



GUIDANCE

Vulnerable children and young people: coronavirus

Information about vulnerable children and safeguarding during the coronavirus pandemic.

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How should we interpret the term “vulnerable children” for the provision in schools and registered childcare settings?

Every child who can be safely cared for at home should be and only where there is no safe alternative should provision be made in schools or other settings.

For the purpose of provision in schools and/or registered childcare settings vulnerable children include those with a social worker and with Statements of special educational needs. The most vulnerable of these should be prioritised by local authorities according to children with most need for the provision.

For the purpose of the provision those who have a social worker include children with care and support or support plans, children on the child protection register and children who are looked after.

What is available for young carers?

The vulnerable children definition, which includes young carers, means they can access an appropriate setting if they potentially require additional support, or a brief respite from their caring role. Implementation and access is being decided by each local authority according to availability of provision. Parents / guardians of a young carer should contact their local school, or local authority education department directly. The preferred option should be to follow government advice and stay at home.

A young carer can access a range of online information and advice, or other forms of support. This can be obtained from the local authority and contact details can usually be found on the local authority website. Support may also be accessed via local or national carers' organisations.

[Guidance for carers has been published by Carers Wales](https://www.carersuk.org/wales)

[. \(https://www.carersuk.org/wales\)](https://www.carersuk.org/wales).

What about other children who may be vulnerable but don't have a social worker?

It is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic could place additional pressure and stress upon families. It is imperative that families who are most in need of support, receive the right help in a timely manner.

Families First is available in every local authority and provides early support for families which helps prevent problems escalating. The Families First programme is delivered through local authorities and the referral process is available on local authority websites together with an advice line for families or professionals to use to make contact.

How are social workers keeping in touch with vulnerable children?

Social workers are still in contact with the children and families they support using risk assessments and RAG ratings to determine the need for physical contact.

Innovative ways of working have been initiated including for example seeing children at a safe distance, using WhatsApp, FaceTime, Skype and social media as well as the telephone.

What support is available for children and young people in foster care and care leavers?

Voices from Care has developed a bespoke [package of support for care leavers](http://vfcc.org.uk/coronavirus/) (<http://vfcc.org.uk/coronavirus/>) which has been circulated to local authorities. The support offered is intended to support emotional wellbeing by offering virtual social space. It is also providing a range of tailored advice and information and will look to adapt its service as the situation progresses.

Welsh Government has updated the guidance around the St David's Day Fund setting out that local authorities should give priority can be given to care leavers who may be experiencing financial hardship due to income loss, difficulty with tenancy agreements, food and other basic living necessities.

[Welsh Government advice to care leavers living in private rented accommodation](https://gov.wales/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-tenants-private-rented-sector) (<https://gov.wales/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-tenants-private-rented-sector>).

[The Fostering Network is reaching out to support foster carers across Wales](https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/coronavirus-covid-19/) (<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/coronavirus-covid-19/>).

The Adoption and Fostering Association (AFA) Cymru has published [advice and guidance for fostering services including in relation to family contact](https://www.afacymru.org.uk/supporting-effective-functioning-during-covid-19/) (<https://www.afacymru.org.uk/supporting-effective-functioning-during-covid-19/>).

What is being done to support the adoption process and adoptive parents?

[The National Adoption Service has issued guidance on its service practices](https://www.adoptcymru.com/news/update-on-our-services-in-the-current-covid-19-pandemic) (<https://www.adoptcymru.com/news/update-on-our-services-in-the-current-covid-19-pandemic>).

The Adoption Agencies (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 and the Adoption Agencies (Wales) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2020 came into force on 1st April 2020 however no enforcement action will be taken in relation to any infractions of these regulations. Correspondence has been issued to the sector in this regard.

What is happening about family court decisions?

The President of the Family Division has issued [guidance about the safe delivery of child arrangement orders \(private law\)](https://www.judiciary.uk/announcements/coronavirus-crisis-guidance-on-compliance-with-family-court-child-arrangement-orders/)

(<https://www.judiciary.uk/announcements/coronavirus-crisis-guidance-on-compliance-with-family-court-child-arrangement-orders/>) during this period which has been circulated to local authorities.

The Courts and Tribunals Service has also issued [guidance in relation to the operation of the family court](https://www.judiciary.uk/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-and-guidance/) (<https://www.judiciary.uk/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-and-guidance/>).

The Courts and Tribunals Service is providing regular updates

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-courts-and-tribunals-service>) including where they are focusing their priorities and a court tracker showing which courts remain active.

The Family Rights Group is providing advice on support for families

(<https://www.frg.org.uk/>).

What is being done to ensure there are enough social workers for continuity of care for vulnerable children?

The Welsh Government is doing everything possible to ensure continuity of care for vulnerable children in the event that the workforce is significantly affected by COVID-19. This includes, through the government's emergency legislation, allowing the emergency registration of social workers who have recently left the profession, allowing them to return to practice, as well as exploring with the sector urgently what requirements can be relaxed to free-up social workers' time without

compromising the best interests of vulnerable children.

Should local authorities still keep a record of vulnerable children and young people's attendance at the school and registered childcare settings?

Yes they should. Ensuring that vulnerable children and young people are safeguarded and continue to be protected is of paramount importance.

Each setting should keep a daily record of children of key workers and vulnerable children and young people who attend their setting. This will allow for a record of attendance for safeguarding purposes and allow schools and/or registered childcare settings to provide accurate, up-to-date data to local authorities and Welsh Government on the number of children and young people attending as and when needed.

What is being done to support young people and the workforce in residential settings?

