

ECEC needs urgent and tough COVID-19 rules, Union says, releasing plan ^[1]

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) services need increased hygiene and safety measures in their services, the United Workers Union has said, and if these cannot be put in place, services should “be shut down to protect young children and educators”

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Source: The Sector

Format: Article

Publication Date: 26 Mar 2020

AVAILABILITY

[Access online](#) ^[2]

[Full plan](#) ^[3]

EXCERPTS

To support increased safety for children and educators the Union has released a six point plan to provide “clear and strong rules” for ECEC, urging the National Cabinet to adopt the plan.

“The sector has been thrown into chaos from the lack of leadership from the Federal Government and can no longer wait for action. There can be no further delays on decisions to help centres continue to operate during the COVID-19 crisis. Urgent funding is needed to support centres so they can put measures in place now,” a spokesperson said.

In order to mitigate risk, the Union has put forward measures such as temperature checks upon arrival, increased personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff, and adequate time for increased cleaning and hygiene implementation. The measures are designed to limit risk for those working in a sector where social distancing is not possible.

The six point plan put forward by United Workers Union includes:

1. Pre-entry screening: every child must have their temperature taken by an educator in the foyer of the centre before being admitted, every day they access the centre. The child must have a temperature reading no higher than 37.5 degrees. If it is higher, the child will be refused access to the centre and the parent will be told to take the child home. The educator conducting the pre-entry screening must be covered in appropriate PPE (that includes a duck mask as well as gloves).
2. Adequate PPE: before a centre is opened up each morning to receive children it must be satisfied that it has enough PPE for the next 48 hour period as a minimum. This includes antibacterial soap; disposable gloves; duck masks; thermometers; sterilising equipment; cleaning detergent and disinfectant; cleaning mops and buckets; antibacterial floor cleaner; toilet paper and nappies. If the centre does not have enough PPE it should not open and receive any children until such time as it does.
3. Adequate cleaning: High-traffic areas of the centre must be comprehensively cleaned every two hours. Door knobs, handrails, coded door entries, exit buttons etc. Every toy and every surface must be comprehensively cleaned two times per day. At the end of each day, after the last child leaves, the entire centre, including all objects and surfaces must be comprehensively cleaned.
4. Adequate staffing: additional staff must be rostered to be available to do the cleaning. Educators cannot be responsible for doing deep cleaning and care and educate the children in their room at the same time.
5. Hygiene: educators and children must have hands washed on entry to the centre, before and after consuming food and drink, after going to the bathroom, after cleaning children's faces, before and after playing with toys, AND on the hour, every hour.
6. Staggered times: Children's starting and finishing times must be staggered to enable social distancing and transitional meal times must be observed.

“Staff, parents and the community must have confidence that centres are doing everything they can to have safe and healthy centres that are actively limiting the spread of COVID-19,” said Helen Gibbons, Director of Early Childhood Education at the Union.

With ECEC being the only place where young children can receive care while health workers save lives, cleaners and council workers keep homes and cities clean, and retail staff meet increased demand, it is important to ensure workers in the ECEC sector are protected, Ms Gibbons added.

“Centres must get on the front foot and enact these measures, they must spend the money on increased cleaning and hygiene and allow the time for this to happen each day. It is the only way that this essential service can safely remain operating,” she said.

Her thoughts were supported by Tamika Hicks, a Centre Director in Victoria who said that while the Federal Government is communicating

that children are safe in early education, “we know that children are affected by this virus”.

“There has been no clear policy for the sector. We are not schools. We are working with very young children where the recommendations that have been put in place about social distancing don’t apply. Educators are taking great care and consideration about the pandemic, but we also need support and resources from the government to ensure workers are as safe as possible. We need recommendations and funding from our leaders specific to early childhood,” Ms Hicks said.

Many within the sector are feeling increasingly uneasy about being exposed to the virus. Bron Jefferson, an early childhood educator from Melbourne, said “As an educator I am totally committed to keeping our families and children safe. But at the moment I don’t feel safe. We don’t have the PPE we need, we don’t have screening processes in place. We need these measures so that we can feel safe and keep coming to work so our centre stays open.”

To review the plan in full, as released by the United Workers Union, please see here.

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