Department for Education

Guidance

Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance for children's social care services

Updated 23 April 2021

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This non-statutory guidance is valid until the extended regulation amendments expire on 30 September 2021.

If you provide non-residential long-term services, such as holiday clubs and out of school provision, read:

- protective measures for out-of-school settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak
- actions to take in care and children's homes during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak

If you provide transport to results-service road transport for schools and other places of education.

Latest updates

23 March 2021

Foster carers and staff of open residential children's homes can access asymptomatic testing twice a week.

9 March 2021

Guidance for care providers added to the reference to existing regulatory flexibilities up to 30 September 2021. The flexibilities will continue to:

- allow providers to take place over the telephone, a video link or other electronic communication methods, where face-to-face visits are not possible due to coronavirus (COVID-19)
- allow medical reports or assessments to be completed at a stage of the process for approving adoptions and foster carers, as long as assessments are obtained and considered as soon as possible
- suspend the mandatory minimum frequency of inspection visits to children's social care providers, which recognising that Ofsted is aiming to restart graded inspections from April 2021 and will assess how it can safely carry out inspections in accordance with COVID-19 restrictions that might be in place meaning the 30 days' notice of inspection year
- Please fear for children in 2021 to 2022

3 March 2021

From 8 March, all pupils should attend school. Read how this change impacts the following areas:

- vulnerable children and young people attendance at educational settings
- alternative provision (AP) schools and providers

Guidance for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) has been revised in accordance with Department for Health and Social Care guidance on how to quarantine when you arrive in England.

Principles

The difficult and complex decisions that need to be taken during this period should be:

- child centred and promote children's best interests, footing a more important than children's welfare. Children who need help and protection deserve high quality and timely assessments and services, including early help
- risk-based, prioritising support and services for children at greatest risk
- family focused, harnessing the strengths in families and their communities
- evidence based, using research and learning from practice and research
- collaborative, working in partnership with parents and other professionals
- transparent, providing clarity and maintaining professional curiosity about a child's wellbeing

Legislation and regulations

Read Regulation and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 for more information on the regulatory flexibilities currently in force.

Ofsted will not take these flexibilities into account when deciding to comply with primary legislation under which we have:

- section 22D of the Children Act 1989
- section 23 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002
- section 9 of the Children Act 2004

This guidance should be read with:

- working together to safeguard children
- Volume 1, Children Act 1989: court orders
- Volume 2, Children Act 1989: care planning, placement and case review
- Volume 4, Children Act 1989: fostering in addition for care providers
- Volume 5, Children Act 1989: fostering services
- Volume 6, Children Act 1989: residential care

Read Explanatory Memorandum to The Adoption And Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 for more information.

The temporary regulations are intended to be used where the flexibilities are still necessary and proportionate to the current circumstances and where they will provide certainty to the public and parties. These can be used when standard practice:

- would be contrary to any guidance relating to the incidence or transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19) published by Public Health England or the Department of Health and Social Care
- would be inadvisable for reason relating to the incidence or transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19)

The approach to using these regulatory flexibilities should include:

- approval at chief officer level in local authorities and where appropriate, top-tier management level in other services and providers
- consideration of the impact on children, young people, or, the reasons for using them, and communicating this to the other safeguarding partners and relevant agencies

Ofsted will note any use of these flexibilities, so providers should be ready to explain:

- why their use was necessary
- how they used them
- how long-term impacts were mitigated

This should be available to share with Ofsted, and others such as Independent Reviewing Officers, as appropriate.

The records may be used to inform Ofsted's annual engagement meetings with local authorities and children's homes providers, and inspections. Ofsted will also use the relevant records if they receive any complaints, concerns or whistleblowing.

The relevant records for children's social care services Ofsted Not for social care providers in 2021 to 2022.

Social work practice

As much as possible, vulnerable children and families should continue unchanged during the pandemic. Any changes to the way you work should be based on risk. While there are temporary changes to the way in which we can work, we should not be making decisions facility remains on course of support and results for children and families.

Wider support network should be prioritised within the framework set by assessment evidence or social work practice, as they can provide an important protective factor for children at risk.

Support for the workforce and foster carers

PPE equipment for care staff

Read safe working in education, childcare and children's social care settings for guidance on infection prevention and when staff should use PPE.

Testing for care staff and foster carers

Education, childcare and children's social care settings and providers must:

- undertake the NHS testing and tracing for coronavirus process
- contact the local NHS Test and Trace protection team as soon as they have a confirmed case or a low or suspected case.

Anyone with coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms should request a test on the NHS testing and tracing for coronavirus website or by phoning 119.

If someone that has been tested without being tested, positive you must immediately:

- get advice from your local PHE health protection team
- let anyone who has been in close contact with the person to self-isolate from the day they first had coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms or Supporting NHS staff and social care with coronavirus (COVID-19)

Rapid lateral flow testing is now available for free for everyone in England. It is recommended for all secondary school pupils and college students, their families and their close contacts (bubbles). Read the guidance on regular rapid coronavirus tests for those not in employ.

Foster Carers and staff of open residential children's homes can access asymptomatic testing twice a week.

- at a test site
- by collecting home test kits from a collection site
- by ordering a home test kit online, where other options are not possible

Use the Report Rapid Coronavirus (COVID-19) Test and Vaccination Site Finder or check your local council website for site locations.

