NHSA
NATIONAL HEAD START ASSOCIATION

Our mission is to coalesce, inspire, and support the Head Start field as a leader in early childhood development and education.

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Le Jardin Community Center

COVID-19:

Destination Reopening Playbook

Updated July 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

For additional information, questions, or concerns, please contact Dr. Bernadine Futrell, the National Head Start Association's senior director, effective practice at bfutrell@nhsa.org.

About NHSA

The National Head Start Association's vision is to lead—to be the untiring voice that will not be quiet until every vulnerable child is served with the Head Start model of support for the whole child, the family, and the community—and to advocate—to work diligently for policy and institutional changes that ensure all vulnerable children and families have what they need to succeed.

NHSA's mission is to coalesce, inspire, and support the Head Start field as a leader in early childhood development and education. We are compelled to fulfill this mission by the promise of all the possible outcomes:one powerful, united Head Start voice; and a collegial, collaborative Head Start field, one that is a valuable and valued partner and resource to early childhood development and education; and nonpartisan support of increased Federal commitment to Head Start; and, ultimately; and healthier, empowered children and families and stronger, more vibrant communities.

About this Playbook

A special thank you to the individuals who committed to reviewing and helping to improve this playbook as part of the National Head Start Association's weekly Destination Reopening Working Group.

This playbook is not intended to provide authoritative health and safety recommendations. Instead, the intent of this playbook is to ignite the thinking for those who are leading efforts to reopen Head Start and Early Head Start centers following the COVID-19 closings. Use this document in conjunction with guidance provided by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and other federal, state, and local agencies and health officials, including the Office of Head Start.

Le Jardin Community Center

Introduction

Supporting Head Start in Unprecedented Times

Introduction

Beginning in early March, many Head Start programs began closing centers and transitioning to distance learning models to protect the health and safety of the Head Start community as the COVID-19 pandemic spread. The National Head Start Association is supporting the Head Start community as they navigate this challenging time, including through weekly virtual discussions, dubbed the "Kitchen Table Talk" webinar series, that began in March. In May, as Head Start began to look toward the next phase of managing risks from COVID-19, NHSA launched a series of webinars: Kitchen Table Talk (KTT): Destination Reopening.

The KTT: Destination Reopening webinars addressed two stated goals from Head Start and Early Head Start programs. The first goal was to share with a larger community of practice information, experiences, and lessons learned from programs with centers that remained open or were in the process of reopening in May. To support this community of practice, following the weekly webinar, members of the KTT: Destination Reopening group continued the conversation online through the The Block, NHSA's, online community platform designed for our Communities of Practice to engage online.

The second goal for KTT: Destination Reopening was to identify and share recommended action steps for programs just beginning the journey to reopening centers in the COVID-19 era. This document highlights five of these action steps, lists resources for each action step, and provides a planning template for reopening developed in partnership with Head Start and Early Head Start programs during NHSA's weekly KTT: Destination Reopening conversations.

NHSA's COVID-19 Principles and Pledges

Head Start programs are weighing difficult decisions around reopening their doors in a way that protects the health and safety of children, families, staff, and communities. To unite as a field, NHSA developed COVID-19 principles to reaffirm our commitment to the Head Start field in these unprecedented times. **During this COVID-19 era, here are NHSA's pledges to you:**

- *We remain committed to our core mission, which is timeless: To coalesce, inspire, and support the Head Start field as a leader in early childhood development and education.*

- *Safety is our utmost priority—both to reduce risks from COVID-19 and also to help keep children and families safe at home. Our work reflects that priority.*

- *We acknowledge the unique pressures Head Start staff find themselves under professionally and personally and will work to address those stresses.*

- *We will continue to prioritize the needs of the whole family and the whole child. We will strengthen our partnership with parents to better meet the multitude of needs that are critical to every child's healthy growth and development, including physical health, socio-emotional well-being and mental health, and school readiness.*

- *We will collaborate with new and old partners, build new relationships, and strengthen existing ones, all in the name of supporting the Head Start community.*

- *The economic impact of COVID-19 will continue to impact the well-being of families in unprecedented ways. We will lift up the importance of comprehensive Head Start services for both child and family as a model to be emulated.*

- *We will continue to prioritize our efforts on Capitol Hill to secure more funding for Head Start, recognizing the growing number of young children living in poverty who need Head Start.*

