

February 2, 2023



**LUZERNE COUNTY  
HEAD START** INC.

## **Evidence-Based COVID- 19 Mitigation Policy**

Policy Council Approval: 2/21/23

Board of Directors Approval: 2/23/23

# Goals of the Evidence-Based COVID-19 Mitigation Policy 1302.47 (b)(9)

At Luzerne County Head Start, Inc. (“LCHS”) it is our priority to keep our staff, children, and their families healthy, especially in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. LCHS is comprised of Luzerne and Wyoming counties and works with pregnant women, children aged birth through five, and their families. We abide by governmental guidelines, when possible, as we strive to balance public health concerns with the needs of our agency. This plan details how LCHS continues to keep our agency open, and the actions taken to help maintain safety of all of our staff, children, and families. This plan pulls pieces of guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Pennsylvania Department of Health (PDOH), Office of Head Start (OHS), National Head Start Association (NHSA), Pennsylvania Head Start Association (PHSA), The Wilkes-Barre City Health Department, and Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL). LCHS also consulted with members our Health Services Advisory Committee (“HSAC”) and our COVID-19 Response Committee, which consisted of Board and Policy Council members, HSAC members, the PA Department of Health, and LCHS staff. Our Board and Policy Council have been part of the reopening of our agency and the continual updates to COVID-19 changes. This plan highlights the responsibilities of managers and staff and outlines the steps LCHS has taken to address COVID-19.

**Please keep in mind that guidance and best practices regarding COVID-19 is continually changing. As such, this plan may need to be adjusted and revised to align with state and local guidance from time to time.**

While we have implemented various protocols to help ensure your safety, it is up to all staff and our children’s’ family members to execute these protocols daily. LCHS hopes that we have clearly communicated our plans and strive to always communicate changes moving forward. This plan highlights workplace protocols that have been in place to help protect your safety and establish a level of comfort for all of our staff and families.

Any questions or concerns relating to COVID-19 or returning to work should be directed to Human Resources. Managers and supervisors receiving questions or concerns relating to COVID-19 will be referring such questions to Human Resources as well.

This plan can be found on our website (<https://lcheadstart.org/>) and has been uploaded to each child’s Google Classroom.

## **What is COVID-19 and what are the symptoms of COVID-19?**

### **How is COVID-19 transmitted?**

According to the CDC, the virus spreads when an infected person breathe out droplets and very small particles that contain the virus. These droplets and particles can be breathed in by other people or land on their eyes, noses, or mouth. In some circumstances, they may contaminate surfaces they touch. Anyone infected with COVID-19 can spread it, even if they do not have symptoms.

### **What should you do if you experience symptoms of COVID-19?**

People with COVID-19 have had a wide range of symptoms reported, from mild symptoms to severe illness. According to the CDC, symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. People with the following symptoms may have COVID-19: fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea. This list is not all-inclusive of all possible symptoms.

According to the CDC, anyone can have mild to severe symptoms of COVID-19. Adults 65 years and older and people of any age with underlying medical conditions are at higher risk for severe illness.

Staff and children who experience the following symptoms should stay home. Staff will call their supervisor and families will call their Family Educator, Teacher, or Family Worker.

- \* Sore throat for unknown reasons
- \* Fever
- \* Diarrhea
- \* Loss of smell or taste

If staff or children start to experience these symptoms while they are already on-site at LCHS, they need to go home. Staff will inform their supervisor that they are not feeling well. A family member of the child who is not feeling well will be called to inform them that they must come pick up the child. If the family member is unable to pick up the sick child within the hour, we will ask that family member if there is anyone else that is able to pick the child up whom is listed on the approved release-to form. While the child is waiting to get picked up, they will separate from the rest of the group in the cozy area or cozy cube.

If you do not feel well, or are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19, as described by the CDC and referenced above, we recommend that you consult your private health care provider to determine if your symptoms are appropriate for testing.

