

# COVID-19 Handbook for Parents

Updated: March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022

We have created this handbook to help parents to understand the precautionary measures and enhanced protocols we will be following for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mahmowenchike Family Development Centre will be abiding by all restrictions as governed by the Thunder Bay District Health Unit. Guidance has been obtained from the Ministry of Education's *Operational Guidance* document as well.

Safety and well-being of the children, families, and staff of Mahmowenchike is always priority number one. Parents can rest assured that we are taking every necessary and reasonable precaution that we can to keep their children safe in our care.

## Drop-off Procedures

At this time, we are still encouraging parents and guardians to avoid entering the program areas as much as possible. We are strongly encouraging parents and guardians to mask upon entry.

At all locations of Mahmowenchike, we will continue to require parents/guardians to screen each morning before arriving at the centre (<https://covid-19.ontario.ca/school-screening/>) to ensure their child is not displaying any symptoms of COVID-19 and meets current requirements for entry into child care. We will not be actively confirming that screening is met, but staff will continue to do a visual check and if there are any visible signs of illness, children may be asked to leave the centre in accordance with the screening protocols.

At our St. Vincent site, since we have a separate wing of the school, parents can bring their children directly to their program doors.

At our St. Ann site, since each program has their own separate entrance, with the exception of the after school program, drop off will take place at the program doors.

At our St. Elizabeth site, there is only the one door of entry so parents will continue to drop off and pick up at our entrance.

## Screening

Each morning prior to attending the centre, all parents and staff will need to complete the COVID-19 Screening Tool.

The COVID-19 Screening Tool is available online or can be done on paper when you arrive. We ask that you do it online if you are able to do so prior to attending the centre. This will reduce congestion at the door and wait times in the mornings.

If a parent, child, or staff member fails the screen (answers yes to any question or indicates any new symptoms), they must leave or abstain from attending the centre and the TBDHU must be contacted for further direction.

## Pick-up Procedures

Pick-up procedures will mirror drop-off procedures at each location.

- Parents will still be encouraged to pick up outside or at the immediate entryway of the program/centre.
- When programs are indoors at the end of the day at our St. Vincent site, parents can ring the doorbell and enter the building and pick up their child from their program.
- When programs are indoors at the end of the day at our St. Ann site, parents can go right to the appropriate program's entrance, with the exception of the after school program. For the after school program, parents can ring the doorbell at our main entrance to gain entry or to signal to their child that they have arrived.
- When the St. Elizabeth program is indoors at the end of the day, parents can ring the doorbell to gain entry or to signal to their child that they have arrived.
- Where possible, programs will end the day outside to make pick-up easier for parents and staff. When programs end the day outside, parents will be able to pick up directly from the playgrounds.

## Illness and Exclusion

Where a child becomes ill at the centre throughout the day, the following procedure will be followed:

- 1) The child will be isolated from the rest of the group and taken to the staff room/supervisor's office where they will be supervised one-on-one by the Site Supervisor until picked up (space permitting and where possible with staffing). The supervising staff will be wearing PPE (face mask and face shield or safety goggles) and will maintain a distance of 2 metres, where it is possible. This does not mean the child won't be comforted as needed, particularly when upset. If tolerated, the child will be encouraged to wear a mask (only when over the age of 2 years old).
- 2) The parent will be contacted to pick up their child immediately. It is imperative that parents make every effort to come get their child right away to prevent possible spread of infection.
- 3) Once the child is picked up, the room will be completely cleaned and disinfected.
- 4) Where a child or staff member is tested for COVID-19 and the test is returned negative, the individual must be excluded from the program until 24-48 hours (dependent on the symptom) after symptom resolution, in accordance with the screening tool.
- 5) Where a child or staff member is tested for COVID-19 and the test is returned **positive**, the individual must be excluded from the program until they have been cleared by the screening tool to return.

All TBDHU guidance will be followed regardless of any contradictions to these steps. The TBDHU will follow up with families as required.

Where a staff becomes ill throughout the day, best effort will be made to find a suitable replacement but in the case that a supply staff cannot be found that is eligible to work in that program, parents may need to be called to pick up their children. Every effort will be made to avoid this situation.

**Mahmowenchike will always require children be 48-hour symptom-free in the case of vomiting or diarrhea and 24 hours fever-free before returning to child care.**

## COVID-19 Cases

There is no requirement for parents/guardians to report their child's PCR/RAT results to the school or child care centre as part of absence reporting. Reporting COVID-19 test results is voluntary but appreciated. When we receive news of a positive COVID-19 test result in a program or in the centre, we will send out a general message to families to inform them of exposure but the details will be very limited in order to protect confidentiality of all parties.

We will follow public health guidance in regards to closing programs in the wake of positive COVID-19 cases but it's important to note that positive COVID-19 test results where the only exposure is in the child care/school settings typically do not constitute close contact interactions and will not necessarily require program or centre closures. Public health units no longer dismiss cohorts and any dismissals or closures of child care will be contingent on operational requirements determined by the child care centre (i.e., insufficient staffing to meet Ministry staff-to-child ratios).

## Group Sizes and "Cohorting"

Cohorting requirements are no longer in place, which means that children from different child care programs may mingle. This may mean that programs may be combined at times, children may "bump up" to the subsequent program, and program visits for children aging up may now resume taking place.

We will be operating at full capacity and regular staff-to-child ratios.