- *We will be creative and innovative in our approach—this unprecedented time calls for new thinking.*

- *We recognize that returning to pre-COVID routines and practices will not take place soon, and will continually re-evaluate the needs of programs, children, and families and keep adjusting our work accordingly.*

- *We acknowledge the future is unclear yet we remain unwavering in our work and commitment to you.*

Action Steps Overview

Five actions to start reopening centers safely and effectively:

This playbook encourages programs to engage in the [Quality Improvement Cycle](#) in developing reopening plans. The Quality Improvement Cycle allows programs to anchor actions to the expectation of continuous improvement—one that is needed as we navigate the uncertainty of the COVID-19 era.

1 Pause and Plan

2 Create a task force to assess the needs for reopening

3 Communicate with families, children, staff, and your community

4 Develop protocols and plans for a safe reopening that includes guidance from health officials

5 Re-open your program confidently and implement your plans and protocols

Action 1: Pause and Plan

Take a step back

The first action step in the reopening process is to take a step back and consider how to best balance service to Head Start children and families and recognition of the pandemic's impact on individuals. In this era of uncertainty, sometimes it feels like the right thing to do is to jump in and go. However, in this situation it is important to think of the big picture and the impact that the plan to reopen may have on program outcomes. Jumping in can be easier to do—but thoughtful planning is necessary for long-term success.

Program directors say that the biggest lesson they have learned during the process of reopening is that **any plan to reopen should start with the well-being of staff as a priority**.

Programs should also pause and process the moment as a team. Because most of the work leading up to closing and reopening was focused on getting programs ready for children and families, directors need to make intentional efforts to check in with program staff. While it can be difficult to take a moment to connect with others when there is so much work to do, outcomes for children and families are stronger when programs are able to connect around content with like professionals.

As a community, Head Start can do more together than alone. With the uncertainty caused by the challenges from COVID-19, it is more important than ever that programs pause and take a moment to connect and recharge.

NHSA created the virtual engagement platform, The Block, to support Head Start staff, teachers, parents, and administrators in creating connections with others who share their commitment to the Head Start community.

Remember, when it is the hardest to plug into your network, that is when you need to do it the most.

> "Catch your breath, pause, and recognize that this is a heavy time for everyone."
>
> Head Start Program Director, Michigan

Resources

NHSA's [The Block](#)
Online platform for communication between Head Start members, parents, and staff from across the country.

NHSA's [Nurturing Staff Wellness](#)
Toolkit highlighting resources and suggestions for nurturing staff wellness.

Office of Head Start's [Promoting Staff and Family Well-Being Website](#)
Resources for supporting staff and family well-being, including strategies for focusing on managing stress, parental depression, and more.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's [Training and Technical Assistance Related to COVID-19](#)
SAMHSA's comprehensive list of resources for coping with the effects of widespread public health crises.

Bellwether Education Partners' [Reground, Prioritize, Plan, Connect Toolkit for 2020-21 Reopening](#)
A tool for education leaders for how to approach reopening their schools, focusing on asking the essential questions that lead to the style of reopening best suited to that community's needs.

New York State Department of Health's [Interim COVID-19 Guidance for Child Care and Day Camp Programs](#)
New York State's guidance on opening child care and day camp programs with precautions to protect against the spread of COVID-19.

Action 2: Create a Task Force

Assess the needs for reopening

After pausing and reconnecting with staff, create a task force to assist in the planning and the identification of considerations for reopening. The task force can ensure the reopening plan is responsive to local needs, and help with logistics like securing the personal protective equipment (PPE) needed to open centers safely.

When planning who to include in the reopening task force, consider the question, "*Who will need to hear from us, and how will we communicate with them?*" This question can lead to reaching out to local health care workers, parents, mental health professionals, local business owners, public schools, and local elected officials.

Once set up, the task force can offer input to the question, **"*How will we know when it is time to reopen, and how will we measure our effectiveness in reopening?*"** This group can help in defining what success will look like in reopening. Including local stakeholders in defining success is an important strategy for building consensus and ensuring your goals meet the unique needs of individual programs and communities. Beyond planning, the task force can be a reliable source to help programs get the items needed for a safe reopening. For example, one program shared that they order supplies by connecting with peers in the local community to identify suppliers who can fulfill requirements for the local program:

"*We are ordering PPE supplies and finding the resources by using the peers within the NHSA community. We found someone in our community who could make masks that have a clear mouth so that children can see [each other speak]. For ordering the supplies, we included a Google Doc and asked all managers to update what they needed...when it was time to order we could see what everyone needed and could make a quick order*," said the NHSA Task Force Member.

