



# Coronavirus (COVID-19)

## Information for early childhood education and care providers and services – **Up to and including 5 April 2020**

**This information sheet consolidates previous information and provides an updated overview of the support mechanisms in place to assist the early childhood education and care sector manage the impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on its businesses. From 6 April 2020 the Government will provide the Early Childhood Education and Care Relief Package payments in lieu of Child Care Subsidy (CCS) and Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS). For information that applies from 6 April 2020, visit the department's [website](#).**

The Government's primary aim is to support services to remain open to ensure that quality early childhood education and care continues to be available to support essential workers and disadvantaged and vulnerable children and families. The following information is updated regularly to reflect additional measures announced by the Australian Government in response to the escalating impact of COVID-19.

### **Support for services up to and including 5 April 2020 to stay open and families to stay enrolled**

On 2 April 2020, the Government announced that services will now be able to waive out of pocket fees for families where a service remains open, but children are not attending for COVID-19 reasons. This change will apply retrospectively from 23 March 2020 and extends the rule which allows services to waive out of pocket fees where a service is directed to close on public health advice.

Waiving the out of pocket fee will mean services do not have to charge families for child care services they are not using. It will encourage parents not to withdraw from child care and make use of absences and additional absences. In recognition of the impact of COVID-19, for the 2019-20 financial year, families are entitled to 62 allowable absences, rather than the standard 42 allowable absence days. In turn, services will still be paid the CCS, which can cover up to 85 per cent of the daily fee.

The Government strongly encourages services to use this opportunity to provide families with fee relief to encourage them to maintain their enrolment, however it is a business decision for each child care

provider whether or not they choose to charge and recover from families a portion of the gap fee or to refund any out of pocket fees. A legislative requirement is in place that providers must not increase fees during this period.

### **Where a service is directed to temporarily shut down on public health advice**

If a service is directed to temporarily shut down on public health advice as a result of COVID-19, a 'period of local emergency' applies under Family Assistance Law. CCS and ACCS can continue to be paid for allowable and then additional absences. In recognition of the impact of COVID-19, for the 2019-20 financial year, families are entitled to 62 allowable absences, rather than the standard 42 allowable absence days.

In addition, services do not need to recover out of pocket fees from families during this time.

It is a business decision for each child care provider whether or not they choose to charge families a fee while closed during a period of local emergency. There is no legal obligation for providers to charge fees during this time. A legislative requirement is in place that providers must not increase fees during this period.

### **Standard processes for activating a 'period of local emergency'**

- Contact the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (the department) in your state or territory (see contact details below) to advise of the closure and period of closure.
- The department will confirm the service has been closed in response to a period of public health advice in relation to COVID-19 and will activate local emergency provisions in the Child Care Subsidy System. Only after this time will families have access to additional absences for the closure.
- Session reports must be submitted no later than 14 days after the end of the week in which a session (including an allowable absence) occurred. If this is not possible because of the circumstances around the closure, the service should contact the Child Care Subsidy Helpdesk via email on [ccshelpdesk@dese.gov.au](mailto:ccshelpdesk@dese.gov.au) or call 1300 667 276.

### **Contact details for state and territory offices**

- New South Wales & Australian Capital Territory [CCSAssessments-NSWACT@dese.gov.au](mailto:CCSAssessments-NSWACT@dese.gov.au)
- Victoria [CCSAssessments-VIC@dese.gov.au](mailto:CCSAssessments-VIC@dese.gov.au)
- Queensland [CCSAssessments-QLD@dese.gov.au](mailto:CCSAssessments-QLD@dese.gov.au)
- Western Australia [CCSAssessments-WA@dese.gov.au](mailto:CCSAssessments-WA@dese.gov.au)
- South Australia [ChildcareSA@dese.gov.au](mailto:ChildcareSA@dese.gov.au)
- Tasmania [ChildcareTasmania@dese.gov.au](mailto:ChildcareTasmania@dese.gov.au)
- Northern Territory [ChildcareNT@dese.gov.au](mailto:ChildcareNT@dese.gov.au)

### **Where a service makes a business decision to close**

If a service decides to close, and it has not been directed to do so by public health advice, subsection 8(4)(b) of the Child Care Subsidy Minister's Rules 2017 provides that there is no entitlement to CCS for any fees charged while the service remains closed and not providing care.

As child care cannot be offered, families should not be charged fees.

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*This information was last updated on 2 April 2020. Please regularly check [dese.gov.au/news/coronavirus-covid-19](https://dese.gov.au/news/coronavirus-covid-19) to help ensure that you are using the latest version of this information sheet.*

## Advice and reporting on potential service closures

The decision whether or not a service should close in relation to COVID-19 will be made, and advised, by state and territory governments. Usually it is from the relevant [health department](#), but it may come from the [state or territory regulatory authority](#).

