

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Department of Human Services Creates Online Tool for Essential Workers to Find Child Care Providers with Approved Waivers, Reminds Operating Providers of COVID-19 Safety Recommendations

Harrisburg, PA – The Department of Human Services (DHS) today announced a new [tool](#) available on the department's website designed to help essential workers connect with child-care providers that have been granted a waiver by the department's Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) to continue serving the families of essential personnel during the COVID-19 emergency.

"While many Pennsylvanians are responsibly heeding guidance from the Department of Health to stay home, there are still many thousands of essential workers whose jobs require that they go out into the world and do work that makes it possible for the rest of us to stay safe and healthy. For many of these workers, safe and stable child care is an essential need," said DHS Secretary Teresa Miller. "DHS is committed to maintaining options for these families, and that's why we implemented a waiver process for child care providers to remain open and serving the children of healthcare workers, first responders and other essential personnel."

On March 16, Governor Wolf recommended that all licensed child care centers and group child care homes operating outside of a residence to temporarily close starting Tuesday, March 17. That request has since changed to a mandated order consistent with the governor's decision to order all non-life-sustaining businesses in Pennsylvania closed until further notice.

OCDEL continues to receive and process waiver requests for child care centers and group child care homes seeking to continue to operate during this time with the expectation that providers operating with a waiver serve only the families of essential personnel such as health care providers on the front lines, emergency and first responders, home care workers serving vulnerable populations, grocery and food service employees until the governor's closure order is lifted.

OCDEL is processing waiver requests based on the information provided in good faith. If a child-care provider reports that they need to remain open in order to serve the families of essential personnel, OCDEL will grant that request. To date, OCDEL has processed and approved more than 700 requests for waivers.

The public can access information about child care providers that have been granted waivers on the department's [website](#), which includes a [map](#) linked on the citizen resource page of the COVID-19 section. DHS encourages essential workers to use this information as a resource to find child care options available in their community.

Family child care homes and group child care homes operated inside a residence may continue to operate at their discretion without a waiver. Those provider types are defined in [regulations](#) and generally serve fewer children than child care centers operated in a commercial setting. The public can access information about these providers at www.findchildcare.pa.gov.

As the non-life-sustaining business closure order is being enforced around Pennsylvania, DHS is also reminding law enforcement agencies that some child care providers may continue to operate. Child care providers operating with a waiver should be prepared to present this waiver if contacted by law enforcement.

DHS is grateful to child care providers who continue to serve the families of essential personnel, and we recognize there is an inherent risk in continuing these operations while we also focus on mitigating the spread of COVID-19. OCDEL has worked with health professionals to provide guidance to help child care providers maintain the health and safety of their staff and children in care. This [guidance](#) was distributed earlier this week and is available in the provider guidance section of the COVID-19 page on the DHS website.

Secretary Miller also reminded families that they must have a back up plan in place should their child care provider need to close with short notice.

“The COVID-19 situation is evolving quickly, and circumstances for child care providers operating with a waiver may change,” said Secretary Miller. “I urge all families who rely on child care to make a back up plan so if that has to happen, your family will be safe and cared for.”

Visit pa.gov for a [“Responding to COVID-19” guide](#) or the Pennsylvania Department of Health’s dedicated [Coronavirus webpage](#) for the most up-to-date information regarding COVID-19.

Guidance to DHS providers related to COVID-19 is available [here](#).

A media call on this subject will begin at 11:00 a.m on March 27. Members of the media who are interested may contact Brandon Cwalina at bcwalina@pa.gov for call-in information.

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