In addition to support in planning for reopening, also engage the task force in developing contingency plans. The task force can be an extension of your team in continuing to offer insight and support planning and re-planning.

Resources

McKinsey & Company's [Three Keys to Better Decision Making](#)

A guide on key practices and considerations to focus on based on the type of decision being made.

NHSA's [Head Start Data Analytics Playbook](#)

NHSA's playbook that uses data to suggest best methods of practice for Head Start programs, including Family and Community Engagement, Health Services, and more.

CDC Foundation's [Evolving Your COVID-19 Strategy for Child Care Leaders](#)

Online seminars discussing a risk analysis framework for retailers, childcare providers, and elementary and secondary educators to use in making operational decisions.

"The pandemic has caused us to think about programming differently. We created a COVID-19 response team... there are many different people who are a part of this team. We wanted to make sure to have many perspectives including parents, teachers, and managers."

NHSA Task Force Member

Action 3: Communicate

Communicate with families, children, staff, and your community

When planning how to re-open your program's centers, be sure to proactively communicate with families, children, staff, and the community about reopening planning. As plans are developing, focus on keeping staff up to speed through regular outreach activities. Engage staff by holding weekly meetings online or by phone while centers are closed to share updates on plans for re-opening and for continuing services.

Consider sending surveys to staff to better understand what concerns they may have about re-opening. An example survey for staff shared included two short response questions:

1. How do you feel about returning to work?
2. What are you most concerned about when thinking about returning to work?

In addition to updating staff and asking for their feedback on plans, NHSA recommends that all staff receive training on new procedures and processes to ensure a safe reopening of centers. Even if a staff member is not expected to be interacting with students directly, he or she can become a part of a list of prepared staff who can step in when a substitute is needed.

When thinking about preparing children and families for returning, NHSA recommends programs invite parents to inform the planning process. Involving parents in the reopening discussion will ensure a critical perspective is included in your planning, and will also support your program's recruitment and enrollment efforts. Additionally, providing information on how children and staff will be kept safe through multimedia can help prepare children for what to expect when centers reopen.

Finally, when planning for reopening, be sure to reach out to your school district partners to identify new ways to support successful kindergarten transition for Head Start children during the COVID-19 era.

"Since we will be missing most of our transition activities for children going to kindergarten, we have contacted a local kindergarten teacher who is making the families a video and will be talking about kindergarten, what the expectations are, what their meal service looks like. She will also share what kindergarten skills they would like to see children come in with. This will hopefully make the children feel more prepared entering the public school. This has been a big request from our families...What about transition?" said NHSA Task Force Member.

Resources

NHSA's Head Start Language Playbook
NHSA's resource for Head Start staff to effectively communicate Head Start's mission and values.

North Carolina Preschool Programs' Eligibility Determination and Enrollment in COVID-19
This document highlights changes in Head Start enrollment and eligibility procedures, as well as funding flexibilities.

Office of Head Start's Collaborating Actively in Meaningful Planning (CAMP) Webinar Series
A free six-week webinar on offering Head Start and Early Head Start services during COVID-19.

Conscious Discipline's COVID-19 Printables
A collection of printables like Coronavirus social stories, including resources in Spanish.

> "We began holding weekly Zoom calls to stay in contact with parents. They were important because we needed to get a sense of what they needed for reopening and how we could support *them*."
>
> NHSA Task Force Member

Action 4: Outline Protocols

Develop protocols and plans for a safe reopening based on guidance from health officials

An NHSA Task Force Member shared, "Through the reopening task force, we created a preparedness and response plan. In this plan we include three options, (A, B, and C):

- **Plan A** – opening all centers
- **Plan B** – partial opening with some virtual learning and some in-person planning
- **Plan C** – a plan in case we open up virtually again."

Next, draft documents detailing the new protocols and plans for re-opening centers. Include relevant guidance from health officials and share these plans with staff and families well before your reopening date. Additionally, online information sessions and training for staff and families should be held as part of welcoming them back to centers.

