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CSCCE Response to Yale Study on Safety of Child Care During COVID-19

Berkeley, CA--On Oct. 14, 2020 a [report](#) was released by a team of researchers from Yale University, COVID-19 Transmission in US Child Care Programs. It found that as long as there were strong preventative measures in place, providing child care didn't pose additional risk to early educators at that time. The study period reflected experiences from April - May.

Not surprisingly, given the [disparate treatment](#) we have seen between child care and schools since the onset of the pandemic, some commentators are now declaring that child care is safe. But they are skimming over several vital details that contributed to the study findings, and fail to treat seriously the exposure risk to people of color who comprise about 40 percent of the early education workforce. In addition, they are minimizing the report's caution that community transmission rates impact safety. Importantly:

1. Most communities across the U.S. were subject to shelter in place regulations in April and May 2020, which decreased the coronavirus infection rate. Testing remained limited, which reduced accurate numbers of who was infected.
2. Many child care providers, similar to those we surveyed in California have reported difficulty [accessing and/or affording personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#) and sanitation supplies that are essential to the strong preventative measures called for in the study.

Rather than declaring that child care is safe, a more careful read of the report shows that when considerable protection measures were taken in the early stages of the pandemic and when community transmission rates were low, exposure to child care settings did not increase the risk to early educators.

We're now at a very different time. US COVID-19 cases reached 8 million this week, growing at a rate not seen since this summer's peak, with hospitalizations rising as we head into the colder months. Cities and counties are relaxing rules, and restaurants, bars, and schools are reopening. The risk of transmission has increased, as evidenced by the spike in cases in many states, and testing is more readily available to detect positive cases. In California, for example, the number of COVID cases reported at child care programs, including among staff, children and parents, rose 205 percent from mid-July to mid-October. The Yale report expressly states, "communities may pose a considerable threat to child care when background transmission rates are high."

The report also states that infection rates were higher among American Indian/Alaskan Native, African American/Black, and Latinx educators, [populations that are most at risk from becoming sick or dying from COVID-19](#). Nearly [40 percent of the child care workforce are women of color](#), and the elevated risk of COVID-19 that they and their family members face should not be minimized or become a footnote.

These findings should make clear that policy makers and leaders are not absolved from protecting the health and safety of the people providing critical child care services. Rather, they have a responsibility to safeguard their well-being and acknowledge the real fear that people have, especially that of educators of color and those working in communities with high infection rates.

Policy makers must ensure that all child care providers [have the resources they need](#) to protect themselves and operate as safely as possible. At the very least, this includes:

- Free PPE and sanitizing supplies for themselves and the children in their care;
- Free and regular access to COVID-19 testing and accurate public report of cases in child care;
- Guaranteed paid sick leave if they must quarantine because of a positive test or exposure to the virus or if they become symptomatic; and
- Guaranteed health coverage for themselves and family members in their household.
- At a minimum, they should be guaranteed to be paid no less than the locally-assessed living wage.

As a family child care provider in California told us, “I don't think that they're paying that much attention to what they're asking us to do. The fact that we are the lowest paid people on the planet or that some of us are older. I can't afford to get COVID-19. I started thinking about writing my will the other day. I mean that's a serious step to take just because I don't want to be one of the hundred thousand people that died.”

The [Center for the Study of Child Care Employment](#) conducts research and policy analysis focused on achieving comprehensive public investments that enable the early childhood workforce to deliver high-quality care and education for all children. CSCCE is a project of the Institute for Research on Labor and Employment (IRLE) at UC Berkeley. [IRLE](#) connects world-class research with policy to improve workers' lives, communities, and society.

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