If someone is showing any of the following emergency warning signs, the CDC recommends seeking medical care immediately: trouble breathing, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new confusion, inability to wake or stay awake, or bluish lips or face. This list is not all-inclusive of all possible symptoms. Please call your medical provider for any other symptoms that are severe or concerning to you. If you are seeking care for someone who has or may have COVID-19, call 911 or call ahead to your local emergency facility.

## LCHS Mitigation Strategies of COVID-19

### What should you do to protect yourself and others?

As COVID-19 continues to evolve, LCHS will continue to monitor guidelines and recommendations from local, state and federal officials. Scientific evidence is continuously evolving, and we will be responding in kind. We expect all staff to comply with the following guidelines to protect themselves and others, which have been established by the CDC and PA Department of Health. Please also refer to guidelines from the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<https://www.cdc.gov>) for more information on what you can do to lower any risk of contracting the virus as well as how to prevent its spread.

According to the CDC, COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective for adults and children 6 months-17. Please see the [CDC Stay Up to Date with COVID-19 Vaccines site](#) and [Find COVID-19 Vaccines](#)

1. **Vaccination-** According to the Interim Final Rule on November 30, 2021 §1302.93 and §1302.94, all staff, certain contractors, and volunteers are required to be vaccinated unless an exemption has been approved. If the Office of Head Start changes this requirement, LCHS will change its policy on vaccinations as well.

LCHS has required all staff and transportation contractors, including bus drivers, bus aides, and substitute drivers and aides, vaccinated with the primary series of the COVID-19 vaccination, excluding approved exemptions. If a staff member has an approved exemption, a weekly COVID-19 test is required with the outcome and proof of test sent to HR prior to the first day of the work week.

LCHS worked vigorously to set up opportunities for all staff to receive their primary series of the COVID-19 vaccine during the initial stages of the pandemic by working closely with Geisinger Health Systems and our local IU. We also provided information to find vaccines close to individuals' homes. LCHS also encourages all staff to continue to stay up to date on all COVID-19 booster vaccines and have provided opportunities and information on where to get these vaccines.

LCHS also informed families in Head Start, Early Head Start, and Pre-K Counts about the importance of the COVID-19 vaccinations. Throughout this pandemic, LCHS sent out information on vaccines and COVID-19 using our Facebook page and our Google Classrooms. LCHS also partnered with the Wilkes-Barre City Department of Health and the PA Department of Health to hold various COVID-19 vaccine clinics for staff, transportation contractors, and families. These clinics provided both the primary series of vaccines and boosters.

LCHS also partnered with The Wright Center to provide the "Driving Better Health" van to locations in Luzerne County. According to The Wright Center, "The Driving Better Health van was acquired to during the pandemic to help populations of special concern expand access to coronavirus testing and vaccines. It has also been successful in being used to support the Health Resources and Services Administration "Catch Up to Get Ahead" vaccination campaign. This van was parked at various Luzerne County Head Start parking lots for our families to access.

## LCHS Mitigation Strategies of COVID-19

2. **Stay home when sick**- If children or staff are not feeling well and cannot pass the health screener, we ask that they stay home. Watch for key symptoms of COVID-19 and consult with your child's primary care physician.
3. **Ventilation**: LCHS has added MERV-13 filters and installed the PHI-PKG air purification system by RFG for our HVAC systems in the two buildings we own. We also asked all of our landlords to improve their air filters in the HVAC to the highest number feasible if it could not be a MERV-13 filter. Additionally, we added two ventilation strategies in all of our classrooms and offices.
  - **Open windows**- If possible, open all windows in offices, classrooms, and on buses.
  - **Turn on air purifiers**- LCHS purchased an EnviroKlenz mobile air system with UV light for all classrooms and offices. These air purifiers should be turned on in each office and classroom everyday while in the building. These air systems change the air up to 10 times per hour. Each purifier has an air filter that is changed every six months. There is also a HEPA filter and UV lights that are changed every two years.
4. **Wash your hands often**- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, sneezing, and before you eat. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. See also: [Proper Hand Washing Video-CDC](#)
5. **Social Distance**- Avoid close contact (meaning within 6 feet of someone) with anyone outside of designated pods when at a high community level, if feasible.
6. **Cover coughs and Sneezes**-Always remember to always cover our mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or use the inside of your elbow. Throw used tissues in the trash. Immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
7. **Clean and disinfect**-

