



Pandemic Policy & Procedure

Links: HS28, HS29

Rationale & Objectives:

The purpose of this Pandemic policy is to minimize the health risk posed to the community and employees in the event of a widespread outbreak of a dangerous infectious disease and ensure on-going operation of essential business activities.

References; Ministry of Education, 2008 MOE Regulations, Ministry of Health, Health and Safety at Work Act 2015, Employment Relations Act 2000, Holidays Act 2003 (sick, bereavement and annual leave, and public holidays), Wages Protection Act 1983.

Procedures:

Lumsden Kindergarten will act in accordance with all legal requirements and in the best interests of kaiako, children and families at Lumsden Kindergarten.

A folder has been developed providing information and action plans in the event of a Pandemic outbreak.

This information will be used in the event of a pandemic to ensure we follow all legal requirements and recommendations as per the Ministries of Health and Education.

We monitor information from trusted sources, in particular, official Ministry of Health announcements and guidance. **See link to their website <https://www.health.govt.nz/>**

What must ECE services do in a case of an influenza pandemic?

The Education (Early Childhood Centres) Regulations 2008

Require licensees to take reasonable steps to exclude children or kaiako if they have an infectious disease specified in Schedule 2 of the Health (Infectious and Notifiable Diseases) Regulations 1966.

Provide that the health regulations will apply to early childhood centres, in the same way but with the necessary modifications, as they apply to schools.

Enable the Secretary for Education to suspend a centre's licence (and therefore stop it from operating) if reasonable action **is not** taken to prevent children from coming into contact with a person suffering from an infectious disease. This discretion is rarely exercised in normal circumstances but could be used in the event of a pandemic. It is more likely, however, that the Medical Officer of Health would exercise powers under the Health Act 1956 to restrict the attendance at early childhood centres, as necessary.

Pandemic characteristics and impact.

A pandemic has unique characteristics when compared with a more "typical" disaster, such as an earthquake. For example:

Widespread impact: The impact of a pandemic would likely be widespread, even nation-wide, not localised to a single area and there may be little outside assistance. Many business continuity plans (BCPs) assume some part of an organisation is unaffected and can take up the required capacity.

Requires limiting social contact: Unique characteristics of a pandemic require implementation of activities to limit contact, such as restricting movement, quarantine, and banning public gatherings.

Long duration: A pandemic would not be a short, sharp event leading immediately to commencement of a recovery phase. A pandemic emergency may last several months. Plans need to take this into account.

Short notice: It is likely that there will be some advance warning after a pandemic develops overseas, but that warning period may be short. E.g. should pandemic influenza spread within New Zealand it will probably be some weeks before the full impact on the workforce will be

felt, although there may be early impacts resulting from ECE service and school closures and similar measures.

Primary effect is on staffing levels: Unlike natural disasters, where disruption to infrastructure and service delivery is likely to be hardware-related, a pandemic is more of a threat to employees. Employers will need to plan for the scenario of up to 50% staff absences at the height of a severe pandemic. Ministry of Health modelling shows that the average leave required for sickness and recovery of a team member is two weeks. Overall, a pandemic wave may last about eight weeks and may come in waves of varying severity over time.

The New Zealand Influenza Pandemic Plan establishes a framework for action that can readily be adopted and applied to any pandemic, irrespective of the nature of the virus and its severity.

Example: Influenza

SYMPTOMS

Influenza is a highly contagious viral disease of the respiratory tract.

Influenza is characterised by rapid onset of respiratory and generalised signs and symptoms including: a high fever, headache, muscle aches and pains, fatigue, cough, sore throat, or a runny nose.

HOW IS INFLUENZA SPREAD? – (Refer to Infection Control fact sheet - Appendix 1)

Influenza is spread from person to person in the respiratory droplets generated by coughs and sneezes. It can also be spread when a person comes into contact with the respiratory droplets of another person by touching items on which droplets are present, and then touches their own eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands. The virus may enter through eyes or more commonly through the nose or mouth, and into the throat and lungs where it begins to multiply. The time from first exposure to when symptoms begin is one to four days.

The disease damages the linings of the respiratory tract. Secondary bacterial infections, such as pneumonia, meningitis, sinus and ear infections can then take hold.

