



February 7, 2022

Cliff: 1218577

Emily Gawlick
Executive Director
Early Childhood Educators of BC
309, 515 W Pender St,
Vancouver BC, V6B1V5

Re: Supporting the Early Care and Learning Sector During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Dear Emily,

Thank you very much for your letter dated January 11, 2022 to my office regarding the concerns of early childhood educators and your recommendations to improve the province's pandemic response by engaging more meaningfully with the sector. I recognize the essential services and supports the sector provides to children in BC and am grateful for the opportunity to respond.

I acknowledge that the dynamic nature of the pandemic has resulted in rapid shifts and changes to guidance and direction from public health and that this has resulted in questions and concerns from early childhood educators (ECEs). Updated guidance was posted to the BCCDC website last week, and on January 26, 2022, we held a town hall with the Ministry of Children and Family Development to better communicate these updates and to answer questions and concerns providers. I hope that you were able to join and that you and the attendees found the session helpful.

In response to your request for appropriate safeguards:

- COVID-19 booster vaccinations are available for all individuals 12+ who received their second dose at least six months ago, and appointments can be made at clinics and pharmacies throughout the province to meet schedules for ECEs.
- As a result of the rapid spread of the Omicron variant in the province, management of COVID-19 in the community is no longer reliant on PCR testing. Our testing strategy has shifted as a result to focus our capacity on PCR testing those who are vulnerable to severe illness, those who are likely to transmit to people at risk of complications, and those who are eligible for treatment options. This being said, rapid antigen tests are becoming increasingly available in communities across BC for those who wish to use them, and 250,000 rapid tests will be made available directly for child care providers in the coming weeks. It is helpful to consider that rapid testing should only be used for symptomatic

individuals, and that a negative rapid test does not mean that all of the other layers of protection should be dismissed. In addition, rapid tests should only be used for workers – not children – to determine if they have a COVID-19 infection.

- Personal protective equipment is one of the layers of protection in the hierarchy of infection prevention and control, and while it is the most visible, it is also the least effective when used on its own and should be used with other levels of protection. In this context, mask use has been shown to reduce spread of COVID-19 in indoor spaces, which is why public health continues to [require the use of masks](#) in certain settings, and why an [Order](#) was recently made to require masks to be used by workers as a part of their COVID-19 Safety Plan. N95 respirators that are not fit-tested are not currently recommended in the community where well-fitting cloth or medical masks are the standard.

With regards to consulting the sector on guidance for child care settings, I am pleased that you are part of our Child Care Working Group which includes providers, licensing officers, medical health officers, and representatives from my Office, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children and Family Development. The Working Group remains an important table for discussions and information sharing as we move through the pandemic and adjust our responses and approaches accordingly. We are working hard to align our guidance with the guidance for the K-12 sector, and invite you to please contact us if you find incongruencies.

The BCCDC site has a wealth of data that is updated regularly; not all of it is relevant to ECEs but I recommend reviewing the information available and encourage the Working Group to add data related to childcare settings as a standing agenda item. The latest epidemiological update on BC's pediatric population is available [here](#).

It is my commitment to you to continue working together with the Ministry of Children and Family Development to ensure ECEs and the sector is well-supported to safely continue the critical services you provide for children in the province.

Sincerely,



Bonnie Henry
MD, MPH, FRCPC
Provincial Health Officer