If you close your service, either voluntarily, or as advised, you must notify your [state or territory regulatory authority](#) **within 24 hours**.

## Responsibilities as an employer

The [Fair Work Ombudsman](#) has issued advice regarding your responsibilities as an employer including workplace entitlements and obligations if your business or your staff are affected by the outbreak of COVID-19. This includes information about workforce laws for business closures and shut downs during the COVID-19 outbreak because of government directions, reductions in trade or health and safety concerns; the different forms of leave for full and part-time employees; as well as information for casual employees.

## Other Australian Government support available for business owners

The Australian Government has developed an economic response package to support households and business and to address the significant economic consequences of COVID-19. These measures complement child care specific programs (e.g. Community Child Care Fund), and you may be eligible to apply for assistance under multiple Government programs. For more information on the Government's Economic Response to COVID-19 visit [treasury.gov.au/coronavirus](https://treasury.gov.au/coronavirus).

The second set of economic responses announced on 22 March 2020 target three areas:

1. [Support for individuals and households](#) – includes support payments, payments to support households and temporary early releases of superannuation.
2. [Support for small business](#) – includes cash flow support for businesses and temporary measures to provide relief for financially distressed businesses to manage cash flow challenges and retain employees.
3. [Support for flow of credit](#) – includes ensuring the flow of credit is available to businesses to manage the impacts of COVID-19.

To access information on financial assistance, eligibility and timing of this assistance visit [business.gov.au](https://business.gov.au) or call 13 28 46. Information on other [Australian Government grants and programs](#) that you may be eligible for is also available.

In addition, [My Business Health](#) provides access to tools, templates and tips to manage mental health and business health to help small businesses find the services they need to face challenges and identify opportunities to grow their business.

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## JobKeeper Payment

Under the [JobKeeper Payment](#) businesses that are impacted by COVID-19 will be able to access a subsidy from the Government to continue paying their employees. Affected employers will be able to claim a fortnightly payment of \$1,500 per eligible employee from 30 March 2020, for a maximum period of 6 months.

## Assistance available for families

### Support for families sending their children to early childhood education and care

#### Additional Child Care Subsidy (temporary financial hardship)

ACCS (temporary financial hardship) is already available now for families experiencing financial hardship and provides short-term support to families experiencing a significantly reduced ability to pay child care fees, such as if the parent lost income due to being unable to attend work. Eligible families will receive a subsidy equal to the actual fee charged by the child care service, up to 120 per cent of the CCS hourly rate cap. In most cases, the full cost of child care will be covered. It can be accessed for up to 13 weeks and eligible families are entitled to up to 100 hours of subsidised child care per fortnight. Families will be required to provide supporting evidence of a substantial reduction in their ability to pay child care fees, such as an email from their employer.

#### Absences from child care

New legislation is supporting services to stay open and to report absences for families whose child/ren cannot attend child care due to COVID-19 as outlined below:

- Under new arrangements, CCS can be paid for up to 62 absence days per child, for the 2019-20 financial year.
- After a child has exhausted those absences days, they can claim additional absences days for COVID-19 related reasons, without medical evidence. This includes where the child is ill or the family has decided that the child's attendance would put the child or any other person at risk of contraction of COVID-19.

## Resources to support children through COVID-19

In recognition that children, along with their families and the broader community, are feeling the impact of the significant social disruption and health concerns associated with COVID-19, a number of resources are available specifically designed to support for children.

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Emerging Minds have published a new resource for [supporting children during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#), which includes a video, fact sheets and tips about what you can expect and how you can help children cope.

The Raising Children Network have published an article on [Coronavirus and children in Australia](#), which includes health information and guidance about talking with children about COVID-19.

## Further information

Please visit the [Australian Government Department of Health](#) for the latest health advice.

The **Australian Government Department of Health** has also released a collection of [COVID-19 resources](#) for the general public.

Please contact the 24/7 **National Coronavirus Health Information Line** on 1800 020 080 which provides health and situation information on the outbreak.

If you need help with translation services while seeking help, you can contact the **Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National)** on 131 450 or [tisnational.gov.au](https://tisnational.gov.au).

Please visit your [state or territory health department](#) for the latest local updates and guidance on COVID-19.

Please visit the **Department of Education, Skills and Employment** website for the latest information for early childhood education and care providers and services, including [Frequently Asked Questions](#). Education and training sector fact sheets are available at [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

The **CCS Helpdesk** is available to assist with information for services to help them manage the impacts on their business. Please email the CCS Helpdesk on [ccshelpdesk@dese.gov.au](mailto:ccshelpdesk@dese.gov.au), send in your query via an [online form](#) or call 1300 667 276 between 9.00 am — 5.00 pm (AEDST), Monday to Friday.

Please make sure that if you are a child care provider or service you have [subscribed](#) to receive **communications** from the Department of Education, Skills and Employment.

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