

## **COVID-19 POLICY**

It is the priority of **Over the Rainbow Early Learning Centre Ltd** to protect all children attending our service and all persons working in our service from the transmission of infections. The health and well-being of all children, staff and visitors to our service is paramount and our aim is to prevent and manage any infection which may be present in the service as best we can.

### **Principle**

This policy is informed by the Government's Return to Work Safely Protocol, COVID-19 Specific National Protocol for Employers and Workers and additional and complimentary to Regulation 23 Safeguarding, Health, Safety and Welfare of the Child of the Child Care Act 1991(Early Years Services Regulations) 2016.

### **Rationale**

While COVID-19 continues to spread it is important that we take action to prevent further transmission, reduce the impacts of the outbreak and support control measures.

The protection of children and staff is particularly important. Precautions are necessary to prevent the potential spread of COVID-19; however, care must also be taken to avoid stigmatizing children and staff who may have been exposed to the virus. Therefore, it is our intension to continue to be welcoming, respectful, inclusive, and supportive to all.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this document is to provide clear and actionable guidance for safe operations through the prevention, early detection and control of COVID-19 within our setting. It sets out a range of actions to be considered, implemented and adapted as necessary. This policy is to be used in addition to our Infection control, hygiene and cleaning policies.

### **Facts about COVID-19**

#### **What is COVID-19?**

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus. 'CO' stands for corona, 'VI' for virus, and 'D' for disease. Formerly, this disease was referred to as '2019 novel coronavirus' or '2019-nCoV.' The COVID-19 virus is a new virus linked to the same family of viruses as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and some types of common cold. It is an illness that can affect your lungs and airways.

#### **What are the symptoms of COVID-19?**

Common symptoms of COVID-19 include:

- a fever (high temperature - 38 degrees Celsius or above)
- a new cough - this can be any kind of cough, not just dry
- shortness of breath or breathing difficulties
- loss or change to your sense of smell or taste – this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal

You may not have all of these symptoms. It can take up to 14 days for symptoms to show. They can be similar to symptoms of cold and flu.

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An early diagnosis from your GP means you can get the help you need and avoid spreading the virus, if you have it.

For more detailed information please see the HSE website.

### **How does COVID-19 spread?**

The most common way you can get COVID-19 (coronavirus) is by coming into close contact with someone who has the virus. You can spread the virus even if you do not have symptoms.

#### ***Close contact***

COVID-19 is mainly spread through close contact and droplets that come from your nose and mouth. For example, from someone who is talking loud, singing, shouting, coughing or sneezing. This happens when people are within 1 to 2 metres of each other. It is why keeping a 2-meter distance from other people is so effective in reducing the spread.

#### ***Infected surfaces***

You can also get the virus from infected surfaces. For example, when someone who has the virus sneezes or coughs, droplets with the virus can fall onto surfaces around them. If you touch that surface and then touch your eyes, nose or mouth, you could become infected too. That's why it's important to wash your hands properly and often.

#### ***How long can the virus survive on surfaces***

Common household disinfectants will kill the virus on surfaces. Clean the surface first and then use a disinfectant.

COVID-19 can survive for:

- up to 72 hours on plastic and stainless steel
- less than 4 hours on copper
- less than 24 hours on cardboard

#### ***Airborne spread***

Airborne transmission is the spread of a virus in very tiny water particles. This can happen over a longer distance than droplets, such as across a room. Airborne transmission does not appear to play a major role in the spread of COVID-19. But it can happen in some situations. To protect yourself, keep indoor spaces well ventilated (aired out) by opening windows and doors if possible.

#### **What is different with the COVID-19 new variant strains?**

- **8 December:** UK reported a new variant of COVID-19 (it had been around since September) Not a new virus but some genetic changes that change how it works
- **18 December:** another different new variant reported by South Africa
- **January 2021:** another new variant strain was found in travellers from Brazil (tested on arrival in Japan)

These variants seem to spread more easily and quickly – otherwise it seems to cause a similar disease. People infected with the new variant seem to produce more virus.

