

# The Nest Forest School: Emerging Practices & Responses to COVID-19

By The Nest Forest School

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# Family Q&A

## CHANGES TO THE NEST FOREST SCHOOL

**How will The Nest be different?** Due to being primarily based outdoors, The Nest will continue much as before. Our goal is to maintain the program experience while adapting to evolving health and safety guidelines.

**Will drop-off and pick-up change?** Drop-off and pick-up times will remain the same (8:30-8:45 am and 3:15-3:30 pm). However, family members are asked to wash or sanitize their hands upon arrival, and practice physical distancing during drop-off and pick-up, keeping a caribou (or 2 metres) between themselves and other families.

**What is pre-screening?** We ask families to take their child's temperature every morning as a way of “pre-screening” for The Nest. There will also be a daily health check/survey for educators and participants at drop-off each day. **If your child has any symptoms of being sick, please stay home.**

**Will you practice physical distancing?** Yukon Government has recognized that physical distancing is challenging to implement in the early years, and can often cause emotional and mental distress. With this in mind, extra precautions will be taken by educators at The Nest, and families alike to minimize possible spread (e.g. the same educators will remain with the group day-to-day, families will maintain appropriate physical distance from each other, etc.).

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## MANAGING ILLNESS

**If my child has a cold, can they come to The Nest?** No. If your child has any cold or flu-like symptoms, such as a cough, fever, shortness of breath, or a general feeling of being unwell, they must stay home until they are well and symptom-free.

**What if my child becomes sick during program?** Should your child become sick while at The Nest, they will be isolated away from other children (when possible) and you will be notified to come and pick them up immediately.

**What if an educator becomes sick?** Just like participants, educators will be required to leave program if they become sick during the day at program. Educators will remain at home until they are well enough to return (no symptoms), replaced by on-call staff.

**How will you encourage proper hand washing?** Educators will remind participants to wash their hands often throughout the day including but not limited to: arrival at the program, before eating, after sneezing or coughing, after using the washroom, and at the end of the day. We will have portable hand sanitizer accessible during forest time.

**Will children wear masks?** Following current recommendations, any participants under 5 will not be required to wear masks during program, but they are welcome to if that feels right for your child.

**Should parents/guardians wear masks when dropping off and picking up their child?**

Following current recommendations, parents/guardians will be required to wear masks at pick up and drop off, whether indoors or outdoors, when interacting in close proximity with staff members or other families.

**Should I send a mask with my child?** Yes. The mask would be used if your child or another child becomes ill during the day to help limit exposure to others until the child who is ill can be picked up, or if that is your child's comfort and preference.

**What happens if there is a second wave of COVID-19 in Yukon?** In such an instance, The Nest will follow and adhere to the updated health guidelines of Yukon Government.

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## Safety & Wellness

At The Nest, we are outside for the majority of our days. We have a small class size, and consistent educators on the ground. All of these factors contribute to a healthy learning environment in the midst of the uncertainty of COVID-19.

Our prevention measures and mitigation strategies at The Nest place an emphasis on *reducing* physical contact versus *physical distancing*. In other words, strict physical distancing will not be observed at The Nest. In these early years, enforcing physical distancing could impact social and emotional learning. Close interaction, through playing and socializing, is central to early childhood development and will not be discouraged at The Nest.

With this in mind, additional responsibilities are required of families and educators to prevent further spread of COVID-19 within the community.

### Drop Off and Pick Up

- **Masks:** Masks are now required in public spaces in Yukon. We ask family members to wear a mask during drop off and pick up, whether outdoors or indoors, when interacting closely with staff members.
  - **Please note: The entrance of The Nest Forest School is considered “public space”.** Should families be entering the building for any reason, a mask must be worn.
  - Following current recommendations, masks are not mandated for children ages 2-5, therefore participants will not be required to wear masks during program.
- Families will be required to answer screening questions with an educator upon arrival at The Nest each day.
- Sign in/out: Staff will meet participants and families at The Nest or yard entrance. To reduce high-contact objects, The Nest staff will sign in/out the participant. Additional pick-up people (beyond the primary and secondary caregiver listed) will need to be added to each child’s file, and will be required to show ID in order to sign out children.
- Families will be asked to maintain physical distance between themselves and other families, educators, and participants. Families may be asked to wait outside of The Nest area during pick-up and drop-off to ease traffic.
- Physical distancing signs will be visible to families at the pick up/drop off area, as well as reminders not to enter The Nest area if sick.
- Participants will wash hands (with soap and water and/or alcohol-based sanitizer) upon arrival at The Nest each day.

