

The Department of Social Development released an updated version of the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) document which consists of 149 pages. For your convenience, SA Childcare Association summarized the document into 10 pages.

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4. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

4.1 PURPOSE:

To provide for uniform procedures to prevent or minimise the spread of Covid-19 in early childhood development programmes and/or partial care facilities in line with the measures instated by Government for the period that the state of national disaster is in place.

4.2 OBJECTIVES:

The objectives of the SOP are to:

- Provide for standard operating procedures and guidelines to assist an early childhood development programme and/or partial care facility to implement measures to prevent and mitigate the spread of Covid-19 among children and staff at an ecd programme and/or partial care facility
- Provide custom and applied procedures and guidelines to accommodate the unique circumstances that applies to early childhood development programme and/or partial care facility with reference to age-appropriateness in early childhood development programmes.
- Ensure that children with developmental delays, disabilities and barriers to learning are included.
- Provide for considerations on how to manage and respond to suspected cases of Covid-19.
- Provide practical information in relation to age-appropriate approaches and practices for children in early childhood development programme / partial care facility.

8.1 STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES

- Ensure the necessary PPE items are in place.
- Ensure that students and staff have clean water on premises

8.2 MEASURES TO BE TAKEN BY AN ECD CENTRE PRIOR TO OPENING:

- Receive in depth orientation regarding COVID-19
- Establish measures and protocols for daily hygiene and cleaning practices.
- Teach children the practices required to prevent transmission
- Teach and support children regarding loss of life
- Increase parental involvement regarding learning and developing at home



All staff need to know the following

- How to facilitate entry and exit to premises
- How to schedule and manage outside play time for children
- Provide safe and healthy teaching and learning environment

Guidelines on how to implement standard operating procedures

- Train all staff
- Provide staff with the opportunity to develop and share suggestions
- Make simple posters and notices that can be displayed on the walls

Preparation of learning space

- Premises, Equipment, and furniture need to be cleaned very well.
- Cleaning materials must be stored in a safe area away from kids

How to implement these operating procedures

- Clean all surfaces, apparatus, and equipment with thick bleach
- Soft toys need to be rather stored away

Communication to parents

Every parent shall be informed of the following:

- All students will be screened daily
- Students must be accompanied by parent or legal guardian upon entry.
- All parents have the right to enquire protocols and measurements that have been put in place
- Parents need to provide contact details where they can be reached should their child fall ill

8.3 ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURE

- All staff will be screened when they arrive for duty every day
- ECD centers must have procedures in place for the drop-off of children that ensure social distancing
- All staff must be orientated on how to conduct daily symptom screening
- ECD centers must have a written schedule for arrivals
- Information boards must be clear at the entrance so that parents can see what to do



Guidelines on how to implement procedures

- Arrange arrival times by age group
- Parents should be asked to wait outside and not enter the facility
- Upon entry children should wash their hands
 - Children can be encourage and supported to air-dry their hands by shaking it.

Screening for COVID-19

- All screening must take place on arrival before entering the premises
- If symptoms are showing it must be reported
- All adults and staff members that has symptoms must be sent home immediately or isolated.
- Screening must take place as close to the entrance as possible
- All equipment and surfaces that are used for screening must be cleaned

Engagement of children before starting time of the program

- After entry to the premises children are allowed to greet and play with one-another
- Where practical and feasible the time between arrival and entry into an ECD centre needs to be as short as possible.

Daily first entry into the classroom/learning space

- Entry procedures into a classroom/learning space should avoid unnecessary crowding
- Children must wash their hands before entering the classroom or learning space
- Children 3 years and younger must always be supported and supervised when washing their hands

Guidelines on how to implement

- It is recommended that children do not queue for entry into learning space
- As far as possible children should wash their hands with soap and water
- It is strongly recommended that hand-sanitizer not be used for children younger than 3 years

Integration into early learning activities and routines

- Have roleplay sessions where you can practice the new routine
- Keep a record of discussion and agreed on routines should you be asked for it at a later stage



Exit procedures at the end of the day

- Unnecessary crowding of parents and children at the entrance need to be avoided
- Parents need to be informed about the exit procedures.
- Children need to wash their hands with soap and water prior to departure.
- There must be clear social distancing markers where parents must wait.

