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Croatian Institute of Public Health

Zagreb, 29 April 2020

GUIDELINES ON PREVENTING AND FIGHTING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC  
FOR INSTITUTIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE AND PRIMARY EDUCATION  
INSTITUTIONS ENSURING THE POSSIBILITY OF LOOKING AFTER  
PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN AND LOWER PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS  
- proposal

### **Purpose**

These guidelines are aimed at the institutions of early childhood education and care (hereinafter: “kindergarten”) and primary education institutions (hereinafter: “school”) that have ensured the possibility of looking after pre-school children and lower primary school students. Keeping children in kindergartens and schools may potentially pose a greater risk for infecting children with COVID-19 than by keeping them at home, especially if the household members are engaged in such a type of daily activities that allows for consistent avoidance of situations with a higher risk of contracting COVID-19.

### **Key guidelines**

**Children with chronic illnesses or in contact with persons with chronic illnesses.** Staying at home is recommended for children and staff/employees with chronic illnesses (respiratory, cardiovascular, diabetes, malignant diseases, immunodeficiencies, children with more severe physical and motor impairments), as well as for children whose parents/caregivers or household members have one of the illnesses mentioned. In case the household members of the staff/employees have such an illness or they are elderly (aged 65 and above), the staff/employees

comply with the measures of physical distancing from the household members and better hygiene practices while staying at home, to protect the other household members.

**Staying at home when possible.** We also encourage staying at home for all children for whom this can be ensured, considering the fact that it will not be possible to comply with the physical distancing measures in these groups due to the permitted number of children in kindergartens and schools. As distance learning will carry on, we encourage lower primary school children to continue learning at home, where feasible.

**2-metre physical distancing.** When organising the work of the institution, social distancing should be ensured to the greatest extent possible (physical distance), as well as better personal and facility hygiene practices. A physical distance of at least 2 metres apart in an indoor space should be chiefly practiced among staff members, and it is recommended between staff members and children when possible, with the exception of care for children in which case physical distancing is practiced in the shortest possible time.

In terms of a shared workspace (e.g. a staffroom), the staff maintain a physical distance of 2 metres, and the meetings, conversations and staff trainings take place through e-communication or over the phone, while the parents' access to the premises should be avoided whenever possible. Only children and the teacher<sup>1</sup> of the same educational group are allowed to occupy the same space at the same time.

It is essential to encourage physical distancing and better personal hygiene practices of children. However, certain inevitable deviations can be expected as a result of the developmental characteristics of a particular age such as:

- exploring the environment and objects surrounding the child (at a certain age, putting fingers and other objects in the mouth),
- curiosity about other persons/children,
- incomprehension of the guidelines,
- non-compliance with the guidelines, motor awkwardness and immaturity,
- motor restlessness and the need for movement.

**Organising work with children.** The stay in kindergartens and schools should be organised in the following manner:

- educational groups of children with a smaller number of the same children (when possible, up to 9 children and one teacher per group, thus making 10 persons altogether – after forming a group of children, in the period of 14 days following the commencement of application of these guidelines including non-working days, other children are not admitted into the group),

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'teacher' refers to ECEC (early childhood education and care) staff and primary school teachers.

- one teacher takes responsibility for one group of children or two teachers (in case of extended school attendance and the afternoon shift in kindergartens) without “overlapping”,
- physical contact (close contact) is avoided between children of one educational group and other children, as well as with the parents/caregivers of other children and other staff members,
- each educational group occupies a single appropriate room,
- the teacher spends time outdoors with children as much as possible,
- kindergarten beds, dining tables and classroom desks are moved apart to enable children to lie or sit at a distance of 2 metres, with each child always lying or sitting in the same place.

**Organising space.** The recommended features of the space occupied by an educational group of children (a classroom or another adequate space, e.g. a sportshall):

- the room is of the largest possible length, breadth and height, it is airy and lighted (provided with an adequate source of daylight),
- the room is separated from the rooms with other educational groups by a door,
- the room can be well aired with the outer air,
- there is a toilet in immediate proximity to the room which is used solely by the educational group occupying the room,
- meals need to be organised in the room (food can be delivered and consumed in the room), so that the person delivering the food leaves the food on a trolley in front of the classroom door/educational group, and the teacher brings the food into the room occupied by children, while the food has been divided into portions beforehand,
- the room has a direct exit onto a larger terrace, balcony or, if possible, a courtyard,
- the entry of any other persons into the room is avoided (e.g. for the purpose of cleaning, repairing or bringing food) so long as the children occupy the room,
- the passage through shared space should be avoided and reduced to a minimum, and in case this cannot be avoided, the passage through shared space is organised in such a way that children and the teacher of one educational group pass together at the same time, with other persons not passing at the same time, while children are encouraged not to touch the surfaces or objects.

