



**VERMONT CHILD CARE
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PLAN
July 2021**

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Section 1 – Introduction

When one thinks of a disaster in Vermont, it is most common to think of winter storms or flooding. The fact is Vermont is susceptible to the same natural and human-caused disasters as any other area of the country. Emergency planning helps ensure child care programs, their staff, and the State of Vermont are prepared to react in a manner that protects the safety of children, staff, and child care businesses during an emergency, disaster, or pandemic event. Emergency planning also establishes mechanisms to help programs during the recovery phase. Safe environments for children are essential for child well-being, to assist families with resuming work activities, to reduce the risks of income loss for programs, to support the stability of Vermont's economy, and for returning to normalcy. As such, Vermont has developed a system to ensure that child care providers are prepared, and safety measures are in place before, during, and after an emergency, disaster, or pandemic event.

Vermont's system begins with the Governor's Office and Vermont Emergency Management who have the overarching responsibility for formulating and updating statewide emergency preparedness procedures, arrangements, agreements, and coordinating all emergency and disaster relief efforts. To learn more, visit [Vermont Emergency Management's website](#).

Vermont has additional documents to support this effort. First, the Child Development Division has a Continuity of Operations Plan that outlines critical functions performed by the Child Development Division; how quickly the functions need to be restored; and the staff, technology, and resources needed. Next, the Child Development Division has a procedure titled, "Emergency Response and Recovery for Child Care Procedure." This procedure identifies how the Child Development Division staffing resources and systems are leveraged to support one or more child care programs experiencing and/or recovering from a disaster, emergency, or pandemic event. Finally, the State of Vermont created the "Emergency Response and Recovery Planning Guide for Child Care Providers." This guide supports child care programs with writing their own emergency preparedness plans. As such, it includes an emergency response plan template and a template for documenting fire drills. This guidance may be found on the [Child Development Division's website](#).

This "Vermont Child Care Emergency Preparedness Plan" provides information about how the State of Vermont will respond using a coordinated effort while managing an emergency, disaster, or pandemic event and during the recovery phase. The "Vermont Child Care Emergency Preparedness Plan" will be reviewed periodically and posted on the [Child Development Division's website](#).

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are referenced and abbreviated as noted throughout this Plan:

- Agency of Human Services – "AHS"
- Agency of Human Services, Department for Children and Families, Child Development Division – "CDD"
- Bright Futures Information System – "BFIS"

- Child Care Development Block Grant – "CCDBG"
- Child Care Development Fund – "CCDF"
- Child Care Financial Assistance Program – "CCFAP"
- Child Development Division Information System – "CDDIS"
- Continuity of Operations Plan – "COOP"
- Northern Lights at the Community College of Vermont – "Northern Lights at CCV"
- Vermont Child Care Emergency Preparedness Plan – "the Plan"
- Vermont Department of Health – "VDH"
- Vermont Emergency Management – "VEM"

Definitions

- **BFIS:** A web-based information and management system used by the CDD to communicate with child care and education providers and parents. It is used to manage processes, actions, documents and information related to child care and early education licensing; the qualifications and professional development experiences of early childhood and afterschool professionals; and Child Care Financial Assistance Program and other payments.
- **CDDIS:** new information and management system which is being developed by the CDD and will replace BFIS. CDDIS will be used to communicate with child care and education providers and parents. In addition, it will be used to manage processes, actions, documents and information related to child care and early education licensing; the qualifications and professional development experiences of early childhood and afterschool professionals; and Child Care Financial Assistance Program and other payments.
- **Parent:** A birth or adoptive parent, legal guardian, foster parent, or any other person having responsibility for, or legal custody of a child.

Section 2 – Coordination with Key Partners

In keeping with final rule 45 CFR 98.16(aa) the Vermont AHS, the lead agency for administering CCDF, has coordinated and collaborated with an array of critical stakeholders in the development and implementation of this Plan. The following outlines partner engagement in the development of this Plan.

Plan Development and Review

A state planning committee was convened by the CDD to engage stakeholders, obtain input, and strengthen collaboration of key activities. This committee had representation from:

- AHS, Department of Health
- CDD, Child Care Licensing Unit
- Vermont Department of Emergency Management
- Child Care Referral Services
- Building Bright Futures

Additional stakeholders provided feedback using a document review process:

- Department of Public Safety, Division of Fire Safety
- Agency of Education, Early Education Team
- Additional CDD Staff

The committee and additional stakeholders reviewed this Plan, the CDD's internal procedure titled: "Emergency Response and Recovery for Child Care Procedure," and the State of Vermont's "Emergency Response and Recovery Planning Guide for Child Care Providers."

Training and Support on Implementation

[Child Care Licensing Regulations](#) require licensed child care programs to have a written emergency response plan approved by the CDD's Child Care Licensing Unit. The criteria for this plan are found in the Child Care Licensing Regulations for each provider type. A review of the program's emergency response plan must be included in each staff member's orientation to the program.

