to this Communique for further guidance.

4 ECU email communications to services and providers

The ECU regularly shares important updates and guidance information via email with services and providers. We rely on the service and provider primary contact details stored within the National Quality Agenda IT System (NQA ITS) to disseminate these communications.

We remind services and providers that it is critical that they maintain accurate primary contact details in NQA ITS, and recommend primary contacts establish a procedure for disseminating those communications more widely within their organisation where relevant.

The ECU is not able to accommodate a subscription-type database to allow individuals to opt-in/out of communications at this time.

Previous Newsletters and Communiques issued by the ECU can be found on the [ECU website](#)⁴.

5 National Workforce Strategy – Update

Susanna provided an update on the progress of work occurring under the National ECEC Workforce Strategy – [Shaping Our Future: A ten-year strategy to ensure a sustainable, high-quality children's education and care workforce 2022-2031](#)⁵.

You can read about the progress of the strategy and a range of complementary workforce initiatives by visiting the [Shaping Our Future online dashboard](#)⁶.

6 Lifting Literacy Implementation Plan

In May 2023, the [Final Report to Government: Lifting Literacy](#)⁷ was published. It delivered a community-wide Framework, 23 Priority Recommendations and a further 24 additional recommendations. The Tasmanian Government has committed to full implementation of all 23 Priority Recommendations.

To support work occurring under a [whole-of-Government implementation plan](#)⁸, the Department for Education, Children and Young People (DECYP) has developed the [DECYP Lifting Literacy Implementation Plan 2024-2026](#)⁹.

DECYP has a key role in leading and contributing to implementation of a number of recommendations, including carriage of Recommendation 9:

DECYP will facilitate and incentivise the adult and ECEC literacy workforce (including volunteers) to participate in evidence-based professional development and engage in a community of practice.

DECYP is now considering how to achieve the intent of two key commitments under the plan centred on lifting literacy in the early years:

Action 22 – facilitate participation by the early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce in evidence-based professional development.

Action 23 – Consider establishing a formal community of practice for early childhood educators focused on evidence-based literacy practice.

Anita Planchon and Jodi Upton from the Lifting Literacy team facilitated a discussion with SRG representatives around questions relating to the language and literacy training needs of the Tasmanian ECEC sector. This feedback session represents one of the Lifting Literacy teams' first interactions with the ECEC sector. The team will be partnering with Tasmanian ECEC services to further understand the needs of the sector. The ECU will share further details when they become available.

7 Review of Child Safety Arrangements under the NQF – Implementation Update

Commissioned by the Australian Government and undertaken by ACECQA, this independent review investigated:

- how well the NQF operates to ensure a child-safe environment.
- how it interacts with national and jurisdictional laws, regulations, policies and practices.

The [Review of Child Safety Arrangements under the National Quality Framework Final Report](#)¹⁰ confirms the NQF remains strong and provides strong protections for children.

The Report makes 16 recommendations to strengthen:

- child-safe governance, leadership and culture
- prevention and early intervention
- educator safeguards, teacher registration and accreditation
- support for staff to respond to and manage risks
- child-safety arrangements across jurisdictions.

In February 2024, Education Ministers agreed to accept in principle, subject to expert advice, consultation and regulatory impact assessment, all Review recommendations within their remit. Ministers agreed to prioritise expedited implementation of particular recommendations, including regarding the use of personal electronic devices.

All states and territories are working collaboratively with the Australian Government to progress agreed actions, working toward public release of a Consultation Regulatory Impact Assessment document in late 2024. In the interim, targeted consultation on particular actions will occur.

While governments are exploring legislative change options in 2024, Ministers requested the immediate development of a transitional Model Code and Guidelines to support approved providers and services to uphold best practices for child safety regarding the use of electronic devices.

We will share further information regarding the Model Code and Guidelines in the coming months.

8 ECU Communications and Engagement Update

Estelle shared details of some work underway within the ECU to review and update ECU engagement strategy, tools and processes. The objective of the ECU Strategic Communications and Engagement Project is to ensure the communications and engagement strategy and related projects promote and support early years and strategic policy initiatives and the regulatory authority functions of the ECU. We will share more information around pieces of this project as it progresses.

