

Hartley Nature Preschool Pandemic Policy Information Sheet



Updated 1/15/2021

Enclosed you will find highlights of the practices and policies at Hartley Nature Preschool during the COVID-19 pandemic.

All of our planning for operating Hartley Nature Preschool during the time of COVID-19 has been and will continue to be informed by guidance from the MN Department of Health (MDH), MN Department of Human Services (DHS), and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in regards to child care centers as well as data on Duluth and St. Louis County infection rates. HNP also considers the recommendations from the MN Department of Education in regards to school programs.

HNP policies and procedures will change with evolving public health guidance. The full HNP Pandemic Operating Plan will be provided to parents upon enrollment and upon request and HNP staff will communicate updates about the plan to parents/guardians throughout the preschool year.

HNP primary mitigation strategies:

- Maximize outdoor time in all weather
- Maximize use of Hartley building and grounds indoors and outside, such as the yurt and classroom one, for better social distancing, winter warm ups, outdoor snacks, etc.
- Teachers wear masks at all times indoors and when within 6 feet of another person outdoors
- Daily health screenings for staff and children
- Increased frequency of cleaning/sanitizing throughout the day and between groups
- Vigilant attention to hand hygiene
- Families wear masks at pick up and drop off and stay out of classroom spaces

1. Health Policies

Children get sick. They get runny noses, fevers, diarrhea. We know that the symptoms of COVID-19 can be confusing and that it is frustrating to have to call your doctor and/or consider COVID-19 with every sniffle or cough, however HNP must, like every other school and child care, be extra cautious with our sick policies during the COVID-19 pandemic. **Children and staff must pass ALL areas of the [home screening tool](#) daily before attending preschool.** HNP will screen staff and children upon arrival. Staff or students who do not pass all areas of the health screening will be denied entry and sent home.

We are all in this together. It is up to each of us to be diligent about protecting our school community of children, families, and staff, by keeping your child home when they are ill. We know this level of caution means that your child may miss an extra day or two of preschool or may even be home in quarantine for 14 days (as recommended by a health care provider). Staying home when sick is also how we keep our program open at a time when a positive COVID-19 case in our school could mean a short or long-term closure for a classroom or for the entire preschool.

HNP will follow exclusion guidelines provided by MDH in the [decision tree](#) for youth and school programs. These guidelines may change as the school year approaches and throughout the school year. See more about exclusion guidelines below.

2. COVID-19 Symptoms

As your child, you, or a family member experience symptoms, please refer to the [decision tree](#) from MDH for information on when to keep your child home and when they can return to HNP. If you aren't sure what to do, call a health care provider for advice.

According to the [decision tree](#)

Children and staff will not be admitted to HNC/HNP if they have had close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 14 days, if any symptomatic household member is waiting to be tested for COVID-19 or is waiting for a test result, or if they have any one of these “more common” symptoms or at least TWO “less common” symptoms:

More common symptoms:

- New cough or cough that gets worse
- Difficulty/hard time breathing
- Fever of 100.4 degrees F or higher
- New loss of taste or smell

Less common symptoms:

- Sore throat
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Chills
- Muscle pain
- Extreme fatigue/feeling very tired
- New severe/very bad headache
- New nasal congestion/stuffy or runny nose

3. Limited Contact

Small, closed groups made up of a consistent set of participants and staff limit participants' potential exposure risk. Recognizing again that these policies will evolve with changes in our local COVID-19 situation and evolving public health guidance, at this time:

- Classroom groups will be kept separate indoors and outdoors.
- The Friday Morning Class is a mix of students from a variety of classes and thus will take place entirely outdoors at this time. The Friday Morning Class will use the well-ventilated yurt in the event of severe weather and for snacks and lunches.
- At this time the Nature Center building is only available for families during drop off for full day families to place gear in appropriate locations and for half day families in the event of severe weather at drop off time or if a child needs to use the bathroom. Families are asked to move quickly through the building and to maintain social distancing at all times.
- Family members are not allowed in the HNP classrooms.
- No volunteers are allowed to join HNP classes at this time, including parents or family members, community volunteers, or college students. HNP does host two MN Reading Corps Members, one who serves the half day classes and one who serves the full day classes.