The [CDD's professional development website](#) provides information about emergency response training. Vermont's Early Childhood and Afterschool Professional Development System is called Northern Lights at CCV. The [Northern Lights at CCV's website](#) also has training information.

Encouraged Partners

The State strongly encourages programs to foster connections at the local level. These local connections are essential in an actual emergency, disaster, or pandemic event. Programs should establish these "on the ground" relationships and contacts ahead of time.

State Agency Partnerships

Coordination between the lead agency and VEM is outlined in and supported by the AHS COOP. Vermont understands and prioritizes the essential nature of cross-departmental cooperation and collaboration and recognizes the especially critical function this plays in times of emergency.

Section 3 – Background and Scope of Plan

In September of 2014, the federal CCDBG was reauthorized. The CCDBG provides essential child care funding, administered by the Vermont AHS. These funds are referred to as the CCDF. CCDF funds, along with the required state matching funds, support Vermont's child care subsidy program (CCFAP), Child Care Licensing, and a robust set of child care quality activities, including a quality rating and improvement system. A key component of the CCDBG Act of 2014 was the inclusion of specific requirements for states regarding the development and dissemination of statewide child care emergency plans.

Vermont's Plan focuses on three essential components of emergency management:

- Mitigation
- Response
- Recovery

Additionally, the Plan focuses on specific requirements of reauthorization. Namely, in Section 658E(c) (2) of the CCDBG Act of 2014, the Plan must include:

- Continuation of CCFAP and child care services after a disaster;
- Requirements that child care providers receiving CCDF funding have in place procedures for evacuation, relocation, shelter-in-place, lock-down, communication and reunification with families;
- COOP plans;
- Specific accommodations for infants and toddlers, children with disabilities and children with chronic medical conditions; and
- Requirements that child care providers receiving CCFAP have in place procedures for staff and volunteer emergency preparedness training and practice drills.

The "Emergency Response and Recovery Planning Guide for Child Care Providers" addresses the following areas of emergency management for child care programs:

- Prevention
- Mitigation
- Response
- Recovery

The "Emergency Response and Recovery for Child Care Procedure" explains how the CDD will serve licensed child care programs in support of continuity of services during and after an emergency, disaster, or pandemic event.

In accordance with section 658, Vermont has developed the following Plan with the intent to identify and communicate processes and supports for child care in the event of an individual, local, regional,

or statewide emergency, disaster, or pandemic event. The Plan applies to all licensed child care programs. In Vermont, a program is required to be a licensed child care program to participate in CCFAP. Approved Relative Child Care Providers are the only type of license exempt program that are also allowed to participate in CCFAP.

Section 4 – Assumptions

The following assumptions are foundational in development of the Plan:

- Emergencies and disasters present themselves in all forms. While some provide advanced warning such as weather-related events, others may come about with little to no warning. The best way to prepare for a disaster is planning and practice.
- Child Care is an essential component for families and should be restored as quickly as possible. This offers continuity and comfort to children and enables the least possible disruption to families and their employers.
- All licensed child care programs are required to develop, provide staff orientation, share with parents, routinely practice, and be fully prepared to follow their emergency preparedness and evacuation plan in the event of an emergency.
- Time frames provided throughout the Plan, unless specifically noted, are merely intended to serve as guidelines for activities and may vary depending on the specific circumstance of the emergency.
- Child care does not operate in isolation of other state activities, and so, this Plan serves merely as a supplement to and not a replacement of the COOP plans in place for each Vermont state department, most notably the CDD's COOP. Further, during a state of emergency, all departments act under the Governor's Office and VEM guidance.

Section 5 - Communication

The "Vermont Child Care Emergency Preparation Plan" works as a complimentary guide to the [State Emergency Management Plan](#). The State Emergency Management Plan addresses Vermont's hazard and threat environment, including natural, technological, and human-caused emergencies or disasters. The State Emergency Management Plan forms the basis of the State of Vermont emergency management system, which includes the collaboration of all state agencies and departments that have operational responsibilities and capabilities across five mission areas – Prevention, Protection, Mitigation, Response, and Recovery. The State Emergency Management Plan assigns functional responsibilities to state agencies, departments, and organizations to provide coordinated guidance, relief, and assistance to the local jurisdictions and people of Vermont before, during, and after disasters. The State Emergency Management Plan is revised on a five-year rotational schedule by VEM.

The State Emergency Management Plan identifies important considerations when issuing public information in an emergency. These considerations are centered around providing timely, consistent, and accurate information to the media, the public, local and regional agencies, and organizations. Utilization of the Emergency Alert System, VT-Alert, the media, personal notifications, and alert sirens. VEM allows towns, state, and federal government agencies, and select non-profit organizations to adopt the use of the VT-Alert system to issue alerts and notifications.

