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Guidance

Children of critical workers and vulnerable children who can access schools or educational settings

Updated 2 January 2022

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Early years and childcare settings, schools and colleges continue to be open for all children and young people in England and attendance of school age children remains compulsory.

These settings may however need to change how they are delivering education and childcare for a short period of time in line with the [Contingency Framework](#). In all circumstances, and in all settings, priority should continue to be given to

vulnerable children and young people and children of critical workers (as defined below) to attend full time.

Vulnerable children and young people

Vulnerable children and young people include those who:

- are assessed as being in need under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, including children and young people who have a child in need plan, a child protection plan or who are a looked-after child
- have an education, health and care (EHC) plan
- have been identified as otherwise vulnerable by educational providers or local authorities (including children's social care services), and who could therefore benefit from continued full-time attendance. This might include:
 - children and young people on the edge of receiving support from children's social care services or in the process of being referred to children's services or who have previously received support from children's social care services (as identified by local authorities)
 - adopted children or children on a special guardianship order
 - those at risk of becoming NEET ('not in employment, education or training')
 - those living in temporary accommodation
 - those who are young carers
 - those who may have difficulty engaging with remote education at home (for example due to a lack of devices or quiet space to study)
 - care leavers
 - children and young people in a family circumstance presenting challenges for them, such as drug and alcohol misuse, parental offending, adult mental health issues and domestic abuse
 - others at the provider and local authority's discretion including pupils and students who need to attend to receive support or manage risks to their mental health

Critical workers

Parents whose work is critical to the coronavirus (COVID-19) response include those who work in health and social care and in other key sectors outlined in the following sections. Children with at least one parent or carer who is a critical worker can go to school or college if required, but parents and carers should keep their children at home if they can.

Health and social care

This includes, but is not limited to, doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, social workers, care workers, and other frontline health and social care staff including volunteers; the support and specialist staff required to maintain the UK's health and social care sector; those working as part of the health and social care supply chain, including producers and distributors of medicines and medical and personal protective equipment.

Education and childcare

This includes:

- childcare
- support and teaching staff
- social workers
- specialist education professionals who must remain active during the COVID-19 response to deliver this approach

Key public services

This includes:

- those essential to the running of the justice system
- religious staff
- charities and workers delivering key frontline services
- those responsible for the management of the deceased
- journalists and broadcasters who are providing public service broadcasting

Local and national government

This only includes those administrative occupations essential to the effective delivery of:

- the COVID-19 response
- essential public services, such as the payment of benefits including in government agencies and arms length bodies

Food and other necessary goods

This includes those involved in food:

- production
- processing
- distribution
- sale and delivery
- as well as those essential to the provision of other key goods (for example hygienic and veterinary medicines)

Public safety and national security

This includes:

- police and support staff
- Ministry of Defence civilians
- contractor and armed forces personnel (those critical to the delivery of key defence and national security outputs and essential to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic)
- fire and rescue service employees (including support staff)
- National Crime Agency staff
- those maintaining border security, prison and probation staff and other national security roles, including those overseas

Transport

This includes those who will keep the air, water, road and rail passenger and freight transport modes operating during the COVID-19 response, including those working on transport systems through which supply chains pass.

Utilities, communication and financial services

This includes:

- staff needed for essential financial services provision (including but not limited to workers in banks, building societies and financial market infrastructure)
- the oil, gas, electricity and water sectors (including sewerage)
- information technology and data infrastructure sector and primary industry supplies to continue during the COVID-19 response

- key staff working in the civil nuclear, chemicals, telecommunications (including but not limited to network operations, field engineering, call centre staff, IT and data infrastructure, 999 and 111 critical services)
- postal services and delivery
- payments providers
- waste disposal sectors

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