Programs can still utilize reduced ratios at drop off (7:30 AM to 9:00 AM), pick up (4:30 PM to 5:30 PM) and rest time (12:30 PM to 2:30 PM) which allows for staff to work alone with more children than regular staff-to-child ratios while children are transiting to and from the centre and while children are resting.

## Program Set-up and Physical Distancing

Programs may be set up differently than they have been in the past to encourage physical distancing. While we will make a concerted effort to encourage physical distancing, we also recognize that children need to socialize and play with their friends, so it won't always be

possible. This is the reason for separating groups of children into cohorts – children in cohorts are permitted to play together because they are considered a group of close contacts.

Strategies that may be used include (but are not limited to):

- Spreading children out into different areas at times where they would typically be in close contact, such as mealtimes and dressing times;
- Getting dressed for outside and coming inside in smaller groups to ensure there is more space for getting undressed/redressed;
- Spreading cribs and cots out and, where that is less feasible, staggering children head-to-toe or toe-to-toe;
- Incorporating individual activities or activities that encourage more space between children; and
- Using visual cues to promote distancing.

In some cases where playgrounds are shared spaces, they will not be used by both groups at a time without a barrier for separation.

## Child Care Fees during COVID-19

During the COVID-19 global pandemic, Mahmowenchike Family Development Centre is required to abide by all regulations as set out by the Thunder Bay District Health Unit and Ministry of Education. As such, children are required to be kept home when sick and should they demonstrate symptoms that could be indicative of COVID-19, they must follow the screening guidelines.

If a child should be required to be absent due to COVID-19 symptoms, it will be treated as an illness and families will be charged child care fees in accordance with our existing Childcare Fees Policy. This measure is required to ensure the continued viable operation of our centre. Subsidized families will be charged in accordance with DSSAB's policies.

## Cleaning and Sanitary Practices

### Hand Hygiene

All staff will be required to wash their hands or use hand sanitizer immediately upon entry into the building. Handwashing and hand sanitization will take place throughout the day at key prevention points, such as before preparing or serving food, after diapering children, cleaning up messes, or wiping noses, after going to the washroom either with a child or alone, and after touching their face, sneezing, or coughing.

Children's hands will also be washed throughout the day. If a child is old enough to wash their own hands, they will be encouraged to do so but they will be supervised to ensure they are washing them thoroughly. Children will be told when to wash their hands, shown how to wash their hands if they don't know or have forgotten, and will be reminded that handwashing will help to keep them from getting sick or spreading germs.

For children who are too young to wash their own hands, the staff will wash them for them. At all possible times, this will be done at a sink. If a sink is not available, face cloths can be used but must be changed after each use and cannot be shared between children under any circumstances.

Children will wash their hands when they arrive, in between activities and when transitioning to a new activity, before eating or drinking, after they use the washroom or have their diaper changed, and after wiping their nose or coughing or sneezing into their hands.

### Cleaning

Enhanced cleaning measures will be taking place daily as set out by the TBDHU (exact details can be found in the TBDHU's Policy and Procedures for Re-opening Childcare Centres). At Mahmowenchike, we use a bleach and water mixture when cleaning surfaces. The bleach and water mixtures will be enhanced to ensure effectiveness against COVID-19.

All frequently touched surfaces will be cleaned and disinfected at least twice a day including doorknobs, light switches, counter tops, crib rails, chairs/table tops not used for eating, toilet handles, toilet seats (unless visibly soiled), faucet handles, handwashing sinks, bathroom countertops, and electronic devices.

Shared items such as phones, iPads, attendance binders, etc. will be cleaned and disinfected between each user.

Child and staff washrooms (including any high touched surfaces within them) will be cleaned and disinfected twice a day as well as at the end of each day.

### Sleep Equipment

As always, a cot or crib will be designated to each individual child and will not be shared between children. Bedding will be cleaned once per week unless visibly soiled, in which case they will be cleaned more often. Cots will be cleaned and disinfected daily.

Cots and cribs will be spaced out where possible. Where it is less feasible, children will be placed to sleep head-to-toe or toe-to-toe.

### Masks and PPE

Staff are no longer required to wear facemasks or eye protection indoors or outdoors. We will continue to strongly encourage the use of facemasks and eye protection in the case that a child is displaying symptoms of COVID-19 and is awaiting pick up by their parent/guardian.

### Vaccination

As of March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022, staff are no longer required to be fully vaccinated or partake in rapid antigen screening three times weekly. We continue to strongly encourage vaccination for all staff to protect all those that attend our centre.

### Travel Outside Northern Ontario

During the COVID-19 global pandemic, Mahmowenchike Family Development Centre urges all families and employees to avoid international travel. If international travel is necessary, the COVID-19 Screening Tool, as well as local public health guidance, must be followed to ensure safety for all children, families, and staff members attending our centre.

It is strongly recommended that travel be avoided as much as possible, and it is essential that public health recommendations are followed. If you have traveled anywhere outside of the Thunder Bay area, self-monitor, continue screening daily, and if any symptoms develop, self-isolate immediately, inform Mahmowenchike Family Development Centre and follow the instructions outlined in the Thunder Bay District Health Unit website for access testing.

Mahmowenchike Family Development Centre will continue to implement all health and safety protocols as outlined by the Thunder Bay District Health Unit and Ministry of Education to ensure the safety of individuals entering our centre.

In the case of a family or staff member who has travelled outside of Canada, federal quarantine guidelines must be followed.