

Department for Children and Families
Child Development Division
NOB 1 North, 280 State Drive
Waterbury, VT 05671-1040
<http://dcf.vermont.gov/cdd>

[toll free] 800-649-2642
[fax] 802-241-0846

Agency of Human Services

Memorandum

To: Senate Health and Welfare Committee
From: Steven Berbeco, CDD Deputy Commissioner
Date: May 22, 2020
RE: Update on Supports for Childcare Re-Opening

The Child Development Division understands that Committee members have questions about re-opening childcare including finances, facilities, health guidance and supplies. Please see the information below related to these topics:

Finances

Childcare programs have been financially supported during the closure period (March 17 - May 31) through two programs: the Essential Persons Incentive Program for providers who have been open to serve our essential workforce, and through the Stabilization Program for providers who have been closed to sustain their financial stability so they may reopen following closure. These programs have been voluntary, and at least half of providers open pre-closure are participating in one of these programs. To date, more than \$5.6 million has been paid to providers.

The Restart Stipend Program offers additional financial support to childcare programs that commit to re-opening. This stipend can be used to purchase cleaning supplies and other materials that are recommended by the recent Vermont Department of Health (VDH) guidance; it can also be used to hire additional staff as needed. The total Restart Program amount of \$6 million will be distributed among eligible program applicants, including summer day camps. The Department for Children and Families Commissioner's Office is administering this program.

CDD distributed a letter on the support available to eligible Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) families during June to childcare providers on May 18th; a similar letter is going out to families this week. CCFAP changed from attendance-based to enrollment-based during the closure period because families were only eligible for childcare based on their status as an Essential Person and it was understood that providers relied on these funds to remain financially stable. With the announced re-opening of childcare on June 1st, CCFAP will return to being attendance-based and function as a subsidy focused on the needs of families. The letters to providers and families include an important update: families who would like to have their child remain home for some additional time in June because of a COVID-19 related concern can opt to continue their subsidy payment to their open childcare provider to save their slot.



Capacity

Vermont has had a childcare capacity deficit prior to the current health crisis. Recent capacity building grants over the past year have resulted in new programs becoming licensed and programs increasing their licensed capacity, which has helped to mitigate the problem. However, programs are independent businesses that will make their own decisions about re-opening on June 1st. They could decide to delay re-opening, have a short-term closure, or permanent closure depending on their business needs.

The childcare profession includes many individuals who are recommended by VDH not to return to work at this time because of advanced age, compromised immune systems, or other medical conditions making them more vulnerable to COVID-19. The decision whether to return to work is between a childcare provider and their employee.

CDD licensing staff are aware that some childcare providers would prefer to move their programs to another location for a variety of reasons. We have already been working with some providers to issue variances that permit this change through our regulated system.

CDD has also been supporting childcare programs on re-opening through prioritization of license applications and background clearances to reduce delays. The strong childcare referral specialist network, available state-wide, will help match families with open and available childcare programs this summer and beyond.

Health Guidance and Supplies

We understand that childcare providers may be concerned about access to appropriate supplies. Working with the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC), we are distributing non-contact infrared thermometers at no charge to programs that are open and in need of one. We are also supporting the distribution of facial coverings to childcare providers and Children's Integrated Services providers the week of May 25th, at no cost to providers. CDD has recommended that childcare programs approach distilleries for hand sanitizer in cases where this product is unavailable locally. We have requested gloves from the SEOC for diapering, as recommended by VDH guidance, and will make those available at no cost to programs. CDD is currently problem-solving with the SEOC on how to make cleaning supplies readily available to programs who may be limited by purchase quantity maximums at local retailers. VDH has not recommended other Personal Protective Equipment for childcare providers, such as N-95 respirators or isolation gowns.

We understand that VDH is presenting webinars daily to different groups of providers on implementing the health guidance that will go into effect on June 1st. Public health nurses at VDH are available to speak one-on-one with childcare programs, and CDD is coordinating with VDH on posters, facts sheets, and policy and procedure statements that will be provided to childcare programs in the near future.

If you have further questions, please contact me at Steven.Berbeco@vermont.gov.



