

## RCMA COVID-19 Q & A

### **What is RCMA?**

RCMA is the largest provider of nonprofit early childhood education in the state of Florida. We provide quality early childhood education to 6500 children in 21 counties. Of the families RCMA serve, 80% work in the agriculture industry as seasonal or migrant workers. Throughout the state, RCMA employs 1600 people, many of whom come from the communities we serve. Over 55 years, RCMA has built solid relationships in the communities it serves.

### **How has RCMA been affected by COVID-19?**

To date, RCMA knows of no staff nor enrolled families that have been diagnosed with COVID-19. As the nation manages the spread of the virus, RCMA has implemented policies to reduce the risk of spreading the virus while ensuring the children we serve (as young as 6 weeks old to 12 years old) have a safe place to learn and develop.

### **Are RCMA centers remaining open?**

RCMA centers which serve farmworkers (those funded by OEL School Readiness and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start), are remaining open at present. This can change if it is assessed that there is no need or that it is not safe.

### **What is RCMA doing to protect staff and children from COVID-19?**

In February, RCMA canceled children's field trips, donor tours and prohibited volunteers from outside our communities in an effort to reduce the risk of bringing COVID-19 into our programs. By keeping class groups of children stable and promoting social distancing, we safeguard our staff and the communities we serve.

Parents who are able to find alternative child care or are able to stay home, are keeping their children home. This means that attendance is down to about 40%, at RCMA centers serving farm-working families. Lower attendance allows staff who are vulnerable because of age or health condition, or staff who is primary caregiver for someone in vulnerable categories, to stay home. Fewer people in the centers also maximizes RCMA's ability to promote social distancing. This means smaller class sizes and minimizing co-mingling of classes. We are following the CDC guidance of keeping groups to a minimum of 10.

Additionally, centers are following strict guidelines around any type of illness. If any teacher or child shows symptoms of illness, such as runny noses, fever or headache, they are being sent home until they are symptom free.

### **Will keeping child care centers open spread COVID-19?**

There are no known cases of COVID-19 among RCMA staff or families. RCMA provides care to

people living in rural Florida. Our families are miles and miles away from urban hubs where COVID-19 is most rapidly spreading. RCMA is ramping up efforts to keep our teachers and children safe.

### **Is there a plan in place in the case someone at RCMA centers is diagnosed with COVID-19?**

Yes. There are protocols in place in the case that either a teacher or a child or a child's family member tests positive for COVID-19. If a teacher or child tests positive for COVID-19, we will follow the direction of the Florida Department of Health.

### **Why is RCMA keeping these centers open?**

During this crisis, RCMA is working hard to keep centers open for agricultural working families that need a safe place for their children to be while they harvest the nation's crops.

**The President's Coronavirus Guidelines for America** explains the reliance on our nation's Critical Infrastructure Industries, including Food Supply. RCMA's child care programs for farmworker children allow parents to work in the fields, on the job to supply America with food. The Guidelines say we have a **special responsibility to maintain our normal work schedule.**

Things are changing quickly, from one day to the next there are new guidelines. Each day RCMA has adjusted our plan according to the newest guidance. Child care is not closed. Picking our nation's food is not closed.

### **Who is making use of the centers?**

RCMA is a lifeline for some of the most vulnerable families in the state of Florida. Families that are able to find alternate care are doing so. Families who cannot afford to stay home or pay for babysitters are bringing their babies and toddlers into our centers. If the centers were not open, at best, these babies and toddlers would be cared for by siblings. At worst, these children risk being left in vehicles while parents work in fields or staying alone with no supervision or meals.

In addition to the rigorous sanitation practices that are regularly in place, RCMA has taken steps to make sure that staff and children who show ANY signs of respiratory illness stay home, this includes runny noses, coughs, etc.

### **How long will RCMA centers remain open?**

RCMA is working closely with local, state and federal officials to follow all health recommendations. The spread of COVID-19 is a global crisis that is causing the United States to create and carry out new policies that respond to rapidly changing realities on the ground. It is impossible to know how long RCMA centers will stay open.

## How can I help?

RCMA is providing a safe place for thousands of children throughout the state, providing educational activities for those who are home, actively educating our staff and communities about COVID-19, implementing social distancing practices and providing/delivering food and essential supplies for our families. **But we can't do it alone.**

RCMA desperately needs monetary support to keep our centers open, provide meals and necessary supplies to our staff and the families. Visit [www.rcma.org](http://www.rcma.org) to make a donation. For other questions or arrange donations please contact RCMA's community relations department at [cr@rcma.org](mailto:cr@rcma.org) or call 239-658-3560.