It is not clear if the big surge we saw late December and January was caused by the new UK variant strain or more people meeting with other people over the

Christmas/New Year period – probably a combination of the two.

### **Who is most at risk?**

COVID-19 (coronavirus) can make anyone seriously ill. But for some people, the risk is higher. Very-high risk and high-risk people are advised to stay at home as much as possible. For a complete list of very high risk or high-risk categories, please see the HSE website.

COVID-19 (coronavirus) can affect children as well as adults. But cases of COVID-19 are much less common in children. Children generally get a milder infection than adults. They often have no symptoms. Children do not spread the virus more than adults and are rarely the cause of the virus spreading in households. The virus can be fatal in rare cases, so far mainly among older people with pre-existing medical conditions.

Children with underlying health conditions may be vulnerable to any infection. But the risk of severe illness from COVID-19 seems to be low, even if your child has:

- an underlying health condition
- special healthcare needs

If your child has a health condition they and everyone in the family should still:

- be extra careful in watching out for symptoms
- strictly follow the advice on good hygiene and hand washing

Your child should try and keep up their normal activities and go to school. This is good for their overall wellbeing. If you have concerns about your child's health condition, ask their specialist team for advice.

A small number of children with COVID-19 have developed an inflammatory syndrome called paediatric inflammatory multisystem syndrome (PIMS). This condition is very rare. It mainly affects children who do not have a health condition.

### **Protecting yourself and others from Covid**

As with other respiratory infections like the flu or the common cold, public health measures are critical to slow the spread of illnesses.

It is important that you:

- stay home when sick or display any Covid symptoms
- wash your hands properly and often
- cover mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue when coughing or sneezing
- Dispose of used tissue **immediately**
- keep social distance of 2 meters
- wear face covering or masks in public spaces or whenever large crowds gather
- do not share objects especially those which have been in contact with your mouth
- clean frequently touched surfaces and objects regularly

As we learn more about COVID-19 public health officials may recommend additional actions which will be added to this policy.

## **Procedure within the setting**

### **Attendance**

#### **Staff**

- Before returning to work all staff must complete a pre-return to work form no earlier than three days in advance of returning to work.
- Before returning to work all staff will complete induction training or refresher training on COVID-19.
- If a staff member is identified as being in the at risk or vulnerable category, a separate risk assessment will be carried out with the staff member to identify what controls can be put in place to support their safe return to work.
- All staff need to comply with any temperature testing implemented by the employer in line with public health advice.
- After a return to work, any staff member who is unwell with a fever, have a cold, influenza or infectious respiratory symptoms of any kind or displaying any of the symptoms of coronavirus need to stay at home, contact their GP and seek their guidance on referral for coronavirus testing.
- Any staff member with symptoms of coronavirus or who tests positive should inform management **immediately** and quarantine at home for the recommended 14 days. Return to work will only be accepted once symptoms have fully resolved and with a doctor's certificate.
- Any staff member who is a close contact of a person who has or is suspected to have COVID-19 should inform management immediately and quarantine at home for the recommended 14 days even though the staff member feels well as it is possible that they are also infected. It can take 2 – 14 days to show symptoms. Return to work will only be accepted with a doctor's certificate to say they do not have coronavirus and are not infectious.

#### **Children**

- Any child who is unwell with a fever, have a cold, influenza or infectious respiratory symptoms of any kind or displaying any of the symptoms of coronavirus need to stay at home, contact their GP and seek their guidance on referral for coronavirus testing.
- Any child with symptoms of coronavirus or who tests positive should quarantine at home for 14 days and only return to the service when the symptoms have fully resolved and with a doctor's certificate stating that the child is no longer infectious.
- Any child who is a close contact of a person who has or is suspected to have COVID-19 should stay at home and quarantine for 14 days even though the child feels well but it is possible that they are also infected. It can take 2 – 14 days to show symptoms.
- Children's temperature will be taken and recorded on arrival and during the day, if deemed necessary. Parental consent will be sought. A fever is considered 38° or higher. A child presenting with a fever will be asked to return home.
- When a child is ready to return to the setting after illness the '**Return to preschool declaration**' must be completed and returned to us before the child can attend.

