

Dear Early Intervention Provider:

The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Bureau of Early Intervention wants to take this opportunity to wish you a happy and healthy 2022.

As the City continues to grapple with COVID-19, the New York City Bureau of Early Intervention remains committed to ensuring that Early Intervention services are available and can be delivered safely and effectively to children and families who need them. As you may know, the omicron variant now accounts for the vast majority of the COVID-19 cases in NYC. Current evidence shows that this variant is easier to spread, leading to more infections, including infections in children. We do not yet know if this variant is more likely to lead to severe illness. The spread of omicron has led to a significant rise in reports of confirmed COVID-19 cases across Early Intervention service settings. However, early evidence shows that vaccination continues to provide protection against severe COVID-19 caused by omicron, and that booster shots can strengthen this protection.

In addition, Early Intervention services can be delivered safely and effectively with proper precautions. The information in this email provides important updated information and reminders to ensure the continuity of care of Early Intervention services. **The situation remains in flux and we will update you as guidance changes.**

I. General Safety Precautions – Protect yourself and others

The best lines of defense remain the public health measures we have all become very familiar with:

1. **Vaccination**, including a **booster** dose.
 - a. Teens 16-17 years old who received their Pfizer-BioNTech initial vaccine series are eligible for the Pfizer-BioNTech booster after a specific period as indicated [here](#) (information frequently updated).
 - b. New Yorkers 18 years and older who received the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna initial vaccine series or the Janssen/Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine are eligible for a booster dose after a specific time period as indicated [here](#) (information frequently updated).
 - c. Vaccines and boosters are widely available at no cost and regardless of immigration status.
 - i. Most city-run sites are offering walk-up vaccinations without an appointment, including for individuals 5 years and older. Find the closest walk-up site by visiting [NYC Vaccine Finder](#) and clicking the "Walk-ups" toggle button.
 - ii. Call 877-VAX-4NYC (877-829-4692) to schedule an appointment at certain sites or request an at-home vaccination appointment. More information [here](#).
2. **COVID-19 testing**, including home testing. Follow the instructions that come with your particular test kit. A positive home test result is considered positive, and isolation guidance should be followed as outlined below. Negative results are not accepted while an individual is

symptomatic or is under isolation (isolation covered in the section below). More information [here](#).

3. Use of a **face covering** that completely covers the nose and mouth, fits snugly against your face, and has layers to keep your respiratory droplets in and others' out. General face covering information available [here](#). **Early Intervention specific face covering** requirements are available [here](#).
4. **Physical distancing**: stay at least 6 feet away from others in public spaces; avoid crowds and poorly ventilated spaces
5. **Hand washing**
6. **Stay home if you're sick**

II. Required Safety Protocols for Early Intervention Providers

1. **(NEW) Shortened isolation period for the general public**
 - a. As of January 4, 2022, the New York State Department of Health has shortened the isolation period from 10 days to 5 days for the general public who test positive for COVID-19 and are either asymptomatic or who have had no fever for 24 hours and whose symptoms are resolving. They must wear a well-fitting mask or a higher-level mask such as a KN95 while working, with no air gaps around the edges. Details at: [nys_updated_isolation_quarantine_guidance_01042022.pdf](#)
2. **(NEW) Shortened quarantine period for the general public who must quarantine**
 - a. For close contacts (within 6 feet for at least 10 minutes within a 24-hour period) of a known case of COVID-19 who are **not fully vaccinated** or who are fully vaccinated and **eligible for a booster but not yet boosted**, the quarantine period has been shortened from 10 days to 5 days, with day 0 as the last day of COVID-19 exposure. They must wear a well-fitting mask or a higher-level mask such as a KN95 through day 10. If possible, test at day 5.
 - b. Close contacts who are fully vaccinated and boosted (with the booster at least 2 weeks before the first day of COVID-19 exposure) or fully vaccinated and not yet eligible for a booster do not need to quarantine. However, they should wear a well-fitting mask while around others for 10 days from the date of last exposure. Details at: [nys_updated_isolation_quarantine_guidance_01042022.pdf](#)
3. **(Reminder) EI Providers must continue to follow all required COVID precautions outlined in the [Early Intervention Program's Return to In-Person Services Action Plan During COVID-19](#)**
 - a. **Review section III - Required Early Intervention Provider and Agency Health and Safety Precautions for the Reintroduction of In-Person Services**
4. **(Updated) Self-screening - Regardless of the setting, all EI providers must have plans to ensure that:**
 - a. Therapists, teachers, families and staff implement ongoing self-screening prior to a session to determine whether they or anyone else who intends to participate in the session:

i. Has COVID-19 symptoms, such as fever greater than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell, etc.

ii. Has tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 10 days

iii. Has knowingly been in close contact (less than 6 feet for 10 minutes cumulative in a 24-hour period) in the past 10 days with anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19

iv. Has been told by a health care provider to remain home due to being exposed to COVID-19 (or quarantine)

