

# Early Childhood Transition and COVID-19



## PATHFINDER SERVICES OF ND

The COVID-19 national emergency has brought several changes to many parts of our lives. It is a time of big changes and transitions for ALL children and their families. For a child with a disability who is receiving early intervention services and turning three years old, an additional transition takes place for the child and their family. On a child's third birthday, the responsibility for special education and related services for children with disabilities changes from the North Dakota Department of Human Services (NDDHS) to the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI).

Families and professionals need the most current information and resources to make informed decisions through each step of this transition process. The resource, *Early Childhood Transition and COVID-19*, provides a summary of the steps within the ND early childhood transition process with related guidance from the NDDHS, NDDPI and the US Department of Education (USDOE). Families are reminded to contact their local Department of Human Services and local school district for the most current and comprehensive COVID-19 guidance.

The NDDPI and NDDHS Guideline - *Understanding Early Childhood Transition: A Guide for Families and Professionals* provides a complete description of each step in the early childhood transition process. This Guideline presents an outline of transition activities and timelines to address key questions that parents and professionals might have about the transition process.

### Beginning the Process of Early Childhood Transition

When children and families enter early intervention through the ND Department of Human Services, an important outcome is to prepare for the transition to future activities, services and programs. The process of transition starts with discussions and planning steps long before the formal process begins. Parents and professionals participate in several discussions about concerns, needs, and opportunities in preparation for the meetings and activities of transition. Effective planning will help reduce the stress of transitions for staff and families and will promote optimal access to services and supports for children.

The NDDHS website currently offers valuable guidance relating to COVID-19 and its impact on services to assure successful continuation of early childhood transition services for families and professionals providing services for children ages 0 to 3 years old. Guidance is provided to assist in determining the provision of safe and appropriate services through virtual meetings and visits. The determination of when and how a service will be provided is made on a case by case basis through important and timely discussions between families and the professionals providing the services.

In addition to valuable resources focused on the COVID-19 national emergency, the NDDHS website provides several beneficial resources for families and professionals in areas such as: housing, child care, behavior health, financial assistance, and many more.



## Child is between 2 Years, 3 months and 2 years, 7 months

To ensure that the transition goes as smoothly as possible and that the child is successful, early intervention staff and parents develop a Transition Plan as part of the child's Individualized Family Service Plan, IFSP. The Transition Plan is a time for everyone currently involved with the child, and those potentially involved with the child, to come together and talk about the opportunities available to the child. It is also the time for parents to determine if they would like the school district to be informed that their child will be turning three years old.

The Transition Plan is individualized and includes:

- steps for the child with a disability and his or her family to exit early intervention services; and
- transition services identified by the IFSP Team that the child and their family may need.

## Child is 2 years, 7 months

The first joint transition conference with early intervention, school district staff, and parents will occur by the time the child is 2 years, 7 months old and is coordinated and facilitated by early intervention. A Joint Prior Notice is sent to parents, the school district, and additional people that parents may want at the meeting.

The purpose of this meeting is to:

- begin to share information between the family and the two agencies about the needs of the child;
- formalize the activities that will be necessary to complete prior to determining eligibility for early childhood special education services; and
- identify the steps of the evaluation process that will determine a child's eligibility for early childhood special education services.



### **What is the NDDPI guidance during the COVID-19 national emergency?**

Districts should consider ways to conduct initial evaluations and use distance technology to the extent possible. Collaborate with Part C providers and connect virtually if possible. Communicate with your families and document your interactions and attempts to provide services.

NDDPI recognizes that during this unusual time, programs will need to be creative and diligent in ensuring parents are informed of their procedural rights and safeguards. We advise using distance learning methods, email, and links to the NDDPI website as needed to assist in verification and communication with families.

## Child is between 2 Years, 7 months and 2 years, 9 months

During this time period, the school district has the responsibility to complete a comprehensive evaluation to determine whether the child is eligible to receive early childhood special education services. The child's parents and early intervention staff are key to planning and conducting the evaluation.

The evaluation process involves:

- reviewing existing information about the child including assessments and information provided by the parents, the current IFSP, and resources provided through the early intervention assessment process; and
- if the team identifies that additional information is needed, the team must work together to develop a plan to gather and analyze the additional information.



### **What is the NDDPI guidance during the COVID-19 national emergency?**

In ND, the 60-day timeline for initial evaluation continues to be in effect and every attempt should be made to complete the evaluation to the greatest extent possible. Reasons for not meeting this timeline must be clearly documented in a Prior Written Notice. If, because of exceptional circumstances, you will not meet the 60-calendar day timeline, you must clearly state the exceptional circumstance, the timeline for completing the evaluation, and must present parents with their procedural safeguards if they are disputing the rationale.

## Child is 2 years, 9 months

At 2 years, 9 months, a meeting, coordinated and facilitated by the school district, is held to discuss the child's eligibility for early childhood special education services and Developmental Disabilities Program Management.