8.4 SOCIAL / PHYSICAL DISTANCING

Social distancing is an important measure to prevent COVID-19, this is a difficult concept for children. For the ECD programs the latter is changed to physical distancing. The physical distance is 1 meter.

Physical distance is applicable under all levels of lock down, herewith a quick overview, keeping age in mind:

- Determine practical, safe and age-appropriate ways to implement physical distancing.
- 1 to 5 meters apart, if possible, be creative about the implementation.
- Keep on stimulating the children and use your own discretion when comforting and helping children
- Keep it as normal as possible. During breaks, keep the same classes together

The relationship between the educator and the child is very important to create an optimal learning environment for the children. You need to find the balance between adhering to the physical distance and to benefit the child in a positive way.

To achieve physical distance:

- Re-arrange the classroom (more space between tables / placing of screens)
- Visible markings should be in place so that the children can see where to stand or sit
- Activities & games should be well planned
- Educators be creative and playful
- Every child should have their own matress or cot, 1 meter apart
- Free play – each age group should be divided to have their own playground area or there should be a play rooster in place

Different age-adaption

- Birth to 18 months –babies don't understand physical distance, don't force the latter. Use common sense.
- 19 to 36 months – won't be able to practice physical distance, gently guide them, make it all about play. Never force.
- 3 years and older – will start to understand the concept, continually support this through positive and playful reinforcement. Never force.
- Children with disabilities – it depends on the child's capacity and mobility.

Rethink your plan on how to implement your ECD program, make sure you know all the challenges you face. Make sure your staff know what to do and if a problem or challenge pops up adapt or make a new plan.



8.5 WEARING OF FACE MASKS AND GLOVES

Face masks are only effective if you wear it correctly. Avoid touching your face and to fiddle with the face mask. Children under 6 years are not required to wear a face mask or gloves. Wearing of face masks for older children is compulsory under all levels of lock down. Parents should wear a mask with drop off and pick up. Teach the children why it is important to wear a mask and the correct way to put it on and to take it off. The kitchen and cleaning staff should wear gloves (take a new pair when starting a new job) and dispose of it correctly.

8.6 PERSONAL HYGIENE PRACTICES

Hand washing procedure

Proper hand washing procedure is applicable under all levels of lockdown. Children and staff should have access to clean water, make hand washing fun (sing a song), wash hands when entering and exiting the classroom, in between activities. Support and supervise the younger children and use paper towels or air dry. Make sure the toys are washed after a child plays with it. Regular hand washing takes precedence over hand sanitizer.

Use of hand sanitizer

Make use of gel-based sanitizers (if you decide to implement it in your program), the children should never apply sanitizers on their own. Supervise when they rub the sanitizer all over their hands, always away from the face. Alcohol based sanitizers are toxic when ingested. Avoid the use of hand sanitizers in children all together.

Bathroom routines

The following guidelines are applicable under all levels of lockdown: avoid over-crowding (only a few children at a time), wash hands before and after the toilet break, support and guide the children (age-appropriate), potties should be spaced 1.5 meters and the nappy changing areas should be separate. Never refuse a child if they need to go the toilet. Encourage the children to visit the toilet before free play.

Coughing and sneezing:

Teach the correct way of coughing and sneezing in your elbow. If a tissue is used dispose of it immediately (don't share the tissue). Be sensitive towards the children, guide and support them.

8.7 GENERAL HYGIENE AND INFECTION CONTROL

Early Learning spaces and classrooms, LTSM, Toys and Equipment

Make sure each classroom has sufficient ventilation and cleaned daily, the baby/toddler units need special attention, and each child's bedding and belongings should be stored separately.

Cleaning should take place more regularly (surfaces, floors, toys and equipment), use thick bleach and dilute as indicated on product. All books/ tablets/ computers should be cleaned before use.



Items brought from home and returned home

The only items allowed from home is the following: clothing, stationery, food containers and bags. Make sure each child's belongings has a designated place and artwork can be sent home in the lower levels of lock down (during the higher lock down levels take photos of the artwork and sent it via social media to the parents).

8.8 PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

Everyday preparations before going to an Early Childhood Development Program by children and their families

Parents need to prepare their children when going to an ECD centre, share info with parents and support them, and provide them with easy activities to practice at home. Parents should enforce personal hygiene practices at home and check daily for any symptoms.