## **Entering and exiting kindergartens and schools**

**Limited access to institutions.** Until further notice, all visits to kindergartens and schools are prohibited (e.g. theatre shows, extra-curricular activities).

It is essential to ensure the flow/arrival of the smallest possible number of persons, both at the entrance to the kindergarten or school and into the indoor facilities.

**Dropping off children at the kindergarten/school.** Parents/caregivers drop off and collect children to the institutions in such a way that they do not enter the building except in case of emergency, when possible. They reach the entrance while maintaining a distance of at least 2 metres apart from other parents/caregivers and children.

The teacher collects or brings the child to the parent/caregiver in front of the entrance to the institution, appropriate to the child's age. At drop-off times, the other children are looked after by other adults who are in the workplace.

The children must not be left unsupervised.

**School equipment.** The student arrives and leaves the school carrying a school bag, in case keeping the bag in school is not possible. They do not share their school equipment and stationery with other children.

In case it can be organised, the parent brings and collects a marked backpack with equipment in the kindergarten solely on Fridays (the last working day of the week) when collecting the child. The teacher takes and returns the backpack to the parent in front of the entrance door. The teacher places the backpack in the kindergarten, so that it remains intact over the weekend and is used only after a pause of 48-72 hours.

**Escorting children to and from the kindergarten/school.** There is always one adult/parent/caregiver escorting a child when the parent/caregiver drops off and collects the child from the kindergarten/school.

Whenever possible, the person escorting a child is always the same person or two adults alternate.

**At-risk escorts.** Where possible, the person escorting a child should be an adult living in the same household with the child, and who is, as opposed to other persons who might be dropping off and collecting the child, at the same time a person who has the smallest chances of contracting COVID-19 due to their daily routine.

**Whenever possible, the person escorting a child should be an adult who does not belong to the group at risk of COVID-19 infection, which means that they are not an elderly person (aged 65 and above) nor a person with a chronic illness.**

**Entering kindergartens and schools by age group.** Where feasible, children from each educational group are dropped off and collected by the parents/caregivers at a certain time arranged beforehand for each educational group, which is at least 10 minutes apart between two different educational groups. For students attending the 1<sup>st</sup> class of primary school, the children and parents are welcomed by the teacher in front of the entrance door. For students attending

higher classes of primary school, the children enter the school building by themselves. The parents do not gather at the school entrance.

**Sick parents.** Parents/caregivers are not allowed to drop off or collect children from the institutions nor access the outdoor grounds (courtyard, garden, playground) or indoor facilities in case they have a fever, respiratory symptoms such as cough or shortness of breath, if they are at risk of having had close contact with a person who tested positive for COVID-19 or if they are suspected to be infected with COVID-19, especially if they are self-isolating and are not allowed to leave home.

**Sick children.** The children who have a fever, respiratory symptoms such as cough or shortness of breath, who are at risk of having had close contact with a person who tested positive for COVID-19 (e.g. in the household or the kindergarten/school) or who are suspected to be infected with COVID-19, stay at home and the parent/caregiver is not allowed to take them to the kindergarten or school. The facts mentioned in the previous two sentences, including the fact that both parents of the child are employed and there is no other option of looking after the child, as well as the statement that the parent is acquainted with these guidelines, are confirmed by the parent in writing to the institution's principal before sending the child to the kindergarten/school.

**Behaviour of children on entering a kindergarten or school.** The child enters the premises by going to the closet, putting on slippers, taking off the jacket, and washing their hands with soap and water before entering the group/classroom.

## **Organising the work of the institutions**

**Shift work.** Where feasible, shift work should be organised comprising seven-day or fourteen-day shifts, including the administrative and technical staff, as well as teachers in situations where two of them are responsible for the same group of children (e.g. this can be considered in school in case of organising extended school attendance). When being outside the institution, the staff should comply with the rules that minimise their chances of getting infected as much as possible (avoiding shops and other places where people gather, public transportation, consistently practicing social distancing and hygiene etc.).