BEST PRACTICES FOR HAND HYGIENE – (Refer to Infection Control fact sheet – Appendix 1).

Hygiene Practices.

During a pandemic, we will need to clean more thoroughly to minimise the spread of the virus, particularly hard surfaces (such as play equipment, sinks, handles, railings, objects and counters). Influenza viruses may live up to two days on hard surfaces.

Influenza viruses are inactivated by **alcohol** and by **chlorine**. Cleaning of surfaces with a neutral detergent followed by a disinfectant solution is recommended. Surfaces that are frequently touched with hands should be cleaned often, preferably daily. Information about the appropriate choice and concentration of disinfectants can be found on the Ministry of Health or Ministry of Economic Development website.

Your usual hygiene practices should be elevated in a pandemic to an even higher level than usual.

Remind kaiako and children not to share cups, dishes and cutlery, and ensure they are thoroughly washed with soap and hot water after use.

Consider the feasibility of removing books from the children's library corner; and removing magazines and papers from the common areas (such as the tea room and kitchen).

Clean play equipment regularly.

Consider ways of cleaning and/or restricting communal use of some play and office equipment (such as, photocopiers, computers).

When a person with suspected influenza is identified and has left the centre, it is important that their work area / office, along with any other known places they have been, are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.

Planning should identify the basic hygiene practices (including hand hygiene) to be followed by cleaners, protocols for the use of personal protection equipment (if recommended by Ministry of Health), and methods for waste disposal. 53

MANAGEMENT OF STAFF AND CHILDREN WHO BECOME ILL

This advice applies to services in the “stamp it out” phase when services are expected to remain open because they are in an unaffected area. The flowchart in “the stamp it out” section, (RED), document 3 outlines procedures to take.

Children who are unwell should be kept at home and kaiako, parents and whānau should be advised not to come in to the centre when they are feeling unwell, particularly if they are exhibiting any influenza symptoms. It may be helpful to inform kaiako, parents and whānau of the differences in symptoms between influenza and a common cold. Unwell team members and children (through their parents/whānau) should be advised to see a doctor, and to stay at home until symptoms resolve.

Normal communication methods will be used to ensure all kaiako, parents and whānau receive the notice. You may also provide them with information about how to stay well during a pandemic, using the Ministry of Health information.

A process will be set up within the pandemic plan to ensure that ill children and kaiako have completed any required quarantine period and **are healthy** before allowing them to return to the early childhood education service.

Note that children and kaiako who have recovered from the pandemic influenza are unlikely to be re-infected (they will have natural immunity) and should be encouraged to return as soon as they are well and the service has re-opened.

EMPLOYER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Compliance with the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015

In addition to the requirements under the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act, pandemic planning will help early childhood education services ensure they meet their obligations under the Health and Safety at Work Act which states

Purpose

(1) The main purpose of this Act is to provide for a balanced framework to secure the health and safety of workers and workplaces by—

(a) protecting workers and other persons against harm to their health, safety, and welfare by eliminating or minimising risks arising from work or from prescribed high-risk plan

Section 30. Management of risks

(1) A duty imposed on a person by or under this Act requires the person—

(a) to eliminate risks to health and safety, so far as is reasonably practicable; and

(b) if it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate risks to health and safety, to minimise those risks so far as is reasonably practicable.

(2) A person must comply with subsection (1) to the extent to which the person has, or would reasonably be expected to have, the ability to influence and control the matter to which the risks relate.

Section 83. Right of worker to cease or refuse to carry out unsafe work

(1) A worker may cease, or refuse to carry out, work if the worker believes that carrying out the work would expose the worker, or any other person, to a serious risk to the worker's or other person's health or safety arising from an immediate or imminent exposure to a hazard. Independent contractors and volunteer workers have the right to withdraw their labour or services at any time, including when they feel the work environment presents an unsatisfactory level of risk.

