

This Profile of Innovation is part of a series that highlights innovative initiatives implemented or planned by Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Lead Agencies. These profiles feature activities aligned with recovery priorities. Many were funded with federal coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) funds, including the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act, and the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act funds. The information is from publicly available sources and has been reviewed by the Lead Agency.

The Office of Child Care (OCC) has issued [information memoranda](#) (IM) for all the COVID-19 federal response and recovery funds. These guidance documents include an overview of the funds, details about the obligation and liquidation periods, and information about allowable use of funds, administrative cost caps, and so on. OCC has strongly encouraged Lead Agencies to use these funds as part of a cohesive vision to implement policies that will better support children’s developmental and learning needs, meet parent’s needs and preferences with equal access to high-quality child care, and support a professionalized workforce that is fairly and appropriately compensated.

Overview of Test to Stay

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) endorsed test-to-stay practices in K-12 schools in December 2021. [CDC decided to support the approach](#) (which many school districts already used) after research in the Chicago and Los Angeles areas found COVID-19 infections did not increase when using the approach.

Innovation

In January 2022, two Region I states, **Massachusetts** and **Vermont**, announced expanded testing options for child care in their jurisdictions. The goal is to increase the time that children are in care, child care staff are at the center, and parents are at work.

The Approach: Massachusetts

In Spring 2021, the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) began offering asymptomatic pool testing supported through Operation Expanded Testing (a federal contract). In January 2022, EEC issued a [press release](#) that informed child care providers of additional testing options for staff and children in care. According to the press release, “*Testing for Child Care* is a first-in-the-nation statewide testing initiative that will allow staff and children 2 years and older, who are close contacts of a COVID positive individual, to test daily for five consecutive days with rapid antigen tests and remain in the child care setting as long as the test is negative. Additionally, staff and children 2 years and older who develop symptoms while attending or providing



What Is Test to Stay?

The test-to-stay strategy allows those who have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 symptoms to stay in school and child care under certain circumstances, such as the following:

- The close contact has no symptoms.
- Testing is done in accordance with the jurisdiction’s protocol, which may be daily or every other day for a specific number of days.

care will be eligible to participate in a symptomatic program” (emphasis original). This unique model pulls elements from test-to-stay program designs.

Testing for Child Care includes three testing options for EEC–licensed programs. In addition to the asymptomatic pool testing, providers may also consider symptomatic rapid antigen testing and rapid cohort asymptomatic testing. EEC–affiliated out-of-school-time programs offering before or afterschool care services, or both, may also participate.

Neighborhood Villages, a nonprofit organization, administers COVID-19 testing options for child care programs statewide. They also provide training for staff who are responsible for administering the rapid antigen tests and offer support in implementing EEC’s guidance.

Child care programs in Massachusetts can have either a designated staff member or volunteer administer the rapid antigen tests onsite, or they can arrange for families to do the tests at home before taking the child to a care setting.

EEC updated their [COVID-19 Mitigation Protocols and Guidelines for Child Care](#) in February 2022 and added [guidance on the Testing for Child Care program](#) in January 2022.

The Approach: Vermont

Vermont recently announced an expansion of the COVID-19 test-to-stay program to regulated center-based preschool programs and licensed or registered family child care homes. The program for child care is called [Tests for Tots](#). The state will supply the tests at no cost to the programs for children ages 2–5. Tests will also be available to child care staff so that they can continue to work and the program can stay open.

Close contacts receive a take-home kit of antigen tests. They will use these to test for up to 5 days from the date of last exposure to the person who is positive for COVID-19. Vermont parents test their children at home before coming to the center for 5 days straight after exposure. If the child or staff member has a negative result, they may attend as normal, with the condition that those who are testing daily as part of Tests for Tots must wear masks except while eating, napping, or outdoors.

The Vermont Department for Children and Families updated its [COVID-19 web page](#) to include instructions for reordering the antigen tests used in Tests for Tots. It also added detailed information about the program. The web page has resources for providers, including translations for the test kits in 12 languages, sample letters to families about the program, a results tracker for parents and guardians, family opt-in letters, and frequently asked questions. It also has a webinar recording of a question-and-answer session with a Vermont Department of Health nurse about Tests for Tots and the Omicron variant of COVID-19 in Vermont’s child care system.

Would You Like to Know More?

Please contact the Office of Child Care Regional Office, the Child Care State Capacity Building Center’s State Systems Specialist, or the Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Response and Recovery Team member for your Region to arrange a peer-to-peer opportunity with CCDF staff or request additional information.