#### **Parents**

- Only parents or carers who are well and have no symptoms of COVID-19 or who have served the required quarantine time of 14 days will be allowed to drop off and collect children.

**General**

- Where at all possible, access to the service will be limited to staff and children.
- Visitors or contractors will only be permitted to enter the service on essential business e.g. essential maintenance, and they will be asked to make these visits outside of the usual operational hours. Their contact details will be collected i.e. name, address, mobile, email address for possible contact tracing purposes.
- People who are in the high risk or vulnerable categories will be asked not to attend the service.
- Please see our Managing Visitors during Covid policy for further details.

**Dealing with a suspected case of COVID-19 in the service**

While staff and children should not attend the setting if displaying any symptoms of COVID-19, the following steps outline how to manage a suspected case if it were to present during opening hours.

**General**

- COVID-19 is a notifiable disease and as per our Infection control policy Tusla, the HSE Preschool Environmental Health Officer and the Public Health Department will be notified immediately of any infection within the service.
- We have appointed **Jennifer Byrne** to be our Covid-19 coordinator, responsible for dealing with suspected cases of Covid-19 within our service.
- We have allocated an area at the backdoor to the setting as our isolation area and have ensured a 2-meter distance between the isolation area and all other areas. Any symptomatic person who cannot leave the service immediately will be asked to remain within our isolation area until they can either be collected or go home.
- Personal protective equipment i.e. disposable aprons, gloves, face masks; tissues, hand sanitizer, disinfectant, dedicated pedal bins to dispose of any potential Covid waste material is readily available throughout the setting.

**Staff**

- Inform Covid Coordinator immediately.
- Relieve staff from duties. Staff member should leave the setting as soon as possible and avoid touching any surfaces, people or objects.
- Advise staff member to self-isolate at home and contact their GP immediately.
- If needed, arrange transport home or to hospital for medical assessment. **Public transport of any kind should not be used.**
- Carry out an assessment of the incident which will form any part of follow up actions.
- Arrange for immediate cleaning and disinfection of any and all areas the staff member was in contact with.
- Cover will be provided as per our staff absence policy.

**Child**

- Inform Covid Coordinator immediately.
- Without causing any unnecessary stress to the child, separate the child from the rest of the children by taking them to the isolation area immediately to lie down or play quietly.
- Depending on the age of the child provide a mask for the child and tissues if required and use the dedicated waste bin, as necessary.

- The staff member caring for the child in isolation should wear personal protective equipment i.e. face mask, disposable apron and gloves.
- The child should be comforted and kept calm but also encouraged not to touch surfaces, people or any objects.
- Contact the child's parents immediately and ask them to collect the child and to contact their GP. **Public transport of any kind should not be used.**
- Carry out an assessment of the incident which will form any part of follow up actions.
- Arrange for immediate cleaning and disinfection of the isolation area and any other area the child was in contact with.

### ***Cleaning and disinfection***

Cleaning and disinfection to be carried out as per our Cleaning and Infection Control policies.

### **Arrival and departure procedures**

No-one with symptoms consistent with Covid-19 should be attending the setting without having discussed it with their GPs. We have been asked to take a precautionary approach meaning if your child is 'off form', **please do not attend.**

### ***If your child does not feel well***

- If your child has symptoms of viral respiratory disease, even if they are mild, they must **not attend the setting.**
- Likewise, parents who have respiratory symptoms must not take their child to the setting or pick them up.
- Parents must not take their child to the setting if a parent or anyone else in your home or at work is suspected of having or known to have Covid-19.