Employers must take all practicable steps to mitigate the risk and protect employees, especially those at high risk. In a pandemic it is anticipated that workers at high risk will include health care personnel, health support staff and first responders (fire/police/ambulance/other emergency workers). Enforced closures of early childhood education services to children in an affected area will mitigate most of these risks for teaching staff. Employers should be aware that at both **Code Yellow** and **Code Green** stages, employees and children may be reluctant to return to the workplace. Others may actively seek to return before it is appropriate. 54

Compliance with Other Human Resource Legislation

The following employment relations legislation will continue to apply in addition to the requirements of the Health Act 1956 and the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015

1. Employment Relations Act 2000
2. Holidays Act 2003 (sick, bereavement and annual leave, and public holidays)
3. Wages Protection Act 1983.

Compliance with the Crimes Act

ECE services have legal responsibilities under the Crimes Act and these would continue to apply in a pandemic emergency.

For example, imagine that a cluster outbreak is declared in Wellington in the morning. By the afternoon public gatherings are banned, education facilities are closed and public transport ceases to operate. Many people are trapped in the city and cannot get home easily. Your service finds that four of its 16 children cannot be collected by a parent. The moral requirement is obvious. You cannot leave the children at the ECE service and go home. Legal requirements in this situation are:

Section 151 – Duty without lawful excuse to provide the necessaries of life. This would apply to all persons who have de facto charge of other persons and that includes teachers. This section makes the person in charge criminally responsible for omitting without lawful excuse to provide the ‘necessaries of life’ to a person if death or injury occurs or the person’s life is endangered.

Ministry of Education funding policy -child absence due to sickness

ECE services may claim early childhood education funding within a three-week period for all sessions or days a child was enrolled to attend but was absent. The three-week period begins on the first day of absence.

Children with health problems may be funded for continuous absences beyond three weeks where they have a short-term illness or condition that is supported by an EC13 form specifying the period of exemption. The EC13 is completed by the service and must remain available for the scrutiny of the Ministry or its Investigating Officers on request. Under this provision, services may claim funding for all the sessions/days a child was enrolled to attend,

but was absent from, within a 12-week period. The 12-week period begins on the first day of absence.

Refer to the Special Circumstances section of the Early Childhood Funding Handbook for information about emergency closure funding.

CLOSURE OF CENTRE.

Closing ECE services to children in affected areas is part of the pandemic influenza section of New Zealand's National Health Emergency Plan to help prevent the influenza spreading. Closure of ECE services to children ("preclusion") aims to reduce close contact between children (as children have been known to remain infectious for up to 21 days whereas the risk period is only eight days for adults).

Though ECE services might be closed to children, they will not necessarily be closed for quarantine. With their employer's prior approval kaiako may still work at the ECE service, work remotely, or carry out additional or 'alternative duties' for their employer or another agency. A pandemic may come in several waves over a six to eight-month period. At the peak of the worst pandemic wave up to 50% of the workforce may be sick, looking after sick dependents, or carrying out 'alternative duties' in priority areas for their employer or another agency (such as health or welfare roles).

If Lumsden Kindergarten is put into Lockdown due to a Pandemic the expectations of kaiako are;

- To have an alternative work plan which means there will be an expectation to continue to work remotely providing continued learning for our enrolled children that promotes our centre Philosophy through regular posts on Educa; Learning Stories and Distance Digital Learning
- To attend team meetings remotely
- To work on appraisal inquiry
- To work on Strat Plan or Internal Evaluation inquiry
- Attend relevant PD remotely eg webinars; online seminars
- Support one another and management – be kind

Management will;

- Keep communication with kaiako transparent and regular – keeping the team in the loop about what is happening giving the team time to prepare if we have to close
- Inform kaiako of the expectations from management while under lockdown
- Be understanding of IT restrictions when team is working remotely – there may be a possibility to use centre equipment. If this is the case, then provisions will be put in place around the care of equipment.
- Support employee's mental wellbeing and be available to chat to – understand this will be unprecedented times for the team
- Team members are entitled to have a support person however that support person needs to be civil
- Be considerate to employee's who are immune compromised or have family members who are vulnerable
- Regularly communicate with families letting them know what is happening during the pandemic
- Be guided by Ministry updates
- The Tokihi Leaders are the voice for the team

The Centre will maintain as full a service as possible for as long as possible during a pandemic emergency.

Philosophy: *'Trusting relationships'*

Policy Developed: March 2020, Aug 2021, Dec 2022