Exceptionally, for instance in institutions that have a greater number of children with more severe developmental disorders, an organised isolated space or so-called workplace isolation can be organised for the staff during a shift within the institution or in some other space.

**Limited number of employees.** The employees who are not currently at work are not allowed to enter the premises.

The smallest possible number of employees should be present at the institution at the same time, but which is sufficient enough to be able to organise looking after children in small groups (if

possible, up to a total of 10 people per group, including both children and adults, and the smallest possible number of children, if possible).

**Entry and delivery in the kindergarten or school.** The entrance door is opened upon a phone call or ringing the doorbell during working time or duty. On a weekend/holiday/working day afternoon the door is opened by the employee on duty.

The goods delivered for the needs of the institution are taken by the institution's authorised employees at the external door, while entering the premises is exceptionally allowed to service technicians and other services for which there is an urgent need (while consistently applying anti-pandemic measures such as water monitoring for human consumption, health accuracy of food etc.), by complying with the mandatory measure of hand disinfection and wearing a protective face mask and spare footwear if needed.

**Cleaning ladies and cleaning.** The cleaning lady working in the morning shift enters first. The last person to exit the kindergarten is the cleaning lady from the afternoon shift who disinfects all surfaces that have been used. It is recommended to take all workwear into the laundry of the building for washing. The bedlinen and textile are washed at the temperature of 60-90 °C twice a week.

**Hand sanitizer.** At the entrance to the kindergarten or school, as well as at several other easily accessible places in the school, it is essential to place hand sanitizer dispensers for disinfecting the hands of school-age children and adults, together with the instructions on using it (pre-school children do not disinfect their hands, and their hands are washed with soap and water more frequently and thoroughly).

**Hand hygiene.** Between 1 to 2 ml of hand sanitizer needs to be squeezed onto dry and clean palms (usually by squeezing the dispenser once or according to the producer's instructions).

The palms and the area between fingers need to be rubbed until dry, and the liquid does not need to be rinsed.

Care should be taken for the adequate use of hand sanitizer, and in case there is a small amount of hand sanitizer left in the dispenser, it is obligatory to contact the person in charge in order to secure a new one.

**Airing out of space.** The rooms must be aired out at least twice a day for at least half an hour before the arrival and after the departure of children, and the window should be left open, weather permitting.

**Cleaning the space.** The contact surfaces such as door and window handles, working surfaces, keyboards, consoles, water taps in toilets and kitchens, toilet tank levers, remote controls, electric switches, doorbells, elevator panels and other contact surfaces touched and used by many people must be disinfected at the beginning and at the end of each shift and at least twice a day.

Avoid using air-conditioning and ventilation equipment.

Cleaning is carried out in the period when children are in the courtyard or after children's departure.

**Disinfection of mobile phones.** All employees are obliged to disinfect their mobile phones immediately upon entry.

**Special work footwear.** At the entrance to the facilities a special space must be ensured for putting on work footwear for all employees. For all other persons entering the facilities, spare footwear or disinfection of soles must be provided.

**Face masks.** The use of protective masks by teachers is optional during care for infants and young children in need of enhanced care that requires close contact. It also applies to the care for children with frequent infectious diseases involving fever, in order to reduce the incidence of such infections and consequent panic due to possible suspicion of COVID-19.

**Gloves.** Wearing gloves is not recommended, preference is given to frequent washing and sanitizing hands.

## **Temperature measurement and monitoring of symptoms in employees**

**Daily temperature measurement.** All employees are obliged to measure their body temperature before work. In case of fever they should not come to work but contact their Director or a family medical doctor by phone, as explained later in the text.

It is recommended to measure body temperature by contactless thermometer to all employees every day upon arrival and departure from work, in order to determine possible respiratory symptoms or signs of other infectious diseases. In case of persons with fever (37.2 °C depending on the specifications of the contactless thermometer), it is recommended to measure the temperature by a standard thermometer under the armpit, and deduct a conclusion on increased temperature/fever based on the results of measurement under the armpit.

**Records.** Records on the values of measured body temperature and a possible display of respiratory symptoms and signs of other infectious diseases should be entered into separate records.