Access control for parents

The new rule of thumb is "no parent is allowed inside the ECD Centre or beyond the designated area", depending on the level of lockdown. No parent is allowed to enter without a face mask and subject to symptom screening.

Access control for visitor

As above mentioned, the new rule of thumb is no visitor is allowed inside the ECD Centre (depending on the level of lockdown). No visitor is allowed to enter without a face mask and subject to symptom screening. Extramural activities are allowed to enter the ECD Centre (under all levels of lock down). All visitors should sign a register.

Control of internal movement of children and staff

In general, each class or age group has their own space and should not mix with other classes or age groups (depending on the level of lockdown). Staff not directly involved with the program when entering areas where the children is should practice the correct hygiene measures. Children can only move to different areas under the supervision of the educators.

8.9. ADAPTION OF THE CURRICULUM AND PROGRAMME CONTENT

Daily Routine

- Daily routines must be adjusted to accommodate additional hygiene practices
- Supply clean water on the premises for washing of hands with soap and water
- Children's hands need to be cleaned when they enter and exit learning areas
- Separate break times for each class/age for more spaced out playing
- Children must be reminded of **hand washing, physical distancing, avoiding touching the face, coughing, and sneezing into the elbow**
- ECD activities should be planned and implemented in a playful and age-appropriate way.

Early Learning Activities

- Play based learning
- Content needs to be related to: Covid-19 **health and hygiene** practices and dealing with **sadness, anxiety, and bereavement**



Inside play

- All apparatus and toys need to be **cleaned before class** and ready for use and **regularly during the day**
- No group sensory or water play in levels 4 and 5
- Play based activities should be shorter with more time in-between for cleaning

Outside Play

- Outside apparatus should be cleaned before play and after each break time
- Children should **wash their hands** before they play outside

Outings and excursion

- No outings and excursions in level 4 and 5
- Kept to a **minimum, and essential** excursions only
- Consider **virtual** excursions

Psychosocial support

- Staff to **address fears** of Covid-19 and support young children in an age-appropriate way
- Address matters like; fear, anxiety, depression, languishing, gender-based violence, abuse and neglect, malnutrition and how to deal with loss of life

Inclusion

- **Have a risk assessment** completed for disabled children
- **HIV+ children not taking ARV's should not return to school**
- If a child is not safe at home, include them in the return to the centre
- No registered child to be excluded from returning, encourage them to wear a mask
- Address stigma that leads to exclusion

Involving Parents

- **Letter** to parents detailing changes and requirements
- Provide **monthly updates**
- Provide support to parents regarding questions and anxieties

Early learning at home

- Support children and parents at home who has not returned to the program
- Provide **practical play-based activities and ideas**
- Provide **digital and non-digital** support

8.10 FOOD PREPARATION AND SERVING

This SOP is applicable under all 5 risk adjusted levels.

- If food is prepared on the premises of the ECD Programme, all the prescribed and additional precautions need to be taken.
- If food cannot be prepared safely, practical alternative arrangements should be made.



HOW TO IMPLEMENT THE STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE:

Transmission of Covid-19 through food could occur if a person infected with the virus prepares or handles food with dirty hands and contaminates it. Food handlers must:

- Wash hands with soap and water before and after touching food during preparation and serving.
- Clean and sanitize all work surfaces, keep all appliances, equipment and utensils clean, store food properly.
- Rinse all foodstuffs thoroughly before cooking and serving.
- Ensure that children do not share utensils, food or drinks.
- Grocery packaging should be thoroughly wiped with disinfectant as soon as it is brought into the facility.

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT OF STAFF:

All staff must show an understanding of all the guidelines regarding food preparation. Alternative measures can be agreed on should food preparation on site not be safe. A person can be appointed, who would take the responsibility for food preparation and serving.

FOOD BROUGHT FROM HOME

This is applicable under all 5 risk adjusted levels.

- If children bring their own food from home, lunch boxes must be removed from the school bags and disinfected on the outside before it is returned to an individual child.
- The consumption of food brought from home must always be done under supervision of a staff member.
- If parents provide crockery and cutlery, they need to be advised on proper precautions.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT THE STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE:

- No food, crockery or cutlery brought from home must be shared with other children.
- All containers to be disinfected.
- Cloths should not be shared between children.