During this period, it is important that parents and guardians are physically distance from each other and from staff when dropping off and collecting their children. We ask that you please note the following rules:

- Parents/guardians cannot enter the service during this time.
- We ask that all parents please be patient during drop off and make provision for drop off taking at least 15 minutes depending on volume of children being dropped at the same time.
- Only 1 adult per family will be allowed to drop off or collect their children.
- The wearing of a face-covering or face mask is mandatory for all adults during drop-off and collection. Children will not be required to wear a face-covering or face mask.
- A one-way system is in place in which parents will be asked to queue, 2 meters apart at the front of the setting and proceed around the back of the setting once your child has been dropped off or collected. Appropriate signage is in place.
- If you and your children walk or cycle to the setting, please note that bikes, scooters, buggies or ride-ons cannot be left at the setting during this time as we cannot provide safe storage and there is an increased risk of infection where bikes, scooters and buggies are kept together.
- Children will have their temperature taken at the door before they are able to enter the setting each morning. 38° or higher is considered a fever. If a child presents with a fever, they will have to return home and contact their GP.

- Parents are asked to please not stop and talk to each other on the premise as this would make it more difficult for other parents to adhere to social distancing within the premise.
- All parents/guardians should follow public health advice and follow social distancing advice and give all other waiting parent/guardians the recommended 2m distance.
- During this time, if parents require to talk to staff, we ask if at all possible, to ring or email either Ann-Marie or Jennifer. With drop-off and collection being very time consuming during the pandemic it is not possible for us to discuss matters at the door.
- Children cannot bring any toys in from home.
- Parents, children and staff are to wash/sanitise their hands, on arrival at the service. Alcohol-based hand gel will be provided at all entry doors safely out of the reach of children as we do not recommend children to use alcohol-based hand gel.
- Please do not linger or congregate in the carpark or at your car as it can cause delays for other parents and also hinders social distancing.

#### ***What should I do to prepare my child for drop-off***

- Children's hands should be washed before they leave home.
- Children should wear freshly laundered clothes every day to minimise the spread of Covid-19 from clothing. We also recommend that children remove their clothing as soon as they arrive home.
- Children with long hair should have their hair tied up away from their faces.
- As staff have extra responsibilities at the moment and the increased risk of potentially spreading the virus, we are unable to apply sun cream at this time. Please ensure your child has sun cream on before they arrive to the setting.
- Children must not bring their own toys from home.

#### **Collections for Children Exhibiting Symptoms of COVID-19**

##### ***If you child becomes ill while attending the setting***

- They will be kept in our isolation area (with a member of staff), while we contact you to arrange for their collection as quickly as possible. You will be advised to contact your GP straight away and follow HSE advice. **It is vital that we have a contact number for parents/guardians where we can reach you at all times during the day.**
- If a parent/guardian cannot be reached at their provided phone numbers their emergency contacts will be called and asked to collect the child as soon as possible.
- Parent/guardian or authorized person will collect child at the back door (Pitch side). **Please do not enter the setting.**
- For more information, please refer to our Covid Incident Plan.

#### ***New Requirement from the HSE***

When a child is ready to return to the setting after illness the **'Return to preschool declaration'** must be completed and returned to us before the child can attend.

This declaration is a requirement from the HSE in which the parent/guardian needs to provide a brief written declaration that:

- They are satisfied that the child has recovered.
- They have followed any medical advice given regarding staying away from childcare.
- They have no reason to believe that the child now represents a particular infection risk to other children or to staff (form available on hpsc.ie website).

### **Communication**

Clear, consistent and transparent communication with parents is very important for the effective implementation of all safety measure to reduce the risk of transmission of Covid-19. Therefore:

- This policy and all other new procedures put in place to reduce the risk of the transmission of the coronavirus in the service will be communicate and explained to parents. Ongoing communication will be encouraged and as far as possible be made safe for both parents and staff. It is important to us that everyone feels safe.
- During this time, if parents require to talk to staff, we ask if at all possible, to ring or email either Ann-Marie or Jennifer. With drop-off and collection being very time consuming during the pandemic it is not possible for us to discuss matters at the door.
- Appropriate signage will be provided throughout the service to help inform and increase awareness on the coronavirus.