Communication from Child Care Providers to State Authorities

In the event of an emergency, providers should first and foremost focus on executing the portions of their plan that best address their needs in the immediate circumstances. The initial focus during an emergency will typically center on implementing one of the four following strategies:

- Lockdown,
- Immediate evacuation,
- Sheltering in place, or
- Evacuation to a relocation facility.

Within twenty-four (24) hours (or sooner if it is safe to do so) of an emergency, disaster, or pandemic event; child care providers must report the following information to the CDD's Child Care Licensing Unit:

- The nature of the emergency,
- The status of the facility, and
- Any relevant information about the well-being of the children.

This is supported in the Child Care Licensing Regulations for all licensed and registered child care programs and providers.

Communication from State Authorities with Providers and Interagency Communications

In the event of an emergency, the Governor's Office and VEM provide leadership and direction to state department leadership. Vermont has a "VT-Alert" system in place for state officials to communicate to the public. Individuals can sign up for [VT-Alert notifications](#).

To the maximum extent possible, CDD's Child Care Licensing Unit will make individual contact with each child care program to assess their status and provide direction to affected programs. To support the CDD's ability to communicate, child care providers are required to keep their program's account in BFIS/CDDIS up to date with their phone number and email address. In addition to the VT-Alert system, CDD will use website postings, emails, and/or broadcast messaging to inform child care programs of relevant information as part of its coordinated public messaging strategies.

After an emergency, disaster, or pandemic event; it is expected that state leadership, including officials from AHS, CDD, and VEM will meet to determine if the circumstance is severe enough to suspend all licensed child care programs in the immediate disaster or outbreak declared area or to suspend on a case-by-case basis.

Notification to Department for Children and Families, Child Development Division

During an emergency, disaster, or pandemic event, AHS will collect and provide updates to the CDD as to the impacts throughout the response period.

Support from Key Networks and Partners

During a large-scale emergency, disaster, or pandemic event; state officials will secure support from Vermont's existing support networks for child care programs, such as Building Bright Futures, Let's Grow Kids, Vermont Afterschool, Community Child Care Support Agencies, Northern Lights at CCV, Parent Child Centers, etcetera to establish a mechanism for strategic communications and exchange of information among the child care community to enhance response efforts.

Communication with Families

Child care providers must maintain up-to-date contact information for families and for families' emergency contacts. Also, child care providers should have a practice in place to take this information with them if an evacuation becomes necessary. Child care providers are responsible for the children until their parent or designee can retrieve them from the child care program. Before reporting that the child's parent or designee cannot be contacted or found, the child care provider should make multiple attempts to reach them using various methods. Child care providers should establish multiple points-of-contact options to reach out to parents or designees, such as emergency contact numbers, social media accounts, emails, and work locations.

FEMA's National Emergency Family Registry and Locator System (NEFRLS) is activated following a presidentially declared disaster to reunite families that have become separated because of the disaster. Individuals and families are encouraged to [register online](#) or by phone at 1-800-588- 9822, 24-hours a day, when activated.

A key part of family communication includes engagement of families in disaster planning activities as well as ensuring that all families are provided with and understand the child care provider's emergency plans and procedures. Examples of activities that child care providers are encouraged to engage in include:

- Routinely verifying the accuracy of emergency contact information on file;
- Handing out wallet cards that contain information on relocation sites and the child care provider's contact information;
- Discussing options for alternative methods of communication such as social media, email chains, text messages; and
- Asking in advance about unique needs that families might have in an emergency, disaster, or pandemic event.

Child care providers have a responsibility to ensure the same level of communication is available for families, whose primary language is not English. This begins with giving families translated documents and using a translator to answer these families' questions when they are enrolling their child(ren). For ongoing communication support, Child Care Licensing Regulations require staff's emergency contact phone numbers include the phone number for a translator. If an evacuation becomes necessary, child care providers should have a practice in place to take this information with them.

Media and Social Media

Recognizing that communications may be limited during an emergency, disaster, or pandemic event, Vermont will use and encourages all child care providers and families to utilize all available mechanisms for communication, including social media sites to provide necessary updates and resources to families. Communications to the public will be coordinated by designated departmental communications and public relations staff.

Section 6 – Reunification of Children with Families

Family reunification includes identifying the correct parent or designee, verifying their identity, and documenting the child's release to their custody. During a large-scale emergency, disaster, or pandemic event; this may be a difficult task. However, child care providers must understand and plan for the following:

- Children are the responsibility of the child care provider until their parent or approved designee can retrieve them from the child care program or temporary evacuation site.
- Child care providers are required to release children to either parent unless in possession of a court order that provides other instructions. Law enforcement may be contacted if assistance is needed.
- If all best efforts have been made and a child remains with the child care provider, the Department for Children and Families' Family Services Division and/or local law enforcement must be contacted.
- Large-scale emergencies, disasters, or pandemic events may result in children needing long-term care; the Department for Children and Families' Family Services Division will coordinate this.