## Screening

- Educators members, participants and families must not attend program if they are sick, *even if symptoms resemble a mild cold.*
  - Symptoms include: fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose, nasal congestion, headache, and a general feeling of being unwell.
- Families are required to pre-screen their child, checking their temperature before The Nest in addition to answering screening questions with an educator upon arrival at The Nest each day. Surveys will include asking if there are any of the following symptoms:
  - Cough;
  - Fever;
  - Shortness of breath; or
  - A general feeling of being unwell.

### **Educators and participants with any of these symptoms cannot not attend the program.**

- Records will be kept of attendance, screening, and of any visitors or additional people attending the program each day, in order to facilitate contact tracing in the event of an outbreak.

## Handwashing

- Educators will practice and role-model exemplary hand washing and sanitizing.
- Educators will remind and encourage participants to wash their hands regularly, and carry hand sanitizer when in the forest (when wash stations are not available).
- Hand washing posters will be posted visibly around indoor space.
- Hand sanitizer will be available at entrance for families, educators, and scheduled guests.
- Hand washing/sanitizing should take place (although not exclusively) :
  - Upon arrival at program
  - Before eating food
  - After being in contact with someone who may have been sick
  - After touching frequently touched surfaces (doorknobs, washroom surfaces, etc.)
  - After using the washroom
  - After using common items (tools, loose parts, craft supplies, etc.)
  - After coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose

## Cleaning & Disinfecting

- Frequently touched surfaces (doorknobs, taps, washroom surfaces, easy-to-clean loose parts, etc.) will be cleaned with disinfectant at the beginning/end of each day.
- Disinfectant spray will be easily accessible to educators (and volunteers) to distribute to participants as needed throughout the day.

## Meals & Food Handling

- Participants will bring their own food from home.
  - If a participant does not have a home-provided meal for the day, and if a family member cannot drop off food within a reasonable timeline, educators may provide food to the participant. In this case, educators will serve individually wrapped food directly to the participants.
  - A “no food sharing” policy will be practiced at The Nest. This includes any items that may be sent in for special events (e.g. birthdays).
- Participants and educators will wash hands before and after eating.
- All participants must bring their own **labelled** water bottles.
  - If a participant forgets a water bottle, The Nest will provide them with a clean and sanitized drinking vessel for the day.
- Participants must **label** personal belongings with their name including food, water bottles, clothing layers, and backpacks.
  - *Personal belongings such as toys are not permitted at The Nest.*
- Following recommendations from Yukon Government, activities involving child participation in food preparation indoors will not take place at this time.

## Visitors

Visiting Elders, Knowledge Holders and other local experts are an important part of our programming at The Nest. The knowledge and experiences shared helps to enrich the connection between participants and the land where they play and learn.

The wellbeing of Elders, Knowledge Holders, community members, and Nest participants is important and must be considered and balanced in these uncertain times. During the uncertainty of COVID-19, The Nest will follow Yukon Government guidelines about visitors to child care centres. When visitors are permitted, any guests to The Nest will follow the same steps of daily pre-screening and screening questionnaire followed by participants and staff. Records will be kept on file of any visitors to the program to aid in any contact tracing, should it be required.

## Illness

The Nest Forest School's standard illness policy outlines that a child *cannot* attend The Nest Forest School if one or more of the following conditions exist:

1. The illness prevents a child from participating in the program activities
2. The illness results in greater need for care than staff at The Nest can provide without compromising the care of other children
3. A child has any of the following conditions:
  - Head lice
  - Hepatitis A
  - Impetigo
  - Measles
  - Mumps
  - Conjunctivitis (pinkeye) with yellow/white discharge (pus)
  - Rash
  - Ringworm
  - COVID-19
  - Rubella (German Measles)
  - Scabies
  - Shingles (uncovered lesions)
  - Strep throat
  - Tuberculosis
  - Vomiting
  - Whooping cough (pertussis)

In addition to the standard practice of staying home when sick (outlined above) to ensure the health and well-being of all participants and staff, The Nest is following the guidelines of Yukon Government regarding COVID-19 prevention, informed by the Traffic Light Symptoms System (see below) and requires all children and staff to stay home from The Nest if they have:

- any symptoms of common cold, influenza, COVID-19 or other infectious respiratory disease;
- travelled outside of British Columbia, the Northwest Territories or Nunavut in the last 14 days; or
- had close contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 and have been directed to self-isolate by Yukon Communicable Disease Control.

**Please note: At this time, refunds will not be offered for any absences due to illness.**

## Traffic Light Symptoms Guide

The Nest Forest School is using Yukon Government's guidance to determine whether a child can return to Forest School and return to regular programming. The "traffic light system" provides a scaled response according to the symptoms that are manifesting themselves (see [Appendix 1](#)). For instance, symptoms of **fever/chills, cough, or shortness of breath or difficulty breathing** are considered Red symptoms, with which a child may not attend Forest School until directed it is safe to do so by a medical professional, and with which testing for COVID-19 is highly recommended.