### **Hand hygiene**

As per our Hygiene policy, **Over the Rainbow Early Learning Centre Ltd** is committed to promoting a healthy environment and a high standard of personal hygiene for adults and children. It is our policy to comply with current regulations and best practice recommendations.

- Liquid soap and warm running water are available throughout the premises for access by children and staff. Child-friendly sinks are available.
- Antibacterial hand gel is also available at all entrance doors and within each room and kept out of reach of children.
- Staff and children are encouraged to regularly wash their hands with soap and water including on arrival at the service, before and after snacks or meals and after using the toilet and should dry their hands thoroughly with paper towels provided.
- Staff are trained in correct handwashing procedure and signage is available at all sinks.
- Children are supervised during handwashing and age appropriate resources such as songs and reward charts are used in the education of correct handwashing.
- The alcohol-based hand rub must be applied vigorously over all hand surfaces. Alcohol based hand rubs are only effective if hands are not visibly dirty, if hands are visibly dirty then liquid soap and water should be used. We do not recommend children use alcohol based hand gel but encourage hand washing instead.

### **Respiratory hygiene**

- Cough or sneeze into your elbow or into a tissue.
- Tissues are readily accessible throughout the service with a dedicated pedal operated bin provided for easy disposal of used tissues.
- Wash your hands after coughing or sneezing.

**Staff must:**

- Adopt and promote good respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette.
- Ensure they are familiar with and follow respiratory hygiene guidance.

**Face masks**

Young children will not be expected to remain socially distanced from each other or the adults caring for them. Neither will they be expected to wear masks or be cared for by adults wearing masks. Adults may wear masks when they are not caring for children i.e. interacting with parents, during breaks. Infection risk should be minimised through children remaining within a small group ('play-pod') through the day.

Disposable facemasks are available within the setting.

**Vaccination**

It is recommended that children, staff and parents are encouraged to have the seasonal influenza vaccination.

COVID-19 vaccines offer protection from COVID-19. If you do catch COVID-19 after vaccination, you should be protected from the serious illness the virus can sometimes cause. Getting vaccinated against COVID-19 is not mandatory. But it is strongly recommended that you get your vaccine when it's offered to you. People who are most at risk from COVID-19 will be vaccinated first.

There's no charge for getting your COVID-19 vaccine. It's free. You cannot get it privately.

**Children's learning and play spaces**

Social distancing between children under the age of 6 is not recommended. Instead we will implement the play pod model.

- The "play pod" model restricts interactions between closed groups of children and adults as an alternative to social distancing, which is not possible with young children.
- The purpose of 'play-pods' is to limit the number of people a child has contact with, to facilitate tracing, and to support close, positive interactions between children and their adult caregivers, like in a key-worker system.
- This system will also reduce the amount of contact adults have with each other.
- Pod sizes are to follow the adult/child ratios as listed in the Childcare regulations 2016.
- Children will have contact between each other in their play pod, play and interact as part of normal development.
- As far as possible, friends will be grouped together. This grouping of children helps to keep track of who has had contact with whom and will remain the same each day.
- Staff will introduce children to changed environment, new procedures, giving them time to ask questions, feel comfortable, use games, stories, books and activities.
- Staff will help children understand importance of hand washing and cough etiquette through games and activities.

***Play Environment***

- Ventilate the environment as much as possible and within temperature requirements e.g. through opening windows in advance of children being in the room or while they are outside.
- Organising toys and play materials into a number of boxes for the different play pods – each play pod has their own boxes
- Frequently touched surfaces and play equipment are disinfected after each session.