**Treating febrile persons with symptoms.** Staff members with temperature, respiratory symptoms and other symptoms of infectious diseases are neither allowed to work, take care of children, nor come to the premises of their employer or their institution, respectively. The same rule applies to the operation of such institutions at all times.

**Replacement and testing of febrile workers.** Employees with fever and/or respiratory symptoms should leave their posts immediately (after notifying their director), or inform the Director by telephone that they will not come to work and contact the selected family

medical doctor who refers them to the test. The director should organize a replacement in advance. All employees with fever or respiratory symptoms should be tested for SARS-CoV-2.

## Suspicion of COVID-19

**Procedures in case of suspicion of infection.** In case of suspected contact of employees with infected persons with or without symptoms of COVID-19, or other reasons for suspecting that the employee has been infected with COVID-19, in case of fever and/or respiratory symptoms (cough and flat breathing-shortness of breath), the employee should immediately:

- inform the director by phone;
- notify the selected family medical doctor by telephone in order to arrange testing for SARS-CoV-2 and determine a need for a sick-leave;
- leave the workplace or fail to come to work. A teacher should be replaced by another teacher who should not care for another group of children during the same period (if possible).

**Emergency phone call to the doctor.** The director of the institution, in agreement with the kindergarten's health coordinator, should inform a relevant epidemiologist immediately by telephone about any suspicion of COVID-19 in employees or children (parents/caregivers are obliged to inform the director by telephone urgently on this issue). In case of schools, the director should inform a relevant school doctor. The director should inform a relevant epidemiologist/school doctor urgently and inevitably in case of suspicion of COVID-19, or infection by COVID-19 of a group (two or more employees and/or children under suspicion from the same group/classroom/building etc.).

If a possible carrier/source of infection has been identified, the employee shall inform the director immediately.

## Children

**No mask.** Children are not obliged to wear protective masks.

**Sick children.** Parents/caregivers are obliged to measure the body temperature of the child every day prior to arrival to the institution. In case of fever they are not allowed to bring the child to the institution, but they should contact by telephone both the director and their paediatrician/family doctor who should decide on the child's testing and treatment.

If children display any symptoms of COVID infection, during their stay at the institution, teachers should inform their parents immediately in order to pick up their child as soon as possible.



**Other infectious diseases.** Children displaying symptoms of other infectious diseases are also not allowed to stay at the institution. Children should be encouraged to maintain a distance (physical distance) from other children and adults, appropriate to their age.

**Touching the face.** Children should be encouraged not to touch the mouth, nose, eyes and face, and not to place hands and objects in the mouth, appropriate to their age.

**Hand hygiene.** Children should be encouraged to wash their hands regularly and properly before entering their group/classroom, before and after food preparation, before meals, after use of the toilet, upon return from outdoor activities, after blowing a nose and whenever their hands look dirty.

Liquid water and soap should be used for hand washing.

When washing your hands, follow the instructions for proper hand washing.

After washing hands with soap and water, it is necessary to use disposable paper towels for drying hands, which should be discarded after use into the waste basket with a lid.

Children should be encouraged to cover their mouths and nose with the elbow or paper tissue when coughing and sneezing, discard a paper tissue into the waste basket and wash their hands.

**Sneezing and coughing.** When they sneeze or cough, children should turn their faces away from other people and avoid touching their face, mouth and eyes with their hands.

**Utensils.** Glasses, cups, dishes and utensils should not be shared with other people.

**Didactic equipment and toys.** When deciding which didactic equipment to use, preference should be given to equipment with smooth, hard surfaces which can easily be washed with dish detergent and water. It is prohibited to use materials such as kinetic sand, clay, corn, rice, etc., as well as any toys that cannot be washed with dish detergent and water and air-dried. If at all possible, it is necessary to sun-dry didactic equipment and toys. Toys should be washed and dried, if possible, at the end of each workday, especially if used by children who can be expected to put things in their mouth.

**Children's clothes, shoes and stationery.** It is advised that each child/student handles their own clothes and shoes, stationery, bags and books, however, if this is not possible, teachers should disinfect their hands after touching clothes and shoes, stationery, bags and books.

**Outdoors classes.** If the weather is fair, it is advisable to hold classes outdoors whenever possible.

**Physical activity.** It is necessary to avoid activities which intensely quicken and deepen breathing, such as running and other forms of strenuous exercise. If such activities cannot be avoided, it is necessary to increase the distance between children as much as possible, to 2 meters at least. It is not recommended to hold physical education classes indoors.

