

Child Care Updates

As of 12pm today, 5/7, 1,198 child care centers have voluntarily chosen to close. This is 50% of all licensed child care facilities in South Carolina. This number is down from the highest closure number which was 1288 child care centers that had voluntarily chosen to close, as of 4/13/2020.

DSS continues to communicate with child care providers and support them in their decision making about continued operations or reopening and are providing guidance on modifying practices to minimize risk of exposure. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been no Executive Orders by Governor Henry McMaster mandating the closure of child care centers in the state.

As part of the CARES Act (Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security) funding, DSS is deploying three initial phases of assistance for first responders, essential personnel, and child care centers.

Phase 1: DSS is offering child care assistance for first responders and essential workers who are essential with respect to the COVID-19 emergency and response. In other words, those engaged in providing essential services (health care workers, first responders, commercial transport, critical state government operations, child care providers); individuals involved in making sure the public has access to critical services (food, water, gas, utilities, sanitation, medical, child care); and critical infrastructure operations (communications, national guard mobilization, transportation).

Payments are made directly to child care providers. Maximum weekly payments vary by categories of care (centers, family child care homes, etc.), urban or rural settings, ages of children served, and quality level of the child care provider. Providers that are in the ABC Quality program already have an established weekly rate based on their quality level, as shown in the attached. Providers not enrolled in ABC Quality will be paid at the Level C rate. DSS will not charge a co-pay per child, however parents may be asked to pay for the difference between what the child care provider charges and the voucher rate.

- In order to qualify, you must be currently working at an essential business, you must need child care so you may continue to work, and you must complete a child care application.
- You do not have to meet any income guidelines for this limited program.
- This category of child care is being provided from the point of approval through August 30, 2020.
- More information is available at: <https://scchildcare.org/news-and-announcements/covid-19-announcements.aspx#essential>.

As of 5/6, DSS had received 4,544 requests for child care vouchers for essential staff and first responders.

- 1319 requests have been approved
- 3042 requests are still pending
- 183 requests have been denied

This accounts for \$6.7 million dollars obligated for the 1,319 approvals thus far. DSS will continue accepting applications through 5:00 PM on Friday, May 8th.

Phase 2: A one-time cleaning and sanitation grant has been made available to licensed or registered child care providers. License-exempt providers enrolled in the ABC Quality program and not operating in a school building are also eligible.

The purpose of this grant is to allow providers to clean and sanitize their center, family or group child care home which may allow them to reopen; or to continue to purchase additional cleaning supplies or services necessary to keep the center or child care home safe and sanitary. Grant amounts are based on facility type:

- Child Care Centers \$600
- License-Exempt Facilities \$400
- Group Child Care Homes \$300
- Family Child Care Homes \$300

DSS has issued cleaning grants to 438 providers, as of May 5th, 2020. These cleaning grants account for a total of \$244,000.

DSS is still accepting applications for these cleaning grants. Information about how to apply and the application form are posted on the scchildcare.org website and were sent to all child care providers via email on 4/21/20.

Phase 3: DSS is also developing an application and delivery mechanism to deploy larger grants to child care centers with funding provided through the CARES Act. DSS is finalizing implementation details now and anticipates a mid-May availability announcement.

Additionally, DSS Child Care Licensing staff contacted all closed child care facilities the week of April 30, 2020. Of the 1,215 centers contacted, 275 of those centers have been able to be reached. DSS Child Care staff plan to continue contacting closed providers via phone and email to gather additional information.

- 107 of the contacted centers plan to re-open (57 in May and 50 between June and August)
- 168 of the contacted centers have not yet made decisions about reopening

Reasons cited for remaining closed:

- following school schedule
- following Governor's schedule/executive orders
- waiting for parents to return to work
- will re-open when Governor re-opens universities
- waiting on boards to discuss or vote on re-opening
- waiting on Governor, public health leaders to decide
- waiting for COVID case numbers to decline

DSS contacted all child care centers to request information regarding needed cleaning supplies. 748 providers responded with their itemized needs. We are working with SC EMD, Commerce and other agencies to assist these providers with obtaining these supplies.

Statewide the need consisted of:

- 6,962 bottles of hand soap
- 10,235 containers of baby wipes
- 4,118 gallons of bleach
- 28,181 cleaning cloths
- 9,398 cans of disinfectant spray
- 10,124 containers of disinfectant wipes
- 10,873 boxes of facial tissue
- 12,397 boxes of gloves
- 8,145 bottles of hand sanitizer
- 242,250 masks
- 815 rolls of paper towels
- 4,970 refill bottles of antibacterial soap
- 3,279 refill gallons of hand sanitizer
- 20,339 thermometers and covers
- 21,741 rolls of toilet tissue

Plans for emergency child care licensing are still in effect. We are communicating with licensed child care centers who may be able to expand their capacity to serve foster children, children of essential staff and First Responders or displaced children. (1-888-825-7174)

DSS is also continuing to identify other organizations that can set up a temporary child care site. These organizations would be allowed to operate without a license for a maximum of 30 days in accordance with state law (63-13-440), but they must be granted approval by our Child Care Licensing Division. (1-888-825-7174)

- Currently there are 9 temporary child care centers, with a licensing capacity of 320.

DSS is partnering with Merchant Food Services to set up four access points for providers across the state to obtain needed food resources for their child care centers.

DSS developed and shared questions and answers designed to help parents and caregivers make informed decisions when choosing alternative care for their children, so they can go to work knowing their children are safe and receiving quality care. These Q & A's have been shared on our social media platforms and are uploaded on our public website.

DSS provided guidance to childcare centers regarding modifying visitation schedule of outside staff in facilities, when possible, to limit potential exposure.

DSS provided suggestions to providers for modifying sign in/out procedures to limit germ exposure inside classrooms within child care facilities.

DSS provided direct contact information line for child care centers to address specific questions that may arise. (1-888-825-7174)