Children's homes will remain open. Local authorities are working to ensure they have the necessary workforce to remain open to deliver the vital protection they provide for vulnerable children. Residential and secure children's homes are working closely with their local authorities on continuity plans for potential staff shortages at the local level and the Welsh Government is looking at options for support to providers.

[Welsh Government has published advice to support the care sector](https://gov.wales/coronavirus-covid-19-social-or-community-care-and-residential-settings-guidance)

[\(https://gov.wales/coronavirus-covid-19-social-or-community-care-and-residential-settings-guidance\)](https://gov.wales/coronavirus-covid-19-social-or-community-care-and-residential-settings-guidance), including care homes, on how to manage their day to day operation, which is available on the Welsh Government website. The guidance provides detailed information on specific actions for social and community care staff visiting people at home or providing care to residents, which provides guidance for whether an individual has symptoms or not. NHS Shared Services will provide a stock of personal protective equipment to local authorities across Wales for

onward distribution to care providers dealing with a suspected or confirmed case of Covid-19.

What is happening with junior apprenticeships?

Colleges in Wales have closed classrooms but are still delivering learning via alternate methods using online classrooms. Junior apprentices are still required to attend online sessions and submit work where appropriate. Learning Coaches are checking in with these learners to check on their wellbeing. All Junior Apprentices in receipt of free school meals have been considered and options discussed. Detailed action plans relating to these learners have been shared with relevant stakeholders.

The delivery of some components of vocational qualifications is still being considered and advice will be shared with learners on a regular basis to keep them informed.

What is available for children attending Special Schools?

Schools and local authorities will continue to make every effort to provide appropriate provision to meet their learners' needs, during these difficult times.

What will local authorities be expected to provide for learners with Statements of Special Education Need (SEN)?

We recognise that this unprecedented situation means support systems are not currently operating as they normally would. We are encouraging a practical and flexible approach and that wherever possible services are provided remotely. Where possible, learners with statements of SEN will continue to have their needs met. Local authorities should take all reasonable steps to ensure provision identified within an individual's statement of SEN is delivered by their school and/or registered childcare setting.

What are Further Education Colleges doing to support their learners?

Learners should contact individual student services departments for specific information but all colleges are keen to provide the best possible support to all learners in these unprecedented circumstances, including:

- Families who receive free school meals are being supported through a range of mechanisms including payments directly into their bank accounts, vouchers and packed lunch schemes.
- Laptops have been loaned to learners who do not have facilities at home.
- Student support is being provided remotely via phone, email, skype etc. I2A caseworkers are checking into their allocated learners regularly who are particularly vulnerable.
- Library service being provided on-line including “ask your librarian” telephone lines.

I have been receiving counselling through my school to help support my mental health. Will I still be able to access that service now my school has closed?

Whilst schools are closed in respect of statutory education provisions the Welsh Government is working closely with counsellors to ensure sessions continue and will be provided either online or by telephone as soon as possible. Young people currently receiving counselling can expect to be contacted over the coming weeks with further details.

I am worried about the effect staying at home and missing my friends is having on my mental health. How do I access support?

Many people will find staying at home difficult, but there are lots of ways to help support your mental health. Tell a trusted adult how you are feeling and talk to them about ways you can support your mental health.

You can call, text, or message [MEIC](https://www.meiccymru.org/) (<https://www.meiccymru.org/>), a free service in English and Welsh that is all about listening to you and helping you get access to support no matter what you need. Their website also has information on [how to exercise](https://www.meiccymru.org/4-ways-to-exercise-while-in-lockdown/) (<https://www.meiccymru.org/4-ways-to-exercise-while-in-lockdown/>), which is a great way to help your emotional wellbeing, as well as many other helpful articles and links.

[Childline](https://www.childline.org.uk/) (<https://www.childline.org.uk/>) is another free service that can give you information, advice, and support including 1-2-1 counselling from trained professionals. They have written some advice especially for [how to cope with feeling worried or unwell](https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/anxiety-stress-panic/worries-about-the-world/coronavirus/) (<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/anxiety-stress-panic/worries-about-the-world/coronavirus/>), and you can also [contact them in Welsh](https://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/contacting-childline/contacting-childline-in-welsh/) (<https://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/contacting-childline/contacting-childline-in-welsh/>).

There are also mobile phone apps that can help with your wellbeing, many of which are free, that you can find on the [NHS apps library](https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/filter/?categories=Mental%20health) (<https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/filter/?categories=Mental%20health>). CALL is another helpline which provides emotional support 24/7 and can be accessed by phone or text (0800 132 737 or text 81066).

The NHS is still here to help you, even though services will be under more pressure than normal, so you should still access support through your GP if you need to.

My child is still waiting for a statement of SEN to be agreed and/or I am going to the tribunal to secure the statement of SEN for my child. Will they qualify as a vulnerable child and be able to go to their school and/or registered childcare setting?

If the local authority has not yet issued an statement of special educational need (SEN) for your child, then they will not automatically fall within the definition of 'vulnerable children' for the purposes of attendance at a school and/or registered childcare setting during the COVID-19 outbreak. If your child has a statement of SEN the local authority remains responsible for maintaining it, including until any

appeal to the tribunal has been heard and resolved.

What should be done about infection control in schools and/or registered childcare setting for children who have complex needs?

We appreciate that this is a very worrying time for parents and for staff working with children and young people with complex needs. It is important that decisions are made based on risk assessments - for both the learner and for the schools and/or registered childcare setting - and are informed by the latest public health and medical advice and guidance available. With support from government guidance and local partner agencies, leaders of schools and/or registered childcare settings are well-placed to make judgements about what is required in their settings, and we will support these decisions.

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[Safeguarding children](https://gov.wales/safeguarding-children) (<https://gov.wales/safeguarding-children>)
