

**For Immediate Release:** Sunday, March 15, 2020

**Media Contact:** Max Wetz, [max.wetz@state.sd.us](mailto:max.wetz@state.sd.us)

### **COVID-19 guidance to childcare facilities**

PIERRE – The Department of Social Services (DSS) is asking childcare providers in South Dakota to take steps to ensure that the health and safety of children, families, and providers remain top priorities in the days and weeks ahead.

“Childcare facilities are a vital link to supporting working families,” **Governor Noem said.** “It is crucial that this system be prepared to handle the demands of the COVID-19 pandemic situation so families, especially medical and emergency personnel, can continue working while their children are cared for and kept safe. I am asking my Department of Social Services to work closely with childcare providers across the state to institute commonsense practices to assist families in need, while also safeguarding the health of all South Dakotans.”

The Department of Social Services has communicated CDC-recommended steps for cleaning and disinfection to all licensed and registered daycare facilities. It is further stressing the need to employ mitigation strategies including:

- Implementing commonsense practices for preventing disease spread such as covering coughs, staying home when sick, and enhancing already required hand washing and sanitizing practices;
- Limiting entry into the facility or home by putting into practice child drop off at the front door;
- Assessing potential risk with staff and parents from travel to affected areas;
- Ensuring that employees and children are not admitted when ill. Those showing signs of illness should be sent home and advised to call their primary healthcare provider for further screening and testing, if necessary;
- Reducing, postponing or cancelling events and gatherings, especially those involving large groups or exposure to the public;
- Using spring break or temporary closures while children are away to deep clean and disinfect the facilities, especially surfaces and items in high-touch areas. The CDC provides guidance regarding cleaning and disinfection at [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection](http://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection);
- Implementing regular deep-clean practices in addition to daily cleaning; and,
- Coordinating with DSS licensing specialists, local public health officials and emergency management.

“By remaining vigilant and following reasonable protocols, we can help slow the spread of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases,” said Laurie Gill, DSS cabinet secretary. “We trust that parents and our childcare partners will make decisions for South Dakota families using common sense and with safety and security in mind.”

The Department of Social Services is asking childcare providers to be flexible with staff who are ill or caring for sick family members and recommends contingency planning for staff shortages in order to

meet staff-to-child ratios. It is also asking providers to work with parents to identify children with special health conditions that place them at higher risk and take appropriate precautions.

Childcare providers and parents should visit [dss.sd.gov/childcare](https://dss.sd.gov/childcare) or call DSS Child Care Services at 800.227.3020. For questions and information about COVID-19 please visit [covid.sd.gov](https://covid.sd.gov) or call 800.997.2880.

South Dakota is not currently experiencing community spread of COVID-19 and all positive cases in the state are travel related. In the event community spread of COVID-19 occurs, DSS will ask childcare providers in affected areas for heightened mitigation procedures including:

- Putting infectious disease outbreak planning into action;
- Practicing social distancing (remaining out of congregate settings, avoiding mass gatherings, and maintaining approximately six feet of distance from others when possible);
- Avoiding mixing children across classes and stagger transition times when children are typically using the same facilities such as restrooms, etc.;
- Limiting visitors and deliveries from outside entities and assessing all visitors for illness and risk of exposure; and,
- Considering dismissal if staff or child absenteeism impacts the ability to remain open. Short-term closures may also be necessary to facilitate public health investigation and cleaning.

“The Department of Social Services is working closely with the Governor’s team and the Department of Health to ensure that we are providing the best guidance and support we can to our licensed and registered childcare providers,” Gill said. “The most important consideration in all of this planning and execution is the well-being of the people of South Dakota.”

-30-

The South Dakota Department of Social Services is dedicated to strengthening and supporting individuals and families by promoting cost effective and comprehensive services in connection with our partners that foster independent and healthy families. For more information, please visit [dss.sd.gov](https://dss.sd.gov).