AGE ADAPTION:

Birth to 18 months & 19 to 36 months:

- Bottles or cups should not be re-used unless sterilized between feeds.
- Soothers / dummies / pacifiers need to be sterilized regularly and never be shared.

For children 3 years and older and children with disabilities or barriers to learning the above applies with adaptations as necessary.



CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT OF STAFF:

Ensure that all staff are aware of how to sanitise containers and packaging. All staff should understand the importance of not sharing utensils / crockery between children. There should be a designated rubbish bin for disposable packaging after finishing eating and identify who will be responsible for disposing of this rubbish and how.

COMMUNICATION TO PARENTS:

Parents need to be informed to keep the number of containers to a minimum and that utensils and crockery must not be shared.

MEAL AND SNACK TIMES

This is applicable under all 5 risk adjusted levels.

- All meals consumed on the premises must be done under supervision.
- There should be no sharing of food.
- Staff needs to be trained in proper food handling.
- All crockery and cutlery need to be clean and social distancing needs to always be maintained.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT THE STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE:

- It should be explained to children that no food from home is to be shared.
- Each child should have their own utensils that get washed immediately and stored in that child's storage space.
- Extra precautions mentioned above should be applied to existing learning routines and activities.
- Develop a plan on how to maintain social distancing during meal and snack times.
- Stagger lunch breaks if practical and possible.

8.11 HEALTH OF CHILDREN AND STAFF – GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Children should continuously be observed for symptoms under all risk adjusted levels. If Covid-19 symptoms are identified, the child should be isolated immediately, and arrangements made with parents to collect their child from the ECD centre. ECD practitioners should monitor themselves and follow the above-mentioned protocol.

Assess the risk of transmission, disinfect all the contact areas, and take other appropriate measures to prevent possible transmission.

Train staff about Covid symptoms and how it presents itself, stay calm and make common sense judgements. Not all symptoms are Covid related. Underlying health conditions of a child or staff member should be considered before reacting. A staff member with underlying health conditions defined as "high risk" should produce a letter from a medical professional indicating that they are fit for work. High risk is defined as having a history of: Cardiovascular -, respiratory - and kidney disease, diabetes, immunosuppressed illnesses and are over the age of 60 years.



SICKBAYS AND FIRST AID

A sickbay or isolated area must be available for children/staff in case of symptoms observed.

No child may be left alone for longer than 15 min and no other children or staff members are allowed in the area, except the staff member attending to the child. This staff member must adhere to safety protocols. All bedding, furniture and equipment in the sickbay/isolated area must be sanitized once used.

First Aid kits should be well stocked, emotional support must be given to the sick child.

An ECD practitioner qualified in First Aid should attend to a child in the sick bay. Temperature may be taken, if needed. Record all symptoms while in sick bay.

CONFIRMED POSITIVE TEST OF COVID-19 BY A CHILD OR STAFF MEMBER

No Covid-19 positive person is allowed on the premises. Staff and parents must be informed about a positive case in the ECD centre, while maintaining confidentiality. Communications methods may include: whatsapp, sms, paper notes, etc. The effected person should isolate for 10 days from symptoms or positive test results. Siblings in the same ECD centre are required to isolate as well. Children and staff in isolation should be supported.

The Department of Health may direct or advice an ECD centre to temporarily close, in case of an outbreak. Inform staff, parents and children about the decontamination procedure to be followed.

DECONTAMINATION AND DISINFECTION OF AN ECD FACILITY

Should be done every time a positive case is reported in the ECD centre. Premises should be empty of children and staff not involved in the decontamination process. Staff members 50 years and older should not be part of the disinfecting crew. Staff should wear PPE's while disinfecting. It is not required to obtain the services of an external contractor.

What should be disinfected?

Everything including entrances, toys, linen, doorknobs, surfaces, keyboards, floors, outside play equipment etc. Floors should be washed after all disinfected areas are done. Re-open 24 hours after decontamination.

8.12 RECORD KEEPING

Keep strict record of:

- Children/staff attendance
- Reasons for absenteeism
- Daily medical documentation
- Daily screening of all persons entering the ECD centre.
- Have a visitor's book for entry/exit with time, date, cell number, ID and signature.
- Basic attendance registers when doing any in-house staff training.