During this meeting:

- the Transition Plan is updated to ensure steps are included to support and help prepare children and their families for the upcoming transition;
- the assessment results are reviewed and the child's eligibility for early childhood special education services is decided; and
- if the child is found eligible for early childhood special education services, a meeting to develop the initial IEP is conducted **within 30 calendar days** from the date of the meeting during which it was determined that the child has a disability.



### What is the USDOE and NDDPI guidance during the COVID-19 national emergency?

If, because of exceptional circumstances, you will not meet the 30-day timeline, you must clearly state the exceptional circumstance, the timeline for completing the IEP, and must present parents with their procedural safeguards if they are disputing the rationale.



The US Department of Education guidance states that: However, parents and an IEP Team may agree to conduct IEP meetings through alternate means, including videoconferencing or conference telephone calls. Again, we encourage school teams and parents to work collaboratively and creatively to meet IEP timeline requirements.

## Child is 3 years old and Beyond

After the Individualized Education Program, IEP, is written and placement decisions are made, it is time to put the IEP into action. This is an exciting time of new beginnings for the child and family. As with anything new, many questions will arise. It is important for all members of the IEP team to discuss and answer these questions together, share information, and make decisions that are in the best interest of the child.



### What is the NDDPI guidance during the COVID-19 national emergency?

If a district has extended school closures but continues to provide educational services to all students, the district will remain responsible for the free appropriate public education (FAPE) of its students eligible for special education services with an individualized education program (IEP). Districts should be communicating with parents and guardians prior to, during, and after a school closure regarding their child's IEP services. Districts and schools will work to ensure that all students receive services to the most appropriate extent possible.

## Extended School Year Services

Children with disabilities who have their third birthday during summer months are not automatically entitled to receive special education and related services during the summer. The school district must provide services during the summer if the IEP team determines the child needs Extended School Year (ESY) services in order to receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). The school district must either assume responsibility for planning and directly implementing services to be initiated on the child's third birthday or contract for these services directly with the local Infant Development service provider or other private providers.



## What is the NDDPI guidance during the COVID-19 national emergency?

After an extended closure, districts are responsible for reviewing how the closure impacted the delivery of special education and related services to students eligible for special education services. Students may need additional services or extended school year services to make up missed services.

It is important to remember that special education and related services support the student's involvement and participation in general education. Therefore, decisions made regarding the provision of general education will directly impact how compensatory education is determined. Compensatory education determination is completed separately from determination for ESY.

## Additional Resources

In addition to the resources listed below, Pathfinder Services of ND has developed and gathered information on the impact of the COVID-19 coronavirus in education and schools. This page contains webinars and resources developed by PSND as well as critical information from Federal and State Agencies.

<https://psnd.co/covid19>

Guidelines: Extended School Year (ESY) Services

<https://www.nd.gov/dpi/sites/www/files/documents/SpecEd/Guidelines/ESYDocumentReformatted.pdf>

Frequently Asked Questions for Families and Parents of Students with Disabilities

<https://www.nd.gov/dpi/sites/www/files/documents/Covid-19/Parent%20FAQs.pdf>

Guidelines: Understanding Early Childhood Transition: A Guide for Families and Professionals

<https://www.nd.gov/dpi/sites/www/files/documents/SpecEd/Early%20Childhood/NDDHSDPITransitionGuideFinal4.18.17.pdf>

School Closure Guidance for Public School Districts and Non-Public Schools – Process Toolkit

<https://www.nd.gov/dpi/sites/www/files/documents/Academic%20Support/Process%20Toolkit%20Version%202.pdf>

Addressing the Risk of COVID-19 in Preschool, Elementary and Secondary Schools While Serving Children with Disabilities

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/frontpage/faq/rr/policyguidance/Supple%20Fact%20Sheet%203.21.20%20FINAL.pdf>

Addressing the Risk of COVID-19 in Schools While Protecting the Civil Rights of Students

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/ocr-coronavirus-fact-sheet.pdf>

Questions and Answers on Providing Services to Children with Disabilities During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak – March 2020

<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/qa-covid-19-03-12-2020.pdf>

NDDPI Updates and Guidance on COVID-19

<https://www.nd.gov/dpi/nddpi-updates-and-guidance-covid-19>

NDDPI School Closure Frequently Asked Questions

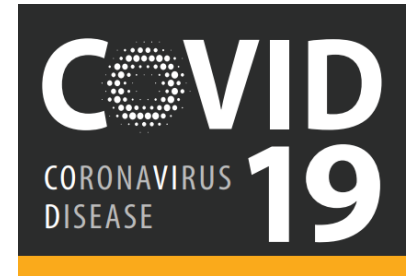
<https://www.nd.gov/dpi/school-closure-frequently-asked-questions>


ND DHS - Coronavirus (COVID-19) Information and Resources

<http://www.nd.gov/dhs/info/covid-19/index.html>

COVID-19 and Extended School Year

<https://www.nd.gov/dpi/covid-19-extschoolyear>



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