



Long-Term Care Regulatory Provider Letter

Number: PL 20-15
Title: Guidance on COVID-19 Response in PPECCs
Provider Types: Prescribed Pediatric Extended Care Centers (PPECCs)
Date Issued: March 21, 2020

1.0 Subject and Purpose

Based on state law, federal guidance, and Governor Abbott's disaster declaration, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) is updating licensure requirements for prescribed pediatric extended care centers (PPECCs). PPECCs are responsible for ensuring the health and safety of minors. Due to the escalating situation of the COVID-19 (coronavirus), HHSC issues this guidance to PPECCs to reduce the risk of spreading the virus. Centers should follow the guidance in this letter or adhere to Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidance/requirements, whichever is more stringent.

Prohibition of Visitors

Per Governor Abbott's March 19, 2020 Executive Order No. 3, PPECC providers must prohibit all visitors not providing critical assistance, given the significant health and safety risk to medically fragile minors posed by COVID (coronavirus).

Visitors who provide critical assistance include the following:

- Persons who provide essential services such as center staff, nurses, doctors, therapists whose services are necessary to ensure care is provided and to protect the health and safety of the minors being served in the center.

- Health and Human Services Commission surveyors whose presence is necessary to ensure the PPECC is protecting minors and providing appropriate care.

All visitors should be screened as described below and practice hand hygiene prior to and during the visit.

****A PPECC should not require screening of emergency services personnel in the event of an emergency****

Recommended Screening of PPECC Minors and Visitors

Visitors providing critical assistance may be allowed access unless they meet any of the following screening criteria:

- Fever or signs or symptoms of a respiratory infection, such as cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat;
- Contact in the last 14 days with someone who has a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19, is under investigation for COVID-19, or is ill with respiratory illness; or
- Traveled within the previous 14 days to a country with sustained community transmission. For updated information on affected countries visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>

Centers should take precautions and screen all visitors to ensure they do not meet the above criteria. Temperature checks should be performed, and hand sanitizer should be available to all essential visitors prior to entry.

In addition, centers should screen all minors and perform temperature checks upon arrival and prohibit entry of any minor being served if any of the above criteria are met.

Limit of Gatherings of 10 or More

In accordance with Executive Order No. 3, if the PPECC has a census of greater than 10 minors being served, the center should limit meal times, staff gatherings, and activities to smaller groups to maintain distance among staff and minors where possible.

2.0 Policy Details & Provider Responsibilities

Until notified otherwise, PPECCs should do the following:

1. Follow guidance issued by:
 - a. The [Centers for Disease Control](#) (CDC)
 - b. The [Department of State Health Services](#) (DSHS)
 - c. The [Health and Human Services Commission](#) (HHSC)
 - d. Their local public health department
2. Ensure the PPECC has an Emergency Preparedness Plan that addresses all required elements as addressed in 26 Texas Administrative Code (TAC) [§550.209](#) including:
 - Staffing and contingency plans
 - Provision of health and safety services
 - Ensuring uninterrupted supplies such as water, food, medications, and other needed supplies
3. Ensure infection control policies are updated to align with CDC guidance and address the use of personal protective equipment (PPE). Centers must comply with all infection control requirements as required in 26 TAC [§550.211](#), including:
 - Limiting physical contact, such as handshaking, hugging, etc.
 - Reinforcing strong hygiene practices for minors and staff such as proper handwashing, covering of coughs and sneezes and use of hand sanitizer
 - Practicing social distancing as defined by CDC
 - Using gloves when providing care to minors
 - Properly cleaning, disinfecting, and limiting sharing of medical equipment between minors and areas of the PPECC
 - Regularly disinfecting all workspaces such as nurse's stations, phones, and internal radios

4. Centers should have PPE available. If centers are unable to obtain PPE, they will not be cited for not having certain supplies if they cannot obtain them for reasons outside of their control. Follow national guidelines for optimizing their current supply or identify the next best option to care for minors.
5. Group activities and communal dining should be canceled.
6. Centers must ensure sufficient staffing¹ of nurses and direct care staff to ensure essential services are provided in accordance with the minor's plan of care.
7. Centers should only allow minors under the PPECC's care and essential visitors, as defined in section 1.0 above, who meet screening criteria to enter the center.
8. Centers should have visible signage at entrances to address the screening criteria prior to allowing access to individuals. Signage should also include language to discourage visits, such as recommending postponing visits or listing exceptions for essential visitors. The signage should remain in place until further guidance is issued by HHSC.
9. Centers should disinfect the area following an essential visitor's exit from the center.
10. Center staff must actively and consistently monitor minors for potential symptoms of respiratory infection, such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath. They must ensure the minor's physician is notified of any findings.²
11. Centers must contact their local health department, or DSHS if there is no local health department, if:
 - a. They suspect a minor has COVID-19, or
 - b. There is an increase in the number of respiratory illnesses among minors or service providers.
12. Centers must ensure the center is equipped with soap, hand sanitizer, and any other disinfecting agents to maintain a healthful environment.

¹ See 26 Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §550.401 and §550.410.

² See 26 TAC §550.403.

3.0 Background/History

PPECCs have the responsibility to protect the health and safety of minors under their care at all times. State guidance indicates that COVID-19 presents a significant health and safety risk to minors under the PPECC's care most of whom have serious health conditions that make them especially vulnerable to communicable diseases. The best method of protecting them from infection is to keep the infection out of the PPECC.

4.0 Resources

Centers for Disease Control Interim U.S. Guidance for Risk Assessment and Public Health Management of Healthcare Personnel with Potential Exposure in a Healthcare Setting to Patients with Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-risk-assesment-hcp.html>

Governor Greg Abbott's Disaster Proclamation is provided at
https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/DISASTER_covid19_disaster_proclamation_IMAGE_03-13-2020.pdf

5.0 Contact Information

If you have any questions about this letter, please contact the HHSC Policy, Rules, and Training unit by email at PolicyRulesTraining@hhsc.state.tx.us or call (512) 438-3161.