Section 7 – Recovery

The State of Vermont has a [Recovery Mission Area Plan](#) within the Vermont State Emergency Management Plan that serves as the guiding document for all short-term, intermediate, and long-term recovery efforts for the State. The Recovery Mission Area Plan was developed to support emergency management and is generally based off the National Disaster Recovery Framework. The plan is scalable, flexible, and adaptable, coordinating structures to align key roles and responsibilities.

Child Care specific recovery actions are taken over the short-term to return vital life support systems to minimum standards and long-term to return life to normal or improved levels. Such measures include damage assessment, supplemental assistance to individuals and public entities, assessment of plans, procedures, arrangements and agreements, and the development of economic impact studies and methods to mitigate damages. Recovery efforts will be guided by Vermont COOPs developed by the AHS, DCF, and the CDD. These COOPs reflect the mission essential functions outlined in the State’s Recovery Mission Plan, coordinated through VEM.

During recovery, staff from Child Care Licensing, CCFAP, and Child Care Support Agencies will collect data on the impacts of the emergency, disaster, or pandemic event; the availability of child care; and the overall community impacts. Vermont will use various communication mechanisms to share information on recovery efforts, including emails, text alerts, social media, website updates, and the VT-Alert system.

A critical element of recovery is communication with families of children enrolled in child care and child care leadership and staff. Vermont recognizes the importance of assessing the scale of families who may require alternative care due to impacted child care programs and will prioritize this activity in its recovery efforts. Community Child Care Support Agencies will make efforts to support families in seeking and securing alternative care. Translation services are used when assisting families whose primary language is not English.

Child Care Licensing staff will support child care providers impacted by the event and assist with a reopening process for child care programs that may include approval to use temporary space and/or approval of provisional licenses as needed. Translation services are also used with child care providers whose primary language is not English.

After large-scale emergencies, disasters, or pandemic events; AHS will conduct an after-action assessment, in consultation with VEM to determine what factors should be considered in mitigating the effects of future events. This Plan will then be updated accordingly.

Section 8 – Continuation of Child Care Services

CDD's "Emergency Response and Recovery for Child Care Procedure" documents the process used to support continuation of child care services. For example, if an individual child care facility or family child care home is damaged or a large-scale emergency, disaster, or pandemic event occurs, and temporary locations are needed; CDD's Child Care Licensing staff will work individually with programs to obtain temporary site use approvals. Variances and provisional licenses are two mechanisms that support this option. Vermont also recognizes that temporary child care solutions, such as those offered at shelters, may be needed in times of wide-scale regional or state-wide emergency, disaster, or pandemic events. In the event this becomes necessary, coordination efforts will occur between the Red Cross, VEM, and CDD. While licensing may waive some rules temporarily during an emergency, disaster, or pandemic event; all critical health and safety requirements will be maintained.

Section 9 – Continuation of Child Care Subsidies

The CCFAP is the hub of child care financial assistance in Vermont. Administered in Vermont by the CDD, CCFAP staff assist low-income families by paying for child care on a families' behalf. In Vermont, child care is an entitlement program for qualifying families. Families whose income and life situations change because of an emergency, disaster, or pandemic event may be eligible for expedited approval.

CCFAP benefits are, by law, portable and follow the child. Therefore, during an emergency, disaster, or pandemic event that displaces families from their current child care program; families may move to other licensed child care programs as needed and funding will follow. This is true even if the licensed child care provider is operating at an emergency location, approved by CDD's Child Care Licensing Unit. All programs must complete and sign the "Provider Agreement, Part 1 Financial Services" in order to receive CCFAP payments. BFIS and CDDIS provides information on all available programs in Vermont. It is the responsibility of the CCFAP unit to work directly with child care providers to facilitate the processing of invoices for payment. In addition, Referral Specialists at each Community Child Care Support Agency will assist families on an individual basis.

The CDD's COOP has business continuity mechanisms in place to ensure continued payment of child care providers even during an emergency, disaster, or pandemic event.

Section 10 – Resources

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Federal Emergency Management Agency \(FEMA\)](#)
- [International Association of Chiefs of Police \(IACP\)](#)
- [National Association of School Nurses Disaster Resources](#)
- [National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care](#)
- [National School Safety Center](#)
- [Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development](#)
- [Vermont Agency of Education](#)
- [Vermont Department for Children and Families' Child Development Division](#)
- [Vermont Department of Health](#)
- [Vermont Emergency Management](#)
- [U.S. Department of Education Disaster Planning Website](#)
- [U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center](#)