Protocols will vary by program and should be customized for individual programs, but four components of communicating them should be included in every reopening plan:

1. **A welcome back letter from program leadership** that includes information on program changes, provides encouragement, and shares protocols and information on stopping the spread of COVID-19. Here's an example from MN United Community Action Partnership.

2. **A detailed list of health and safety precautions** taken in advance of reopening and those that will be taken once the program has reopened.

3. **A detailed list of activities to minimize exposure** during various components of the program, including, but not limited to changes concerning: recruitment and enrollment; arrival/transportation procedures, temperature and symptom screening; the use of masks; meals, naps, hygiene/toileting/diapering, and outdoor time; dismissal; and off-campus activities.

4. **A summary of how your program will innovate** to continue to support early learning, health, and family well-being under the new protocols.

Resources

California's COVID-19 Guidance for Childcare Programs and Providers

A collection of printables like Coronavirus social stories, including resources in Spanish.

New England Head Start Association's Program Reopening and Operating Planning Template

A collection of printables like Coronavirus social stories, including resources in Spanish.

Office of Head Start's COVID-19 & the Head Start Community

A collection of printables like Coronavirus social stories, including resources in Spanish.

Los Angeles County Schools' Rising to the Challenge of COVID-19: A Planning Framewokr for the 2020-21 School Year

A collection of printables like Coronavirus social stories, including resources in Spanish.

New York State's Reopening New York: Guidelines for Child Care and Day Camp Programs Guidelines

A collection of printables like Coronavirus social stories, including resources in Spanish.

Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes

A collection of printables like Coronavirus social stories, including resources in Spanish.

Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Coronavirus (COVID-19) Webpage

A colection of printables like Coronavirus social stories, including resources in Spanish.

Action 5: Implementation

Reopen your program confidently and implement your plans and protocols

The fifth and final recommended action is to reopen confidently. The planning process can be daunting and deliberation can go on indefinitely, if allowed. Instead view your plan as a dynamic blueprint that is subject to change as needed.

Consider developing a phased approach to reopening centers that follows the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's guidelines and allows time to reflect on how it is working before bringing everyone back. Finally, include in reopening procedures details on how new developments in the management of COVID-19 will be monitored, and commit that your program will continue to follow guidelines from health officials.

"There is no playbook for what comes next, but there are some guidelines. Because no one knows what will happen as restrictions are eased, public officials would be well advised to move cautiously, monitoring results at each step.

Mistakes are inevitable.

The people will accept imperfection—but only if leaders are willing to acknowledge error and change course."

William A. Galson, The Brookings Institution, 2020

Resources

StudioMLA Architects' [**Reopening Childcare: The CDC Guidelines and helpful hints on how to meet them**](#)

A collection of printables like Coronavirus social stories, including resources in Spanish.

YMCA of Metro Atlanta's [**First Responder Childcare Program**](#)

A collection of printables like Coronavirus social stories, including resources in Spanish.

Venice Family Clinic's [**Cleaning and Classroom Environment Checklist**](#)

A collection of printables like Coronavirus social stories, including resources in Spanish.

Clayton Early Learning's [**Reopening Guide**](#)

A collection of printables like Coronavirus social stories, including resources in Spanish.

McKinsey and Company's [**How to safely reopen schools after COVID-19 closures**](#)

A collection of printables like Coronavirus social stories, including resources in Spanish.

Center for Disease Control and Prevention's [**Workplaces During the Covid-19 Pandemic Decision Tree Tool**](#)

A collection of printables like Coronavirus social stories, including resources in Spanish.

Action Planning Worksheet

Repen Safely and Effectively

Use this worksheet to develop a plan for reopening that considers the five actions offered in this playbook. The worksheet follows the Quality Improvement Cycle, a dynamic process that encourages constant activity and effort.

	Pause & Plan	Create a Task Force	Get Feedback	Outline Protocols	Implement
Plan What will you do? Who will be responsible? Who will be impacted? How will you do this? What resources are needed? When will this start? When will this be complete? What are the desired outcomes?					
Do What did you plan to do? What did you do? What did you not do?					
Study How did it go? Did you achieve your goal? What did work? What did not work?					
Act Are you going to (A) adopt, (B) adapt, or (C) abandon what you did? Why or why not?					