4. Social Distancing

The exposure risk for contracting COVID-19 occurs when there is close contact. According to the CDC, a close contact is anyone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 15 minutes over a 24 hour period. In the case of a child care setting, the 15 minutes is cumulative over the course of a session, so any child or staff member in a class with a person with a positive case of COVID-19 would be considered a close contact. The hope and expectation is that the mitigation strategies, such as masking, increased outdoor time, increased cleaning/sanitization, increased hand washing, etc. would decrease the likelihood that a close contact develops a case of COVID-19. These mitigation strategies would *not* prevent a child or teacher from having to quarantine if they were a close contact to someone with a positive case.

Social distancing will occur as age-appropriate and as needed. As you closely observe a group of young children at play, it is interesting how little time they spend in very close proximity to one another. During preschool, we anticipate supporting the children's social-emotional development by allowing their natural encounters to continue and by allowing them to be children. You may see children holding hands as they walk down the trail, children reading a book together, or children busy at work playing together.

We will be using phrases like "Please take a bunny hop back from your friend," or "Please scoot back so I can breathe the fresh air," or "We need to give each other some more space to keep each other healthy and safe" with children. We will not scare children with information about the bad things that could happen if someone gets COVID-19 and we will not shame a child for wanting to be close to a friend or teacher. After all this time of social distancing, we are all craving physical contact and spending time together outdoors with other children and caring teachers is the best way we can currently meet that need for our children.

Social Distancing Between Staff and Children

- Staff will maintain social distance from children whenever possible and will be provided with PPE in the event that physical distance cannot be maintained, such as when reading a book with a child, when helping a child with toileting or dressing, or when attending to an injury.
- Staff will **ABSOLUTELY** still provide loving comfort to a sad child at any time they are in our care. Preschoolers may have complex social-emotional needs after lots of disruption to their

normal routines and when returning to or beginning school after lots of time at home with family.

- o Staff will wear appropriate PPE when providing comfort to a child.
- o The staff member and the child may change clothes after the child feels better if there are tears, snot, etc. on the clothing.

Age-Appropriate Social Distancing Between Children

- Children will be allowed to play together and be close to one another.
- We will do our best to eat snacks and meals outdoors, as the weather allows, and to allow children to spread out as they eat. If snacks/lunch need to be eaten indoors, we will spread children out as much as the space allows.
- Rest time is an important part of a busy nature preschooler's day and will continue to happen in a cozy, dim room. Children's cots will be placed as far apart as possible in the nap space and children will sleep head to toe. Children from the same household do not have to be head to toe. Each child will have their own labeled cot and nap time blankies, lovies, etc will be stored so they don't touch another child's items. Children may not wear masks at nap time.
- At this time we will not allow rough and tumble play where children are in prolonged physical contact unless children are from the same household or "pod" outside of preschool.
- Tree cookies, tape lines, or other visual cues may be used to help children maintain social distancing indoors or outside.

Social Distancing with Families

- Drop off and pick up will occur outdoors as the weather permits.
- Please do your best to maintain distance from our staff to help keep us all healthy.
- A teacher will sign your child in and out on the clipboard to reduce the need to pass the clipboard or share a pen.
- Please maintain proper social distancing from other families and children as you wait in line at pick up or drop off.
- Parents and family members will not be allowed to volunteer with our classes at this time.
- As the local COVID-19 situation evolves and the weather changes, we may move to indoor drop off where drop off occurs at the classroom doors and parents follow one-way paths to the classroom and out of the building. In this situation, parents would not be allowed to enter the preschool classrooms.

5. Hand Hygiene

High quality and frequent hand washing practices, as described in the HNP Parent Handbook, will continue to be followed.

