

FAQ for Tennessee Head Start Programs in Response to COVID-19

Updated 3/27/2020

As part of Lyndon B. Johnson's National War on Poverty, federally funded Head Start programs were established in 1965 to promote school readiness for children of low-income eligible families who are between three and five years of age. In addition to academic readiness supports, Head Start (HS) programs offer wrap-around services inclusive of educational, nutritional, health, social and other service supports for children and their families.

Early Head Start (EHS), launched in 1995 to provide services and support to low-income eligible infants, toddlers, pregnant women and their families. Early Head Start programs are designed to enhance children's physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development. Wrap-around services are also provided to help pregnant women access comprehensive prenatal and postpartum care; support parents' efforts to fulfill their parental roles; and help parents move toward self-sufficiency.

In both Head Start and Early Head Start federally-funded programs, grantees are the actual entities or agencies who are recipients of the federal grant dollars. In Tennessee, there are 24 Head Start grantees that receive federal grant dollars to provide services to over 20,000 children in 414 locations across the state. Grantees are the entities that are recipients of the Head Start or Early Head Start federally awarded grants.

The Office of Head Start (OHS) does not mandate closure during a natural disaster, but they do require each Head Start facility to utilize their board of directors to make the decision on opening during such disasters.

1. *How do I know who qualifies for Head Start?*

Children from birth to age five who are from families with incomes below the poverty guidelines are eligible for Head Start and Early Head Start services. Children from homeless families and families receiving public assistance such as TANF or SSI are also eligible. Foster children are eligible regardless of their foster family's income.

2. *Where can I find more information about the poverty guidelines?*

The poverty guidelines are adjusted for families of different sizes and maybe used to determine financial eligibility for certain federal programs such as Head Start and Early Head Start services. The guidelines are issued each year in the Federal Register by the Department of Health and Human Services. These [poverty guidelines](#) may be used when determining a family's eligibility for Head Start and Early Head Start services.

3. *Where can I find a Head Start location near me?*

Families can use the [Head Start Center Locator](#) to find a site that best fits their needs. For families who are in need of additional guidance, they may contact the Tennessee Head Start State Collaborator, [Belva Weathersby](#) to get more information.

4. *Can Head Start funds be used to support non-Head Start activities during this pandemic?*

No, the national Office of Head Start (OHS) does not have regulatory or statutory flexibility to approve the use of federal Head Start funds for non-Head Start services. By law, Head Start Federal Funds can only be used to provide Head Start services to eligible children and families. –OHS, Dr. Deborah Bergeron, Director

5. *If the local Head Start program is closed, can the Head Start program use its facilities and staff to provide emergency child care for first responder's children?*

If a grantee, the entity awarded the federal Head Start grant dollars, offers or directs Head Start staff to support emergency child care operations in its own facilities, Head Start dollars cannot be used for salaries or any other costs associated with the child care operation. Head Start staff may receive wages for hours worked in another child care program, but only if the work they do is outside of the time they are expected to be available to support ongoing services to Head Start children and families. For example, a Head Start teacher working a late afternoon or night shift in an emergency child care setting would be working outside of the normal time for Head Start services and, thus, would be able to pay from the child care organization for that time. –OHS, Dr. Deborah Bergeron, Director

6. *If the local Head Start facilities are closed, can facilities be leased to another entity with their own emergency child care providers to care for first responder's children?*

Yes, Head Start facilities could be used for childcare in the circumstance described in the question. However, no Head Start funds could be used in these arrangements. If a grantee temporarily leases Head Start space to another entity to offer child care to first responders, there are legal, fiscal, and logistical implications. –OHS, Dr. Deborah Bergeron, Director

7. *What are some of the health and safety concerns of this request (stated above in question 6)?*

While Head Start programs have provided support to communities through many natural disasters, such as hurricanes and floods, this situation is much different. Programs are not reacting in the aftermath of a disaster, but are trying to reduce the spread of a virus by limiting contact among people. That is the basis for schools and other community closures. We must all bear this distinction in mind as we work together to meet critical ongoing needs. We must also recognize that first responders, medical professionals and support staff, and certain other workers are vital to response, and many do need child care. Balancing these priorities is a critical challenge. While grantees may choose to lease their space, they may also assume some oversight of the operation. If the grantee is engaged in any way in the oversight of operation, they are obligated to report to the local authorities any incidents of maltreatment, lack of supervision, or child abuse. –OHS, Dr. Deborah Bergeron, Director

8. *If the local Head Start wants to open prior to the school system opening (April 24), what steps do they need to take to do so?*

The OHS does not mandate closure during a natural disaster, but they do require each Head Start facility to have a board of directors and program policies in place for such disasters. If the local Head Start wants to open prior to the school system opening, they must make the request to their regional program specialist which is subject to review by the Office of Head Start.

9. *How can we feed Head Start children during program closure?*

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) provides reimbursement opportunities for meals given to participants that meet the age and income requirement. For more information on how to sign your facility up for CACFP, please click on the link below:

<https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/children/dhs-nutrition-programs/child-and-adult-care-food-program.html>

School districts across Tennessee are providing meals for children birth-18 years of age. To find out if a school district near you is participating please check using the following link:

<https://schoolmealfinder.hoonuit.com/>

10. *When the local Head Start facility re-opens, will there be a grace period on licensing/certification requirements, specifically professional development?*

Head Start programs are either certified by the department of education (DOE) or licensed by the department of human services (DHS).

For DOE regulated Head Start programs, professional development (PD) requirements will be relaxed through May 30, 2020. If programs want to utilize this time to get ahead on PD hours for 2020-2021, this is approved by School-based Support Services.

For DHS regulated Head Start programs, you are encouraged to communicate need to your assigned program evaluator (PE).

11. *Do you have any resources that you suggest we share with parents who want to keep their child at home?*

Below are several resources for parents and others who care for young children to facilitate ongoing learning during the closure period.

[Department of Education COVID-19 information](#)

[Department of Human Services COVID-19 information](#)

12. *What additional COVID-19 Resources can be found for children and families?*

National Child Traumatic Stress Network:

https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/factsheet/outbreak_factsheet_1.pdf

NPR—Just for kids: A comic exploring the new coronavirus:

<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus>

National Association of School Psychologists: Talking to children about COVID-19 (available in multiple languages): [https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-\(coronavirus\)-a-parent-resource](https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-(coronavirus)-a-parent-resource)

13. *What additional resources can be found concerning standards and development of young children?*

National Association for the Education of Young Children: <https://www.naeyc.org/>

Birth to 48 months:

https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/standards/tnelds/std_tnelds_birth-4yo.pdf

4 year olds:

https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/standards/tnelds/std_tnelds_4yo_2018.pdf

14. What online resources can support continuity of learning for children staying at home with families?

Ducksters (social studies): <https://www.ducksters.com/>

Science Buddies: <https://www.sciencebuddies.org/stem-activities>

Scholastic:
<https://classroommagazines.scholastic.com/support/learnathome.html>

Readworks: <https://www.readworks.org/>

GoNoodle: <https://www.gonoodle.com/>

ABCmouse (reading, math, science, art): www.abcmouse.com

Starfall: <https://www.starfall.com>

ABCya.com (math, reading, science, and more): <https://www.abcya.com/>

Growing Book by Book: <https://growingbookbybook.com/>

Kids Activities: www.kidsactivities.com

For additional questions please contact: Belva Weathersby, Head Start State Collaborator,
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