LCHS will be taking every reasonable precaution to make sure the premises are safe for staff, children, and families. LCHS will use cleaning agents, as well as disinfectants, throughout the day and follow a strict cleaning and disinfecting protocols throughout the building that includes regular cleaning with frequency in all shared bathrooms, food prep area and other spaces, including, but not limited to offices, vehicles, printers, copiers, countertops, kitchenettes, and other common areas.

LCHS noticed the nationwide shortage of cleaning supplies during the initial months of the pandemic. This prompted us to research effective alternatives and discovered Hypochlorous Acid.

  - In May of 2020 we reached out to EPA to ask for Hypochlorous Acid to be listed as an EPA registered disinfectant.

## LCHS Mitigation Strategies of COVID-19

- On May 28, 2020, the EPA updated its list and added it in response to our findings.
- Each center has an Eco One Electrolyzed Generator to create the hypochlorous acid.
  - [Hypochlorous Acid Generator](#)
- Each center has at least one cold mist fogger and/or portable fogger to place the hypochlorous acid to sanitize the classrooms, hallways, bathrooms, and homes during a home visit.
  - [Cold Mist Foggers](#)
  - [Portable fogger](#)

All staff are required to be part of the continuous cleaning and disinfecting process to help maintain the building's cleanliness, including offices, kitchenette, training rooms, and bathrooms. Staff will be responsible to clean and disinfect the toilet and sink after each use. Bottles of hypochlorous acid (effective for two weeks-all bottles will be labeled and dated) will be placed on counters of bathroom sinks.

- Once a staff member has washed hands for at least 20 seconds using water and soap, they will then clean the toilet seat, the toilet handle, and sink handles with soap and water and then wipe off while wearing gloves.
- Then the staff will disinfect by spraying the hypochlorous acid on the above listed areas to air dry.

Video on making the Hypochlorous acid and using the foggers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8TrMuSRJiM>

Video on cleaning and disinfecting the bathrooms

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8TrMuSRJiM>

### 8. **Responding to Outbreaks-**

All cases of staff and children COVID-19 cases are reported to the PA Department of Health via email and tracked internally through the use of Child Plus COVID-19 Affected tracking. If LCHS notices that there are multiple cases of COVID-19 within the same classroom, we consult with the PA Department of Health to determine if the cases are related. If the cases are found to be related to the classroom, we would use the guidance of the PA Department of Health for next steps. If the cases are to be unrelated, LCHS will continue to keep the classroom open.

## LCHS Mitigation Strategies of COVID-19

### 9. Masking-Updated 2/02/23

As we continue to monitor COVID-19 community rates in Luzerne and Wyoming counties, LCHS has decided that all students and staff are no longer required to wear a mask inside of our buildings, vehicles, and buses. This new guidance, which correlates with the CDC guidance on masking is effective September 26, 2022.

Any staff and/or family may choose to mask at any time. Masking by any one individual is a personal preference and an option for those who wish to continue to wear one. Disposable masks will be provided by LCHS for any staff or child who wishes to wear one.

LCHS will monitor the COVID-19 community rates in both Luzerne and Wyoming counties on a weekly basis. If at any time our community reaches high community spread for a week straight, LCHS will review our guidance on masking, consult with our Department of Health, and may reinstate masking as necessary.