- In non-winter months there will be hand washing stations and hand sanitizer at each outdoor drop off location and children will wash hands before joining their class in play. Teachers will monitor hand washing to help children properly wash their hands.
- Children will not wash hands or use hand sanitizer at drop off when the temperatures drop and the focus must be on keeping fingers warm and mittens dry. In these colder months the focus will be on cleaning hands at times that mittens come off, such as before and after eating or after using the restroom.

- Hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol) will be used with adult supervision frequently and whenever soap and water are not available.

6. Masks

Masking for Teachers and Staff

Teachers are required to wear masks or face shields at all times indoors and outdoors when within 6 feet of a child or another person. We have been surprised and pleased to find that our Hartley preschoolers have not been bothered by their teachers wearing masks; it's now normal for children to see adults wearing masks. If a child asks why we are wearing a mask, we may say something like "I'm wearing a mask to keep everyone healthy and safe."

- **Teachers will be required to wear masks** at all times indoors and outdoors when within 6 feet of a child or another person.
- **Parents, caregivers, and siblings above 5 years old must wear masks** during pickup and dropoff.
- Teachers are allowed to remove masks during the following times: to eat or drink, to communicate with a child who is deaf or hard of hearing, when participating in physical activity, when performing (i.e. playing an instrument) where wearing a mask or face shield is impractical, or when the face mask may get wet, such as in the rain.
- Teachers may remove their mask when sitting at least 6 feet away from children during circle time so children can see the teacher's face and see their mouth and lips move, all of which is important for their development.

Masking for Children

As COVID-19 cases rise dramatically in our region we have had questions from parents regarding children wearing masks while at preschool. Children who meet the MDH definition of reliable mask wearers are absolutely welcome to wear masks when at preschool. This means they can wear a mask without frequently touching it or removing it. The following outlines our masking protocol for children:

- From [MDH](#): Children age 2 through 5 years who can reliably wear a face covering or face shield in compliance with CDC guidance on [How to Wear Cloth Face Coverings](#) may do so. This means they can wear it without frequently touching or removing it.
- Masks will be child led, that is children will be in charge of their own masks. Staff will offer a reasonable amount of verbal reminders to mask wearing children, but will not help children adjust the masks. We must protect staff in every way possible at this time and it is not safe to have staff touch 16 children's wet masks throughout the entire class session.
- Staff will direct children to place their mask in a pocket or backpack if they begin touching the mask or their face frequently, begin sucking on the mask, drop the mask in an unclean location, or if a teacher feels the mask has become a risk to the child's health.
- Children will not wear masks when eating, drinking, or napping.
- Children will be allowed to remove their mask at any time they wish, including to eat snow, when physically active, when too warm, etc.
- Children are welcome to wear masks or a face covering (balaclava, neck warmer, buff) outdoors. On days we dress as "nature ninjas" a balaclava or other warm face covering is required for safety in cold temperatures. A fabric face mask will not be allowed as a warm face covering on "nature ninja" days.

7. Cleaning and Disinfecting

HNP will continue to follow our regular rigorous cleaning and disinfecting policies. During the pandemic, staff will also:

- Increase cleaning between groups of children in classrooms and bathrooms.
- Clean high-touch surfaces frequently.
- Carefully consider the materials that are used by children indoors and outdoors and clean/disinfect materials after each class.
- Continue to use natural, porous items like sticks and rocks for play and learning indoors and outside whenever possible.
- Full details of COVID-19 related cleaning policies and procedures can be found in the HNP Pandemic Operating plan.

8. Curriculum Changes

After all of the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus of our curriculum at this time is on developing authentic connections with peers and teachers and on free play in the outdoors. Our typical season curriculum will be wound throughout our days and lessons, but you may see lots more free play, shorter circle times, and more supplemental activities done with natural items instead of craft supplies. Teachers may continue to do activities such as letter of the week and Handwriting Without Tears depending on the needs of the particular class and teachers.