## Participants - Illness at The Nest

- If a child develops symptoms while at The Nest, they will be isolated away from other children. A parent/guardian will be notified to come and pick them up immediately.
- If a child requires close contact and care, educators will continue to care for the child until the parent or guardian is able to pick them up. The child, and any educators interacting with them, should wear a mask.
- Any items used by the child while isolated will be cleaned and disinfected as soon as the child has been picked up.
  - Items that cannot be cleaned and disinfected (e.g. paper, books, pelts, etc.) should be removed from The Nest and stored in a sealed container for an appropriate number of days (depending on the material)
- Children can return to The Nest when they are symptom free, or if a healthcare provider has cleared them to return.
- At this time, The Nest can not offer refunds for absence due to illness, including COVID-19.

## Educators - Illness at The Nest

- If an educator becomes ill while at work, they will immediately remove themselves from contact with others. They will contact a Director and go home.  
**Guidance from Yukon Government:**
  - Symptomatic employees will be required to self-isolate until tested for COVID-19 and then follow the guidance of the public health professional (e.g. nurse).
  - If the test results are negative for COVID-19 but the employee remains ill and/or symptomatic, they should remain on sick leave and follow the guidance of the public health professional.
- Educators should remain at home if experiencing symptoms until cleared by a healthcare provider.

## Closure

Should a second wave of COVID-19 reach Whitehorse, The Nest will follow and adhere to the updated health guidelines of Yukon Government.

- Programs may be cancelled with short notice if staff shortages occur due to illness.
- Program cancellation can happen prior to or during a day of The Nest. In the event of cancellation during the day, families will be notified and asked to pick their children up immediately.



## Additional Precautions

- **Masks**
  - Masks are now required in public spaces in Yukon. **Please note: the entrance of The Nest Forest School is considered public space** - should families be entering the building for any reason, a mask must be worn.
  - Following current recommendations, masks are not mandated for children ages 2-5, therefore participants will not be required to wear masks during program. However, all participants are encouraged to do what feels best, and are welcome to wear a mask indoors if that feels right for your child.
  - Educators will wear masks when administering First Aid
- **Volunteers, Guests & Visitors**
  - Any persons visiting The Nest and who are not participants or educators must read and sign the Waiver of Liability regarding COVID-19, and must complete the appropriate daily COVID-19 screening questionnaire before entering the site.

# Appendix 1

## Can my child go to daycare or return to regular activities?

COVID-19 guidance for children aged six months through five years. 10/16/20

**Observe or talk to your child every day to see if they have any new or worsening symptoms.**

If your child has mild symptoms, they still need to self-isolate at home, but you can keep them at home for 24 hours to see if they get better or if new symptoms start.

**Pre-existing conditions don't apply.** For example, a child with asthma may have a cough, and some children get frequent runny noses during cold weather. You might want to talk to your daycare provider about what is normal for them.

### RED symptoms

- Fever/chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing

### YELLOW symptoms

- Headache
- Runny nose or congestion
- Sore throat
- Nausea/vomiting or diarrhea
- Fatigue, or just unwell (acute/intense fatigue, generalized muscle aches not related to physical exertion, significant loss of appetite)



If your child has **one or more RED** symptoms, testing is **STRONGLY recommended**.

**Your child should NOT attend daycare or take part in other activities until you get their test results from your health care provider.**

If you don't have your child tested:

If symptoms clear up sooner than 10 days without testing, self isolation is still required unless you are told otherwise by your family physician or your rural primary health care provider.

In this age group, these symptoms can be a sign of many different illnesses. If you feel your child is sick please seek urgent care.



If your child has **YELLOW** symptoms, **but no red symptoms** (such as fever), testing is optional.

If you have your child tested:

Your child should **NOT** attend daycare until you get their test results from your health care provider.

If you don't have your child tested:

Your child can return to regular activities when symptoms have gone away.

**Exceptions:** If your child is **throwing up or has diarrhea**, keep them at home until 24 hours after symptoms have gone away.

If **runny nose/nasal congestion** lasts longer than 24 hours, is mild and not getting worse, and the child is otherwise well, they may return to daycare.

**You don't need a written note from your health care provider for your child to return to daycare or regular activities.**



**Your child has NO symptoms.**

**Your child can go to daycare or return to regular activities.**

**If old enough, continue to encourage them to follow the Safe 6.**

**This guidance DOES NOT apply if:**

- Your child is a contact of someone who has COVID-19.
- Your child is severely immunocompromised or has a complex medical history.
- Your child recently returned from travel outside Yukon.