**All reasonable accommodations will be made for any child who is medically compromised or has been diagnosed with a disability that prohibits them from masking.**

As per Luzerne County Head Start Inc. policy, all children and staff who have diagnosed with COVID-19 will be required to stay home for five days after test date. Upon return, all staff and children will be required to mask for days 6-10 after test date. For all home visits, if a household member has been diagnosed with COVID-19 within 5 days of the visit, you must reschedule your visit. If any household member is within day 6-10 post positive COVID-19 test, both the household members that you are visiting and the staff member must mask during the entire visit.

## Responsive to Changing Conditions

Luzerne County Head Start continually monitors our community levels of Covid-19 by using the CDC website, ([cdc covid-by-county](#)), to verify the levels weekly in both Luzerne and Wyoming County. If the level goes from low or medium community spread to high community spread, changes to both masking and social distancing will go into effect.

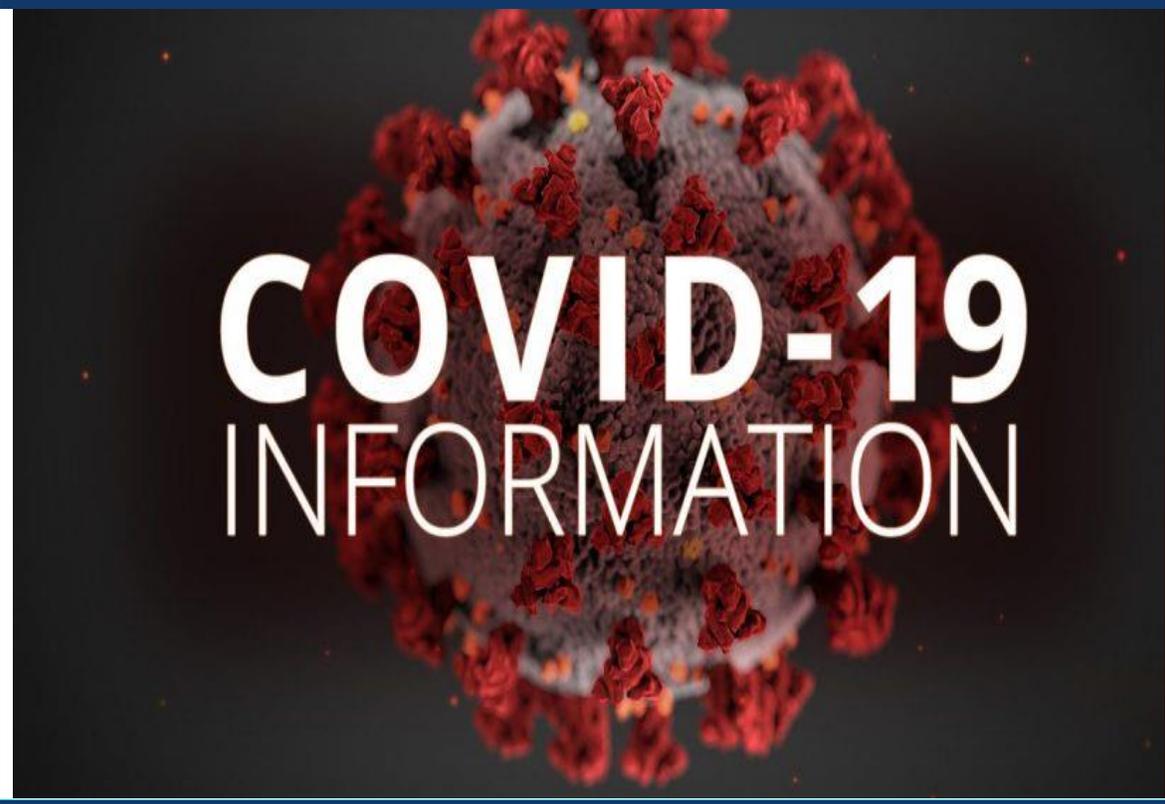
The Director of Operations will send out an internal email to all staff and an external email and text message to all families, including Head Start, Early Head Start, and Pre-K Counts. Our teachers and family educators will also upload the below message to each child's Google Classroom.

