A crucial aspect of a successful harvest is having childcare in place for essential workers. COVID-19 has forced significant modifications this year.

The Oregon Childhood Development Coalition (OCDC) provides childcare for migrant workers for children aged six weeks to six years. New physical distancing rules made busing unworkable, so workers will drop their kids off at childcare, said Jennifer Heredia, program director for OCDC in Wasco and Hood River counties.

To accommodate this, OCDC will open 30 minutes early, at 4:30 a.m., staff will take the temperature of every child every day, and ask three health related questions. Parents will also drop kids off outside the building.

To the extent possible, children will be kept in stable groups of 10, with the same staff. That is down from the normal class size of 20. The stable groups of children will use the playground in shifts, and the playground will be cleaned between each shift. Significant new cleaning regimens will also be in place.

OCDC will open two days later than planned, on June 11, as it awaits arrival of ordered supplies, including handwashing stations, and works to hire 20 aides. Enrollment has been changed from June 2 to June 4.

Older children ages 7 to 11 are served by the Migrant Education Program. It is also seeing significant changes, including teaching classes at orchards instead of having kids come to a central location. Local officials have worked to get Wi-Fi hotspots to orchards to facilitate learning and telemedicine.
The location and number of outdoor classrooms hasn’t been determined yet, but Dr. Jonathan Fost, director of the Migrant Education Program for the Columbia Gorge Education Service District, anticipates 12 to 20 remote classes.

Class size will be limited to 10 per class and they will meet three hours a day, three times a week, for five weeks. The program had almost 400 kids last year but Fost doesn’t know what attendance will be this year.

For questions or more information, please contact OCDC at 541-340-1639.

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