



EDUCATION AND CARE

Information for families - COVID-19 Outbreaks in Early Childhood Education and Care settings

February 2022

Contacts

Interactions with a case in an Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) setting are not considered a close contact.

Close contacts are generally people who live or stay overnight in the same premises as a case, or spend more than four hours (cumulative, over a 24-hour period) with a case in a residential setting during the case's infectious period.

- Close contacts must undergo quarantine and testing requirements as prescribed by Public Health Emergency Operations Centre (Public Health).

ECEC contacts are children and staff who spend more than four hours (cumulative, over a 24-hour period) in the same room as a case during the case's infectious period, regardless of facemask use.

- ECEC contacts do not need to undergo quarantine and testing requirements and are only required to monitor for symptoms and isolate and get tested if they develop any symptoms.

Outbreaks

Public Health will work closely with ECEC services if there are increased numbers of cases in services.

ECEC services include Long Day Care, Outside School Hours Care, Family Day Care, Occasional Care and In Home Care

This guide should be read in conjunction with the [Covid-19 Case and Outbreak Management Guidelines for the Tasmanian ECEC Settings](#) noting that advice may be updated at any time.

All ECEC services have Case and Outbreak Plans in place and to help Public Health better respond to outbreaks in services.

Outbreaks are defined as:

- **A room/group outbreak** is when **five** or more ECEC associated cases of COVID-19 are identified in children or staff from a specific room/group, within seven days of each other.
- **An ECEC outbreak** is when **three** or more room/group outbreaks are identified in an ECEC setting within seven days of each other.

The key components of this practical guide:

- **Definition of ECEC contacts**
- **Definition of a room/group outbreak**
- **Definition of an ECEC outbreak**



Dealing with outbreaks

Dealing with any COVID-19 outbreaks in an ECEC setting will be in three stages.

1. Prevent and Prepare
2. Response
 - 2.1 to cases
 - 2.2 to outbreaks
3. Ending an outbreak

Stage 1

Prevent and Prepare

Public Health has worked with the Education & Care Unit (ECU) to develop and implement practical, workable measures to help reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Key requirements for services include:

- Continuing good hygiene practices
- Implementing physical distancing requirements where practicable
- Encouraging vaccination for all staff and children over five years old
- Increased ventilation in rooms and use of outdoor learning spaces
- Wearing of facemasks by staff at all ECEC settings
- Providing rapid antigen test kits (RATs) to enable all children and staff to get tested if they develop any symptoms

Learn more about COVID-19 symptoms from the Public Health [website](#).

Stage 2

2.1 Response to Cases

If Group Outbreak thresholds are met, Public Health is informed and the ECEC service follows their outbreak guidelines (usually senior staff at the service coordinate these actions) as described in their Outbreak Management Plan.

These actions by families and staff include:

- registering their positive RAT (Rapid Antigen Test) result with Public Health
- Informing the ECEC service to ensure all cases stay away from the ECEC setting for their isolation period, and follow the Public Health guidance on the [isolation](#).

The ECEC service will:

- Identify and notify ECEC Contacts. This means all children or staff members who spend more than four hours in the same room as a positive case during the infectious period, regardless of facemask use, will be informed.
- ECEC Contacts will be advised of the action to take (usually to monitor themselves/their child for symptoms) for the next seven days; and get tested if symptoms develop.

Depending on the circumstances, families/staff who are known to be medically vulnerable to COVID-19 and/or have medically vulnerable household members can also be advised.

2.2 Response to Outbreaks

What to do if my child is an ECEC contact in an outbreak:

- Follow the instructions given by the ECEC service
 - This will typically include testing for COVID-19 (regardless of symptoms) on the day of the advice from the ECEC service and every two days after that, until advised to stop testing
- RATs will be provided for children and educators by the ECEC service
- Testing can be performed using a RAT or Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test

- If your child returns a positive test they must:
 - Immediately isolate
 - Register the RAT result on the Tasmanian Government COVID [website](#) or by calling the Public Health Hotline on 1800 671 738; and
 - Advise the ECEC service
- If your child returns a negative test and they have no symptoms, and have not become Close Contacts (from a household member) they can return to the ECEC service:
 - If waiting for PCR results, children can continue to attend if they have no symptoms and have not become close contacts (from a household member).

- If the initial testing identifies additional cases, a second test of all children and staff in the group will be performed two days later and then every 2–3 days until no positive tests are returned. The ECEC service will advise all ECEC Contacts when testing can be stopped.
- Children and staff with symptoms must stay home until their symptoms have resolved, regardless of the test result.
- Children and educators who test negative on a RAT but have symptoms should repeat a RAT or get a PCR test to confirm.

Stage 3

Ending an outbreak

In most instances, once seven days have passed since the last positive case linked to an outbreak was identified, the outbreak has ended.

Typically, ECEC services will discuss this with Public Health to confirm shared understanding of the situation and all ECEC Contacts will be notified.

No further action is needed, except for staff/families to finish isolation/quarantine and work with their service to continue with learning so far as possible.