2023-2024 Grants Budget has been expended, with final processes for disbursement of minor infrastructure grants underway. Planning for the 2024-2025 ECU Grants Program is underway.

9 ECU Operational Update

9.1 Assessment and Rating

Throughout the 2023-2024 financial year, Authorised Officers have been utilising adapted quality support programs with services. An increased focus on supporting services with educational leadership will continue into the 2024-2025 year, with a training resource trialled with selected services to be shared broadly with the sector.

9.2 Compliance

To improve efficiencies, the ECU is refining some compliance processes. These changes are designed to support timely response to high-risk matters. Communications are being developed to update services and providers on these changes, including guidance to understand new processes before these are implemented. Details of changes to relevant processes will be provided in due course.

10 Next Meeting

Next meeting is scheduled for 27 June 2024. We encourage providers, services, educators, families, and communities to contact their SRG representative should they wish to raise any issues for consultation or provide information to the ECU. Up-to-date details of [SRG members](#)¹¹ can be found on the [ECU website](#)¹².

Vidhya Chelliah
Director, Education and Care Unit
Department for Education, Children and Young People

Gastroenteritis Outbreaks

Public Health Guidance for Childcare Facilities

What is gastroenteritis?

- Gastroenteritis (gastro) is an infection of the digestive tract that results in vomiting and diarrhoea and can be caused by different germs such as viruses, bacteria or parasites.
- Outbreaks in facilities are commonly caused by viruses such as norovirus or rotavirus.
- Viral gastro is highly infectious and can spread through direct contact with the vomit and faeces of an infected person or contact with contaminated surfaces, objects, food, or drink.
- People with gastro are considered infectious until at least 48 hours after all symptoms have resolved.
- Gastro can affect people of all ages but can be serious in young children, the elderly and people with suppressed immune systems.

A case of gastroenteritis is defined as a person with diarrhoea (3 or more loose stools) AND/ OR vomiting (2 or more vomits) in a 24 hour period which cannot be attributed to a known cause such as an existing medical condition or medication.

An outbreak is defined as 2 or more gastroenteritis cases in staff or children in a 48 hour period, with symptom onset at or within 48 hours of attending the school/ centre.

When is gastroenteritis notifiable to Public Health?

- Notify Public Health if you have (or suspect you have) an outbreak of gastroenteritis.
- All gastro outbreaks in residential, educational, childcare and healthcare facilities are notifiable to the Director of Public Health in Tasmania.
- The Environmental Health Unit may be notified if there is evidence to suggest food or water is the source of the gastro outbreak.

What measures should be taken to stop the spread of gastro in our facility?

Exclusion/isolation

- Symptomatic staff should leave work immediately and not return until at least 48hours after symptoms have ceased.
- In an educational or childcare facility, symptomatic children must be sent home and not return until at least 48 hours after symptoms have ceased.

Hand hygiene

- Gastro is easily spread by contaminated hands, so hand hygiene is a simple and effective way of stopping the spread of gastro in a facility.
- Everyone should clean their hands regularly with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub to prevent the spread of gastro especially after going to the toilet, before preparing or handling food and after cleaning up vomit or diarrhoea.
- Staff should also perform hand hygiene before and after nappy changes/assisting children with toileting.

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

- Staff should wear gown and gloves when caring for somebody with gastro symptoms or cleaning any bodily fluids.
- A surgical mask is only required if caring for someone who is actively vomiting.
- Change gown and gloves and perform hand hygiene between affected individuals.

Environmental cleaning

- Environmental cleaning should occur more frequently.
- Clean frequently touched surfaces like door handles, benches and bathrooms when visibly soiled and at least twice a day.
- Clean the surface with detergent to remove dirt and most of the germs, then use a bleach-based (sodium hypochlorite) disinfectant at 1000ppm as per the below table.
- For workplace health and safety reasons, spray disinfectant into a cloth and then wipe surface rather than spraying directly onto a surface.