- If the answer to any of these questions is **yes and the individual is not fully vaccinated (or vaccine status is unknown)**, the sessions should be rescheduled at least 10 days from the onset of symptoms, positive test result or start of quarantine, whichever is applicable.
 - The reason that this time period is not shortened to 5 days is because children in Early Intervention are not eligible for vaccine and the vaccine status of family members may be unknown.
- If the individual is known to be fully vaccinated, the guidance outlined under #1 above (**Shortened isolation period for the general public**) applies.
 - If the individual is an EI service provider who cannot wear a well-fitting mask or a higher-level mask such as a KN95 through day 10 due to the nature of the service being provided (such as speech language therapy), the provider should isolate for the full 10 days and provide only teletherapy during that time period.

b. If a child is sent home due to concerns about COVID-19 or if home-based sessions are cancelled, the center or therapist should call the family the night before services are scheduled to restart to confirm that it is safe to resume.

i. On the day of the visit, before the therapist or teacher enters the home or, as part of a coordinated facility intake process, determine whether the child or anyone in the household:

- Has a fever greater than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell, etc.
- Has tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 10 days
- Has knowingly been in close contact (less than 6 feet for 10 minutes cumulative in a 24-hour period) in the past 10 days with anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19
- Has been told by their health care provider to remain home due to being exposed to COVID-19 (or quarantine)

- If the answer to any of these questions is **yes**, the sessions should be rescheduled at least 10 days from the onset of symptoms, positive test result or start of quarantine, whichever is applicable.
- If a child is sent home due to concerns about COVID-19 or home-based sessions are cancelled, the center or therapist should call the family the night before services are scheduled to restart to confirm that it is safe to resume.

5. (Reminder) Case Reporting

- a. Under Article 11 of the New York City (NYC) Health Code, providers of Early Intervention services operating in the five boroughs of NYC are required to report to the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC Health Department) confirmed cases of COVID-19 among children, therapists and teachers. Reporting this information is permitted under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
- b. [The Early Intervention COVID-19 Case Reporting Requirements for Early Intervention Providers](#) outlines the required information that providers must submit to the NYC Health Department when there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 in a group, home, or community-based setting. The protocol provides the expected messaging to families affected by a confirmed case of COVID-19 regarding mandatory modification in method of service delivery from in-person to teletherapy.
- c. Effective and consistent implementation of the reporting protocol will ensure that the New York City Early Intervention Program and provider community does its part to suppress the COVID-19 pandemic. (**Reporting template and instructions attached**)
- d. Direct all questions regarding this protocol to the Bureau of Early Intervention Provider Oversight Unit at: afishman@health.nyc.gov

6. (Reminder) Teletherapy

- a. Teletherapy remains an option for service delivery in the NYC EI Program. All providers (service coordinators, evaluators, therapists, and teachers) and NYC Health Department staff are required to discuss the benefits of teletherapy with all families in the EI Program. Families should be informed that teletherapy:
 - i. Provides greater scheduling flexibility for parents
 - ii. Is as effective as in-person therapy
 - iii. Increases positive child outcomes
 - iv. Increases parent engagement, self-efficacy, and empowerment
- b. DOHMH BEI continues to strongly encourage a flexible approach to service delivery to minimize breaks in services. Therefore, parents/guardians who have opted for in-person services and/or group developmental services are encouraged to sign both the [Consent for Use of Telehealth During the Declared State of Emergency for COVID-19](#) and the [Consent to Initiate or Resume In-Person Services During COVID-19](#) forms, to allow

for flexibility in service delivery approach. In this way, potential service disruptions due to COVID-19 may be minimized through the switch to teletherapy.

- c. As long as a family's legal residence is in the five boroughs of NYC, their child may receive teletherapy services through the NYC Early Intervention program if they are living outside of NYC or internationally for a short period of time.
- d. EI group service providers should aim to ensure that they can provide teletherapy services to children if the group service provider must stop service delivery for a time period designated by the New York City Department of Health. If the group service provider cannot meet the mandate, the SC must find another provider agency to fill the mandate.
- e. If a group needs to be put on hold **due to a confirmed case of COVID-19**, the SC or EIOD (as appropriate) should create backup home-based service lines for each child whose parent/guardian has provided consent to the provision of teletherapy for EIOD approval. The created and approved home-based service line cannot be used to deliver in-person services. The start date of the services line should be the date that the center closed, or the quarantine period started.
- f. Additional information is available in the **New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Bureau of Early Intervention Protocol for Resuming Group Services and Ensuring Flexibility During COVID-19 (9/23/2020)** (attached).

Please direct all questions to EITA@health.nyc.gov unless otherwise stated above.

Thank you for your continued commitment to the delivery safe and effective Early Intervention services to children and their families in the Program.

DO NOT REPLY TO THIS EMAIL.

Sent from the New York City Department of Health & Mental Hygiene. This email and any files transmitted with it may contain confidential information and are intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom they are addressed. This footnote also confirms that this email message has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.