## **Students supported by teaching assistants and professional communication intermediaries**

**Children with disabilities.** According to the Ordinance on the School Education of Students with Disabilities (OG 24/2015), the types of disabilities are:

1. Visual impairments
2. Hearing impairments
3. Speech, language and communication impairments and specific learning disabilities
4. Physical impairments
5. Intellectual disabilities
6. Behavioural and psychological disorders
7. Developmental disorders.

**Contagion risk.** Apart from children with health issues listed in the first paragraph of the Key guidelines (which include certain type 4 disabilities), children with disabilities who are supported by teaching assistants or professional communication intermediaries are not necessarily at a higher risk of contagion with COVID 19 if considering the level of their bodies' vulnerability to the novel Coronavirus. However, it should be taken into consideration that certain disabilities (such as disabilities type 1, 2, 4 or 6) can affect the children's consistency in social distancing and hygiene, which can put them at higher risk of contagion. Therefore, children supported by teaching assistants or professional communication intermediaries should only be sent to schools if parents/caregivers are absolutely not able to keep them at home, and only if they do not have any of the health issues listed in the first paragraph of the Key guidelines (which include certain type 4 disabilities).

**Preparatory consultations with the school doctor.** Before children come back to school and whenever necessary during the time children are in school (e.g. when health changes occur), it is necessary that the parent/caregiver, school employee and/or the assistant or the intermediary, consult (always phoning first) the assigned school doctor on the students' health and education in the current circumstances. Similarly, it is necessary to be especially cautious and pay special heed to pre-school children with developmental disabilities and health issues who are to re-join their kindergartens, and for them it is advisable to consult the assigned paediatrics specialist or general practitioner.

**Limited number of students, physical distancing and personal hygiene.** The teaching assistants and professional communication intermediaries should be counted into the total number of people in the educational group which must never be higher than the number recommended here (up to a total of 10 people, including both children and adults). They should physically distance themselves from students and adults in the school as recommended, keeping the distance of 2 metres or more; they should consistently apply the recommended hygiene measures, encourage and support students in paying special attention to hygiene and distancing, and do their part in keeping the school space clean and disinfected.

**Physical distancing when providing support to students.** The teaching assistants and professional communication intermediaries will not always be able to keep the 2 m distance from the children they support as this would prevent them from performing all the tasks required by the Ordinance on Teaching Assistants and Professional Communication Intermediaries (OG 102/2018, 22/2020). While providing support to the student and when close to the student, the assistant or the intermediary should always wear a surgical mask and, during toileting, if possible, disposable gloves. When outside the educational institution and with parents/caregivers, the assistants or intermediaries are required to apply as much as possible the measures which decrease the risk of contagion (avoid shops and other public places, avoid public transport, consistently apply social distancing and hygiene etc.). When providing support to the student, the assistant or the intermediary should actively encourage the student to keep distance and apply hygiene measures meant to prevent contagion with COVID-19, in line with these instructions and other relevant recommendations.

### **Concluding recommendations**

If the educational institution is not able to function due to a high portion of self-isolating staff, the competent civil protection authority (national or local) should coordinate with the school owners to temporarily relocate staff from other institutions in order to continuously provide childcare.

Continued cooperation with the school owners is ensured.

Principals can authorise a professional staff member, the health coordinator-registered nurse or another staff member, to perform the tasks that have been listed here as the principal's.

Each task should be delegated to one person who will, when possible, keep written records of the task performed daily.

These instructions will be adapted to changes in the epidemiological situation as needed, and a revision and adaptation is scheduled for after they have been applied for a total of 14 calendar days.

These recommendations do not preclude the application of other recommendations in line with the current and changing epidemiological situation.

### **Instructions for cleaning and disinfection**

The relevant instructions are provided (in Croatian) in the documents listed below.

When there is no evidence of COVID-19 contagion: <https://www.hzjz.hr/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Ciscenje-idezinfekcija-prostorije-bez-objeljih-od-COVID-19-2.4.2020..pdf>

When COVID-19 contagion is suspected, or people have been tested positive for COVID-19: <https://www.hzjz.hr/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Ciscenje-i-dezinfekcija-prostora-u-kojima-je-boravila-osoba-podsumnjom-COVID-19-2.4.2020..pdf>