

NORTHSTAR LEARNING CENTERS

TEMPORARY POLICY

Using Face Masks in Our Early Childhood Education Program During the Coronavirus Pandemic

Policy statement

While small group sizes, physical distancing, daily health checks, handwashing, respiratory etiquette and diligent cleaning and disinfecting remain vital to minimize the risk of spreading infection, the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that early childhood education programs have staff and children age 3 wear masks during the program day when 6 feet of physical distancing is not possible. Cloth masks are used to reduce the likelihood that the wearer, in the event that they are infected but not symptomatic, will transmit virus to other staff members, children, or parents.

Based on EEC's recommendations, NorthStar has established this policy on the safe and effective use of face masks for staff and children in our early childhood education program:

- Staff will be required to wear a cloth face mask while serving children and interacting with other staff and parents and families.
- Face masks for children age 3 and older are recommended to reduce the chance that they are spreading the virus, despite having no symptoms. Children will not be excluded from the program, however, if they are unable to safely and consistently wear a mask or their parent does not consent to their child wearing a mask.

Who should and shouldn't wear face masks

Following is a summary of who should and who should not wear face masks:

Who should wear face masks	Who should NOT wear face masks
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff• Children age 3 and older who can safely and reliably wear, remove, and handle masks throughout the program day—subject to parental consent• Parents when permitted to enter the early childhood education space and at all times during drop off and pick up	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Babies and children under age 3 because of the danger of suffocation• Children who have difficulty breathing with the face mask or who are unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the mask themselves• Children with severe cognitive or respiratory impairments who may have a hard time tolerating a face mask• Individuals who cannot breathe safely with a mask, including those who require supplemental oxygen• Children who, due to behavioral health problems, are unable to safely wear a mask• Children for whom wearing a mask causes them to touch their face more frequently• Individuals who need to communicate with people who rely upon lip-reading

Wearing face masks in conjunction with other protective strategies

Wearing cloth face masks is NOT a substitute for social distancing, frequent hand washing, avoiding touching the face, or other everyday or enhanced preventative actions.

Cloth masks do not provide adequate protection for others if a staff member or child has symptoms compatible with COVID-19. Sick staff members and children should stay at home.

What kind of face masks should be worn

- Medical-grade masks should be reserved for use by health care workers and first responders.
- NorthStar will make available homemade or purchased cloth masks, which are suitable for general use.
- Pleated masks with elastic are likely to work best for children.
- Masks should be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape.
- Masks should fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face (to be safest and most protective for children and adults, masks should securely cover the nose and mouth and stretch from before the ear to the other side).
- Masks should allow for unrestricted breathing.

Guidelines for wearing masks

- To prevent potential contamination, do not touch the mask, your eyes, nose, or mouth while wearing cloth masks.
- Wash your hands thoroughly before putting on the mask.
- Remove the mask carefully and wash your hands after removing.

Safety considerations for children wearing masks

- Children under 5 years old should be supervised at all times while wearing a mask.
- Masks should NOT have any attachments (e.g., buttons, stickers, etc.) that may be a choking hazard.
- Masks should NOT be worn if they are a strangulation risk (e.g., during certain activities or for certain children).
- Masks should NOT be worn during active outdoor play.
- Masks should NOT be worn while napping.
- Masks should NOT be worn while eating or drinking.
- Masks should never be worn around the neck.
- Children should NOT be forced to wear a cloth mask if they are not comfortable/able to do so safely or show signs of breathing difficulty.

Strict and consistent physical distancing should be practiced at all times during eating/drinking, napping, and active outdoor play.

Cleaning and care of face masks

- Wash the mask after each use (at least daily and any time the mask is used or becomes soiled).
- When possible, masks should be washed in a washing machine in hot water. If a washing machine is unavailable, masks should be washed with soap and hot water. Washed masks should be allowed to completely dry before using again.
- Each staff member and child should have their own mask. Whenever possible, extra masks should be available in the event a mask is damaged or becomes soiled.
- Used cloth face coverings should be placed in a clean paper bag that has been marked with the child's or staff member's name and date until the face covering needs to be put on again.
- Clean masks should not be stored with used masks.
- All masks should be clearly marked to distinguish which side should be worn facing outward so they are worn properly.

Communicating with parents about staff and children wearing masks

Our program will inform parents of our policies and procedures for using face masks. In determining whether using a face covering is appropriate for their children, parents and early childhood education staff should consider the rationale, along with their knowledge of their child, their child's maturity level, and/or special health concerns. The decision for a child to wear a mask must ultimately be a parent's choice.