



Minnesota's Children's Cabinet

Child Care Update

Dear Family Child Care and Center-Based Child Care Providers:

Thank you for continuing to be a support in your community to the children and families you care for. You play a critical role in their family well-being.

To help support your work, we're sharing some important updates and reminders.

Federal Supports

Funds for coronavirus relief were included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, which became law on December 27, 2020. These funds are being made available to states through the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG). The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) expects for Minnesota to receive an estimated \$137 million in relief funds for child care. However, DHS has not received the exact award amount and is awaiting additional guidance from the federal Office of Child Care.

To help address immediate needs based on provider and stakeholder engagement, DHS in collaboration with the Education and Child Care Work Group has developed a plan to provide short-term funding to continue to help stabilize child care programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. **One of the planned actions is to extend payments for the COVID-19 Public Health Support Funds for Child Care for January and February for an estimated cost of \$45 million. These funds will be available to eligible child care providers who previously received these supports for costs associated with public health guidance implementation.** DHS, in collaboration with the Children's Cabinet, is working on the process and timeline for the administration and distribution of these funds and will provide more information on those details in the coming weeks.

The other planned short-term action will provide funds to support low income families by adding \$15 million into the Basic Sliding Fee Child Care Assistance Program to serve up to 780 new families, balancing the funds over Calendar Year 21 and Calendar Year 22. This could, temporarily, greatly reduce or eliminate current waiting lists.

COVID-19 Vaccinations

Until there is enough vaccine for everyone, efforts are focused on immunizing for impact. Based on federal guidance, vaccinations start with the people who are most likely to get COVID-19 and those most at risk of serious complications. The Administration wants distribution to go as quickly as possible while ensuring safety and minimizing the potential for wasted or spoiled doses due to human error.

The state's role is oversight and facilitation. The state helps the federal government know where in Minnesota to send vaccine and helps make sure vaccine providers in Minnesota – mostly private health care providers and pharmacies at this stage – administer it safely. Due to the complexity of handling and administering these brand-new vaccines, Minnesota chose to receive final instructions from the FDA and ensure adequate training before allowing vaccine to be administered. Some other states chose to simply start giving shots before providing final instructions and education.

Educators and child care workers are included in 1b recommendations and the availability of these vaccines will likely begin after January. We will be working as a part of the Education and Child Care Workgroup across agencies on strategies for execution of vaccine distribution to the frontlines.

You may have seen the news that following significant changes in federal guidance on vaccine distribution **earlier this week**, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) informed hospitals, health care systems and other vaccination partners that they can provide vaccines to broader categories of Minnesotans – including Minnesotans 65 years of age and older as 1a is completed. This decision is based on engagement with Minnesotans, changing guidance and inconsistent allocations from the federal government, challenges around the complexity of this COVID-19 vaccine administration – and ensuring no vaccine goes unused.

We understand that this announcement may result in questions about vaccine rollout for phase 1b (which has been planned for after January), in addition to Minnesotans in 1a still awaiting their vaccine. More information on the next phases of vaccine rollout and phase 1b will be announced in the coming days. Please visit mn.gov/vaccine for more information. Meanwhile, Minnesota is still working with the extremely limited supply of vaccine allocated each week from the federal government the state is **urging the federal administration to provide more vaccine immediately**. We will continue to be in touch soon with more information.

More information about the COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Advisory Group including a form to submit feedback prior to scheduled meetings can be found at <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/vaccine/advisory>.

Child Care and Early Childhood Nurses

Minnesota is following the prioritization recommendations of CDC for administering COVID vaccine. Child care and early childhood staff are in priority level Phase 1b, however health care workers who provide direct patient care, such as child care

nurses and early childhood nurses, are in Phase 1a, priority 3. Minnesota is just completing Phase 1a, priority 1, working on priority 2, and transitioning into priority 3. This means most child care and early childhood nurses should be able to receive their first vaccine dose in a couple weeks.

Child care and early childhood nurses have been advised to call their local public health agency.

COVID-19 Testing

The State of Minnesota is continuing to prioritize low-barrier, free testing opportunities for child care providers. Child care providers have been on the front lines since the beginning of this pandemic - coming to work every single day and risking virus exposure to care for and educate our youngest Minnesotans and respond to community needs. Governor Walz, Lt. Governor Flanagan and state leaders want to ensure that child care providers and staff are prioritized for new testing opportunities.

The state created a strategy for COVID-19 screening testing for certain child care providers who wish to participate. This strategy was based on a pilot that considered frequency of testing, child care provider size, geography, demography, and previous outbreaks.

For eligible programs that opted into the optional program, distribution of COVID-19 tests has begun with the duration dependent on ongoing funding.

All child care programs, including smaller programs and family child care providers, may utilize the following testing options:

- **Utilization of [Community Testing Sites](#):** All COVID-19 testing is free at a Minnesota Department of Health testing site. You won't need to show identification and insurance is not required. While walk-ins are welcome, **appointments are strongly recommended to limit wait times. Visit mn.gov/covid19.**
- **At-home COVID-19 saliva testing:** Minnesota offers free, at-home COVID-19 saliva testing, and these kits can be ordered individually at any time.

Provider Call

View a [recording](#) of the Jan. 4 call. The next provider call will be on Mon. Feb. 8. Details on how to log-in will be provided in a future update.

Provider Surveys

There are currently two surveys that child care providers are being asked to complete, and both are critically important. Data will be shared between the two

surveys, but they are each used for different purposes. We continue to work on streamlining the processes. Please take a moment to complete both surveys:

Capacity Survey. Updating your capacity through this [survey](#) helps those with young children working in health care and other critical sectors be connected to your programs. Data from the capacity survey on mn.gov/child care is being used to address immediate needs related to the pandemic, and we are sharing this map and survey with hospitals and critical sectors. If you have questions about your license and availability to serve additional school-age children, call the DHS hotline at 1-888-234-1268.

Market Rate Survey/Provider Business Update. Completing the business update and market rate survey through Child Care Aware is critical to provide important information to families looking for child care and to inform reimbursement rates for the Child Care Assistance Program. Child Care Aware is busy helping families with their child care searches, and having your update-to-date business information helps guide these families and supports their children's care needs. You can complete the Business Update by using the online Update Tool (ParentAware.org/update).

If you've never used the Update Tool before, you will need to activate your account first using your License ID# and email address on file with Child Care Aware. If you need assistance, please email UpdateTool@ParentAware.org. All programs that complete the rates and fees section of the update before the end of January will be eligible to win a gift card. If you would like to complete your update in a different way, please email InformationServices@ParentAware.org.

Please complete the surveys when your status or enrollment changes, or ideally every six weeks.

Regularly Review the Public Health Guidance

Find links to public health guidance and other important information on <https://mn.gov/mmb/childcare/providers/>.

Contact Us

If you have any questions, please send to childrenscabinet.mmb@state.mn.us or call us at 651-259-3636.

Thank you,

Erin Bailey & Jenny Moses, Governor's Children's Cabinet

On behalf of participating agency leaders and staff

Contact Us.

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