9. Current Travel Restrictions

[MDH](#) is currently strongly discouraging all unnecessary travel, particularly to another state or country. Anyone arriving in Minnesota from other states or countries, including returning Minnesota residents, should self-quarantine for 14 days.

Children are not allowed to attend preschool for 14 days following out of state travel, gathering indoors with out of state visitors who were not able to quarantine for 14 days after arrival (i.e. hosting out of state family members in your home), having a high risk exposure, or attending gatherings or celebrations that do not meet the Governor's requirements laid out in [Executive Order 21-01](#) including the following restrictions, which are in effect until February 12, 2021:

- Limit indoor social gatherings to two households with no more than 10 people, and stay 6 feet apart from anyone you don't live with.
- Limit outdoor social gatherings to three households with no more than 15 people, and stay 6 feet apart from anyone you don't live with.
- Follow current restrictions for gatherings, celebrations, and life events such as weddings, birthdays, and funerals.

As always, children must pass ALL areas of the home screening tool in order to attend preschool. Please contact Kaitlin at psdirector@hartleynature.org or your child's teachers with questions or concerns about your child's attendance at preschool following any travel or hosting out of state family or friends.

10. Can I enroll my child in only the Friday Morning Class?

At this time, a child must be enrolled in another HNP class to attend the Friday Morning Class. We are considering additional opportunities for engaging children in Hartley programs on a regular basis.

11. COVID-19 Related Closures

Hartley Nature Preschool is licensed as a child care center by the Minnesota Department of Human Services and is governed by MN Rule 3. As a licensed child care center, we are not obligated to follow COVID-19 related decisions of local school districts. For example, we do not intend to close if ISD 709 decides that all students will shift to distance learning.

Our aim is to continue to provide care--as long as it is safe and feasible to do so. However, as circumstances change this plan may also change. As we determine the ever evolving level of mitigation required to keep staff and children safe and healthy, we will continue to monitor the St. Louis County and Duluth [rates of COVID-19](#) and the recommendations and requirements of our licensing agencies and local and state public health officials.

Depending on circumstances and Department of Health Recommendations, it's possible that a classroom or the entire HNP program could be closed one or more times for a quarantine due to teacher, child, or other Hartley staff member testing positive for COVID-19. We highly encourage your family to make back up child care arrangements in case HNP has a temporary closure.

HNP may need to adjust our programming due to a stay at home order, changing enrollment numbers, staff illness, and other unforeseen circumstances and *may* need to:

- Combine classes
- Offer only specific classes/cancel specific classes
- Limit care to families of Tier 1 or Tier 2 workers
- Close specific classes or the entire preschool temporarily

12. January-May Financial Policies Related to COVID-19 Related Closures

Because we want to be responsive to changing circumstances and the needs of families, ongoing safety considerations, and the need to maintain organizational flexibility, the following financial policies will be in effect from January 2021 through May 2021, and then re-evaluated for fall 2021. In the event HNP needs to close because of ill students or staff, if required by public health officials, or for other pandemic-related reasons:

- Hartley Nature Preschool will not issue refunds for any COVID-19 related closures totaling less than four weeks cumulatively between January-May.
- During a short-term closure, such as for a mandated quarantine, we hope to offer distance learning activities on scheduled class days, depending on staffing and other circumstances.
- Hartley Nature Preschool will offer refunds or credits for any closures totaling more than four weeks cumulatively between January-May.
- If an individual child misses preschool for quarantine or illness, Hartley Nature Preschool will not issue refunds.
- The May 2021 deposit will remain non-refundable regardless of a child's attendance.
- You may choose to keep your child home at any point and continue paying tuition to hold their spot. We will continue to require 30 days written notification of permanent withdrawal from HNP.
- We understand that COVID-19 has negatively impacted many family's financial situations and we welcome individual families to reach out about financial policies at any time.