

## REENTRY GUIDANCE

NMPreK Programs must develop a flexible program that meets the needs of children and families, taking into account community circumstances and program capacity.

Preschool children need interactions with adults and peers to build language and social skills. Community-based NMPreK programs will need to develop and implement a model that reflects:

Child development practices

Needs of families

Community circumstances

Program capacity



### Developing and Implementing a Flexible Program

Each NMPreK Program will develop an implementation plan that will take into account a diverse set of factors to ensure programs meet the needs of families. With this in mind, programs must communicate with families to learn about their needs, coordinate with local public schools and identify program capacity (e.g. staffing, budget, space, etc.) to ensure the educational and social-emotional needs of enrolled PreK children are met. This guidance has been developed to support programs in the implementation of their PreK program that includes in-person instruction.

### Ratios and Group Size

1. As of July 1, the New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) has approved that four-year-old Pre-K/preschool ratios and group size may return to the FOCUS standard of up to 20 children and two adults, depending on the setting. For NM Mixed-Age PreK and Early PreK the class size is up to 16 children and 2 adults, depending on the setting.
2. As part of the flexibility in program configuration, group sizes can vary depending on each program's and families' needs but cannot exceed the approved class size and ratio approved by NMPreK and ECECD Licensing.

## Higher-priority COVID-safe Practices

1. Drop-off and pick-up times must be staggered for each small group to avoid a large number of people congregating outside or in front of the facility. Markers at pick up and drop off indicating six ft. distance can be set, including one-way routes to reduce exposure of children and adults at pick up and drop off whenever possible.
  2. Limit the number of people who enter the program to essential visitors (e.g., state or district staff, therapists, special education teachers, etc.) and ban volunteers.
  3. Cohort classes (children and staff) to minimize crossover among children and adults within the school. Maintain the same groups from day-to-day and week-to-week, including outdoor time.
  4. Peer interactions and play are still a priority of PreK and critical for healthy social-emotional development; reducing classmate interactions/play in PreK aged children may not provide substantial COVID-19 risk reduction. Concentrate on hand hygiene, cohort grouping, face masks and sanitize surfaces and toys between groups.
  5. Implement Pyramid strategies to support social-emotional development.
  6. Utilize outdoor spaces for learning activities and meals when possible.
  7. Every day, a trained staff member should conduct a health check of each child that includes their physical and social-emotional well-being.
  8. Practice frequent hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, and require handwashing upon arriving at the school, when entering the classroom, before meals or snacks, after outside time, before and after diapering, after going to the bathroom, and prior to leaving for home.
  9. Help young children to ensure they are washing their hands effectively. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Supervise children when they use hand sanitizer to prevent ingestion.
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10. Place posters describing hand washing steps near sinks. [Developmentally appropriate posters](#) in multiple languages are available from CDC.
  11. Advise children, families, and staff to avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
  12. Conduct Home Visits virtually, via phone or any other mutually-agreed safe arrangement.
  13. Meals and snacks should be provided in the classroom to avoid congregating in large groups. If meals must be provided in a lunchroom, stagger meal times, arrange tables to ensure that there is at least six feet of space between groups, and clean tables between lunch shifts. Eliminate family-style meals, have employees (not children) handle utensils and serve food to reduce the spread of germs.
  14. Staff, including substitutes, must comply with testing and training requirements as defined by the ECECD Licensing Unit.

## Face Coverings in Preschool

1. Children must wear masks/face coverings of appropriate size except during nap, and when eating and drinking. A preschool classroom offers an opportunity to learn and practice self-care including handwashing, safe distancing and the use of protective equipment such as masks. If a child has a medical reason for not wearing a mask, the parent must provide a doctor's note. Follow PED Special Education Division guidance for children who receive special education services. Please utilize social stories to assist with acceptance of masks. (See Resources Section for links.)

- a. **EXCEPTIONS:** Cloth face masks should not be placed on children under 3 years of age - nor on anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the cover without assistance.
- b. **Notes:** Children between the ages of three and five must be supervised if they are wearing a mask. Teachers should use their professional judgment in deciding when to remove a mask if it is creating discomfort or resulting in a child touching their face frequently. If a child cannot remove the mask on their own, without assistance, even if they are over the age of three, they should not wear a mask. As always, providers should be aware of choking risks due to masks with ties.

## Limit Sharing

- Children in each group must have access to all interest areas (e.g. art, writing, manipulatives, blocks, science, literacy, dramatic play) within their designated group space. Ensure enough supplies and materials are present in each group to limit the sharing of materials between children.
- Keep each child's belongings separated from others' and in individually labeled containers or cubbies. Do not use water or sand/sensory tables.
- Limit item sharing. If items are being shared, remind children not to touch their faces and wash their hands after using these items.



Photo courtesy of Garcia Street Club, Santa Fe, NM

## Physical Distancing

1. Avoid getting close to children's faces when comforting them.
2. Children should practice physical distancing of six feet, where and when possible such as teacher-directed activities, circle time, etc.
3. Children should be placed six feet apart for naps, if possible. Mats or cots should be placed head to toe.
4. Incorporate additional outside time if possible. Stagger outdoor time and clean outdoor playground equipment in between groups of children.
5. Avoid gathering in larger groups for any reason. Increase the distance between children during independent table work. Minimize the time children stand in line, develop distance markers when lining up is necessary.
6. Plan activities that do not require close physical contact between children.
7. Open windows frequently as long as this can be done safely. Adjust the HVAC system to allow more fresh air to enter the program space. Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows, using fans, or other methods. Do not open windows without screens and if they pose a safety or health risk (e.g., allowing pollens in or exacerbating asthma symptoms) to children using the facility.

## Submitting Reentry NMPreK Plans

NMPreK Programs must submit their implementation plan, using the Reentry Plan Format to their NMPreK assigned program specialist at the ECECD by July 31, 2020.

### The Plan must include the following:

1. Schedule: Days and hours of NMPreK in-person implementation, how are the funded hours will be implemented
2. Pick up and drop off plan, including schedule, measures for physical distance, avoiding congregation
3. COVID-safe adaptations to the environment, class size and the daily schedule (e.g. two circle times to limit group size)
4. Implementation of COVID-safe meal time practices in accordance with the meal services authority in the setting
5. Cleaning and Sanitation Plan: daily and once per week
6. Plan for ongoing communication with families
7. Budget modifications – Attach a Reentry NMPreK Budget Plan

### RESOURCES:

Use social stories to teach health practices, including the wearing of masks and hygiene practices.

- [www.autismlittlelearners.com](http://www.autismlittlelearners.com)
- [consciousdiscipline.com](http://consciousdiscipline.com)
- Families Together [Preschool Canvas page](#) (use a browser other than Internet Explorer)
- [New Mexico Kids](#)

<https://familymedicine.uams.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2020/05/My-Teacher-Wears-a-Mask-5-27-2020-edit.pdf>

Health and Safety Requirements, including testing, planning and rapid response.

<https://www.newmexicokids.org/coronavirus/health.php>

Mandatory COVID-19 Response Training.

<https://nmels.org/ets/home>

More information on [COVID-19 Planning Considerations: Guidance for School Reentry](#) is available from the American Academy of Pediatrics.



Photo courtesy of Garcia Street Club, Santa Fe, NM

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