***Activities***

- Individual activities, small group activities, and outdoor play opportunities for the children in their pods will be planned in advance.
- Large group activities will not be planned at this time so as to reduce the risk of transmission of the coronavirus.
- The use of playdough, gloop or other similar play materials will be temporarily limited so as to reduce hand to hand contact between the children and cross contamination.
- Activities in which children take turns to prepare and later eat foods will be temporarily limited so as to reduce cross contamination.
- The outdoor space will be used as much as possible when the weather permits. This increases the space for activities to be set up and increases the space between children.
- Toys used & put in their mouths will be washed and sterilised before use by another child
- Ask parents & children not to bring in soothers, toys etc. from home into the centre – sources of transmission.
- Limit toys that are difficult to clean and dry on a daily basis e.g. soft toys, dressing up clothes.

***Trips***

- Trips or outings will not be undertaken at this time as this exposes staff and children to further risks of transmission of the coronavirus which are difficult to predict and control.

***Mealtimes***

- Sharing of food will be actively discouraged between children and between staff.
- Snack sent in by parents are to be placed in a washable container or wrap such as tinfoil.
- Children will have meals and snacks within their pods.

***Personal care***

- When providing personal care such as supporting younger children with toileting, staff should wear personal protective equipment i.e. disposable aprons, gloves and facemask/shield.

## **Cleaning**

Current evidence indicates that the virus causing COVID-19 can live on surfaces and objects from a few hours to a few days, so enhanced cleaning schedules is essential.

As per our current cleaning policy and Infection Control policy, our cleaning procedures are based on the recommendations provided within the Guide to Infection Prevention and Control booklet supplied by Tusla.

We are committed to excellence in matters of cleanliness and hygiene and therefore the following procedures will be carried out in addition to our regular cleaning schedule and not as a substitute:

- Surfaces and objects that are regularly touched such as e.g. door handles, light switches, desks, tables, presses, cupboards, toilets, taps, sinks, computer keyboards, printing equipment, kitchen surfaces and floors will be cleaned at least twice a day.
- Children's room, and washrooms will be cleaned twice daily.
- If disinfection of an area is required, it must be performed in addition to cleaning and never as a substitute.
- Order and ensure that the service has a good supply of liquid soap, hand gel (70% alcohol at least), face masks, gloves and disposable aprons, cleaning and disinfectant products.
- A deep clean of the premises both indoor and outdoor will be carried out before re-opening.
- Play items and toys will be cleaned daily and dried completely.
- Toys used by young children, which have been placed in their mouths, will be washed and sanitized before reuse by another child. Sharing of toys will be avoided where possible.
- Toys and materials such as dress-up and soft toys will temporarily be removed as they are difficult to keep clean and dried on a daily basis.
- Parents and children are asked not to bring toys from home into the setting.
- Bins will be emptied at least twice a day using gloves.
- Surfaces will be cleaned in accordance to our cleaning policy.

## **Staff**

- While it is recognised that young children need physical contact and comfort for their safety, their wellbeing and to attend to their personal care needs, it is recommended that staff do not kiss children.
- Staff should implement social distancing of 2 meters or 6 feet between themselves at all times with no physical contact between them and will implement our no hand shaking policy.
- Staff breaks and staff areas will be organised so as to facilitate social distancing.
- Staff are not to share equipment such as pens, cups, plates but should have these items for their own personal use.
- New Infection control protocols will form part of staff training.
- Our Staff absenteeism policy will be followed in the instance of a staff member contracting Covid-19.
- Support for employees who may be feeling anxious or stressed when they return to work will be provided. A list of mental health and wellbeing support services will be provided during training.

**Meetings**

- Face to face meetings will be kept to a minimum and the participants will maintain physical distancing at all times.
- Staff members are not to gather within the service or on arrival or when leaving.

**Uniforms**

All staff have been issued with 3 uniforms and are required to wear a fresh laundered one each day. To facilitate this measure, staff can wear non-uniform clothing if needed.

**Returning post travel**

Public health advice is that all individuals who have travelled should restrict their movements for 14 days. For travellers from South Africa or Brazil, it **is vital** that they self-isolate for 14 days post-travel and undertake Covid-19 testing as recommended.

This policy was adopted by **Over the Rainbow Early Learning Centre Ltd** on:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Manager

\_\_\_\_\_  
co-Manager

Review Date: \_\_\_\_\_