The message would state:

- “Due to the change in our community level of Covid-19 to high, LCHS will now require masking for all children 2 and older and all staff. We will also begin social distancing again. All home visits and socializations for the Early Head Start program will all be virtual as well. These changes will continue until further notice based on the lowering of the community level to medium or low.”

During this time when the community spread is at a high level, Head Start home visits and/or orientations will be virtually.

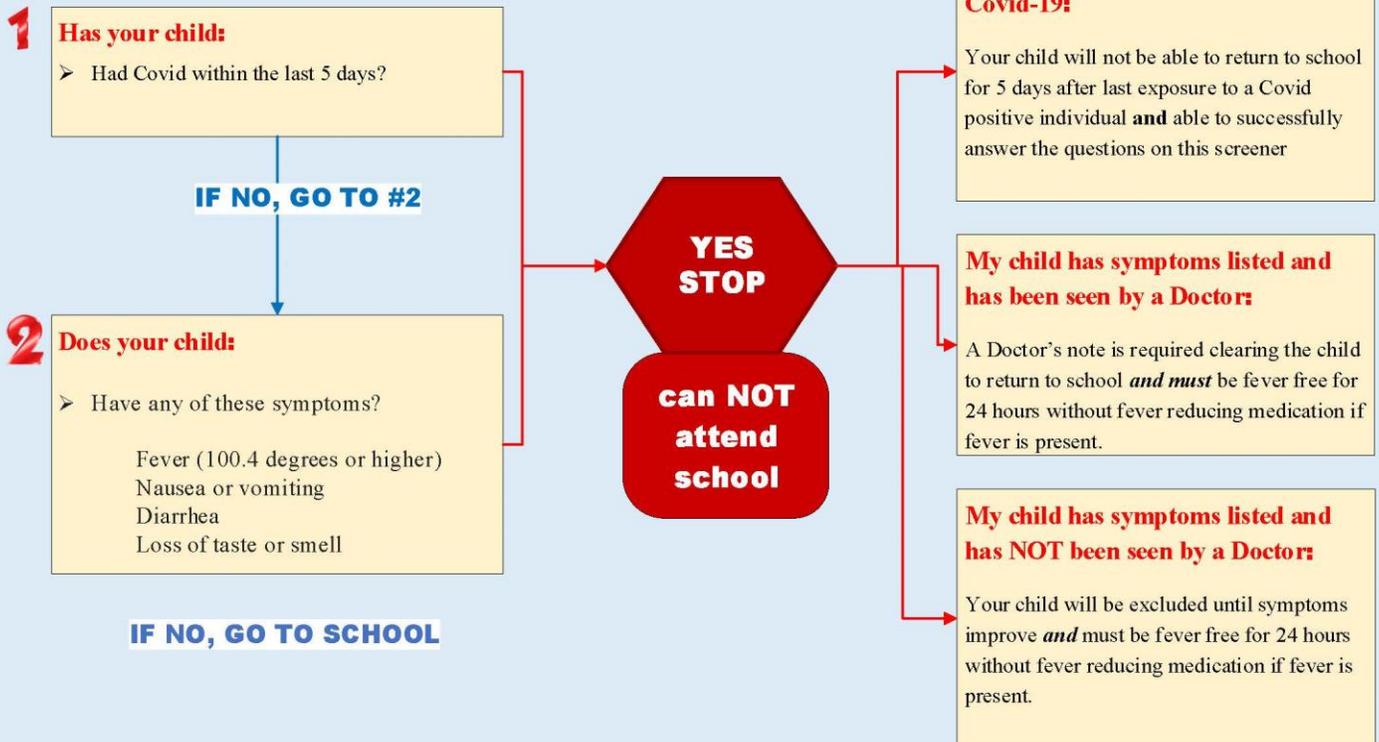
# APPENDICES



**COVID-19**  
INFORMATION

# Student Health Screener

Revised 8/31/22



# Family Health Screener

Revised 8/31/22



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