Strength of bleach	Dilution to achieve 1000ppm		Volume of bleach to be added to 1L cold water
	Parts of Bleach	Parts of water	
4%	1	39	25 ml
5%	1	49	20 ml

Additional cleaning of toys

- Smaller plastic toys can be washed in the dishwasher on a hot cycle.
- Toys that are likely to be 'mouthed' or chewed should be either washed in the dishwasher OR cleaned then disinfected with a food grade sanitiser.
- Where possible, limit sharing of items between children.

Additional cleaning of environment

- Clean change mats/tables with detergent and disinfectant between use.
- Wash cushions and other fabric-based items daily.
- Where possible, remove items that cannot be cleaned thoroughly from affected rooms. Clean and disinfect them as best as possible OR dispose of (or consider disposing of) them and replacing these after the outbreak is over.
- Steam clean carpet and floor rugs. Consider removing floor rugs from affected rooms until the outbreak is over.
- Continue to follow routine cleaning checklists.

Visitors

- Visitors to facilities should be informed of the gastro outbreak.
- Any visitors to the facility should wash their hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub upon entry and exit.

Communication

- Remind families of the requirement to keep unwell children home and of the 48-hour exclusion period post symptom resolution.
- Communicate with families/carers alerting them that there is gastro outbreak in the facility.
- Communication can be via email, phone call, text message, or an 'app'

Other

- If staff or children with diarrhoea see a doctor, a stool (poo) sample is helpful during an outbreak to identify the cause.
- Disposable crockery and cutlery are not required during an outbreak.
- Consider whether combined activities between different parts of the facility should be temporarily stopped during the outbreak, i.e., activities involving multiple rooms in childcare facilities.

When will the outbreak be declared over?

- Public Health will communicate regularly with facilities during the outbreak.
- The outbreak will be declared over when there have been no new gastro cases identified in 4 days/96 hours.

Resources

- Gastroenteritis information for Childcare - [Staying Healthy](#)

For more information:

Phone: Public Health Hotline: **1800 671 738** and select *Communicable Diseases* to speak to a Clinical Nurse Consultant.

Email: cdpugastro@health.tas.gov.au

Links

- ¹ ECU SRG Terms of Reference | Education and Care Unit - <https://publicdocumentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/library/Shared%20Documents/Education-and-Care-Unit-Stakeholder-Reference-Group-Terms-of-Reference.pdf>
- ² Home | Education and Care Unit - <https://educationandcare.tas.gov.au/>
- ³ SRG Members | Education and Care Unit - <https://educationandcare.tas.gov.au/stakeholder-reference-group/members/>
- ⁴ Home | Education and Care Unit - <https://educationandcare.tas.gov.au/>
- ⁵ Shaping Our Future | ACECQA - <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-10/ShapingOurFutureChildrensEducationandCareNationalWorkforceStrategy-September2021.pdf>
- ⁶ Workforce Dashboard | ACECQA - <https://snapshots.acecqa.gov.au/workforcedashboard/index.html>
- ⁷ Final Report to Government: Lifting Literacy | Department of Premier and Cabinet - https://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0027/297711/Final-Report-to-Government-Literacy-Advisory-Panel.pdf
- ⁸ Lifting Literacy Implementation Plan 2024-2026 | Department of Premier and Cabinet - https://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0014/330044/Lifting-Literacy-3-year-Implementation-Plan.pdf
- ⁹ DECYP Lifting Literacy Implementation Plan 2024-2026 Department for Education, Children and Young People - <https://publicdocumentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/library/Shared%20Documents/Lifting-Literacy-Implementation-Plan-2024-2026.pdf>
- ¹⁰ Review of Child Safety Arrangements under the National Quality Framework Final Report | ACECQA - https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-12/Review%20of%20Child%20Safety%20Arrangements%20under%20the%20National%20Quality%20Framework-full_report.pdf
- ¹¹ SRG members | Education and Care Unit - <https://educationandcare.tas.gov.au/stakeholder-reference-group/members/>
- ¹² ECU website - <https://educationandcare.tas.gov.au/>