Bringing social workers back into frontline practice

The Social Work Together campaign puts employers in contact with social workers. On the Local Government Association website:

- social workers can register their interest in the Social Work Together programme
- local authorities can register to access the details of social workers who have signed up

In Spring 2020, Social Work England wrote to all social workers who had left the profession in the last 2 years to encourage them to return to practice. Social Work England's temporary register of social workers and how they can help during the pandemic.

Any social worker who has a fitness to practice case upheld will not be included on the temporary register. Local authorities must carry out their usual employment checks.

During the pandemic, standard and enhanced DBS checks are free for children's social care workers who are registered with Social Work England and are undertaking the provision of care and treatment of coronavirus (COVID-19), or those being recruited to backfill roles because of the impact of the pandemic.

Support for children

Advocacy support for looked-after children

It is a requirement for local authorities to continue to provide advocacy for looked after children at the time.

The following services are open:

- Coram Voice on 0808 800 5792
- Voice of Care on 0800 528 0731

Support for the mental health of looked-after children and care leavers

Local authorities should follow the statutory guidance on promoting the health and wellbeing of looked after children and care leavers:

- look out for issues that may affect children's mental health and wellbeing
- ensure unaccompanied other children to speak to their social worker, carer or other trusted adult about how they are feeling
- ensure they get the help and support they need

Special actions may apply to foster carers aware of the guidance.

- for parents and carers on supporting children and young people during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic
- encouraging other children and young people during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

Other mental health resources for children and young people include:

- Public Health England's Every Mind Matters
- Royal Mail's free letters for isolated other children

Bereavement services and services for mental health, learning disabilities and autism.

Support for children who have a social worker

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children remains of paramount importance.

Multi-agency support should continue with appropriate flexibilities in delivery where necessary. Local authorities, NHS, schools, and other agencies, should work together where it can be provided safely. Read the guidance on social care services and children.

Local authorities should:

- consider the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) in increasing the stresses on, and reducing the protective available to, children and families
- work with local safeguarding partners to ensure continuity and consistency of support

Missing children

The responsibilities of local authorities to missing children and children at risk of going missing remain unchanged.

You should:

- use your judgement on a case by case basis to find ways to meet your statutory duties, guided by the principles set out in both this and the children who are open or on protection from harm or care
- continue to follow the use of unaccompanied research children and child victims of modern slavery guidance

Support for young carers

Local authorities must continue to assess whether a young carer in their area needs additional support and services.

A carer is a young carer may need support:

- a request is received from a young carer or a parent of a young carer to assess the young carer's need for support
- an assessment has been carried out, but the circumstances of the young person or person being cared for have changed

Visits and the use of virtual visits

Virtual visits by local authorities

The Statutory guidance also refers to a standard offer, including, and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, to be carried out such as:

- the frequency
- the nature
- other electronic communication methods

The use of virtual visits should be the exception and only as a result of public health advice or where it is not practicable to have a face-to-face visit because of coronavirus (COVID-19) including:

- work or national restrictions
- shielding
- social distancing

As good practice, children and young people should be told why a face-to-face visit is not possible and be advised of their right to advocacy or support. Visits should be face-to-face as soon as it is practicable to do so, and in the interpretation of the meaning of the statutory timescales as it can be held face-to-face.

The temporary regulations require virtual visits to follow any recommendations from the nominated officer. When making recommendations, nominated officers should consider:

- the ethos of the children and young people affected
- the ability of the other young person to engage in a virtual visit due to their age, understanding, and the nature of the subject. for example with respondent-parent-caring relations
- whether there is an established bond between the social worker and the child or young person
- the amount of time since the last face-to-face visit
- any other factors the nominated officer thinks are relevant

Uses of this temporary flexibility must be recorded in individual case files, and these records should include:

- reasons a virtual visit was necessary
- name of the nominated officer consulted

Social worker visits

Children and families may have anxieties about the risk of infection, but social workers should continue to visit children and families.

Visits should be face-to-face where possible and sufficient to safeguard or promote the child's welfare. Online on social authorities under sections 17 and 47 of the Children Act 1989 are exempted.

Social workers should consider how best to accommodate or meet the needs of babies and young children, as well as children and young people, who may be particularly vulnerable.

If families refuse access and there is a risk to the life of the child or a likelihood of immediate serious harm, local authorities should follow the immediate child protection procedures set out in the working together to safeguard children's guidance.

Educational settings

Vulnerable children and young people attendance at educational settings

From 8 March 2021, all pupils should attend school.

Read Schools coronavirus (COVID-19) operational guidance for more information. Where pupils are self-isolating with their certificate of exemption, it is important that their education provider and systems in place to keep in contact with them.

When a vulnerable pupil is unable to self-isolate, their education provider must:

- notify their social worker (if they have one)
- agree with the social worker the best way to maintain contact and offer support

Their education provider should have procedures in place to:

- check if a vulnerable pupil is able to access remote education support
- support them to access it (as far as possible)
- report back to their social worker if they are not accessing it

We have published a toolkit of resources and guidance to help social workers in commissioning and providing remote delivery social work intervention.

Social workers should be in communication with schools and, where possible, engage with the child or young person and their family, to discuss the best way to support the child, risk of suspension or expulsion.

We have extended to schools that they should, as far as possible, avoid exporting any pupil, but in the case of a pupil who is vulnerable, or where it is in the child's best interest, and after all risk of suspension or expulsion, the Virtual Schools Heads, amongst others, should consider what additional assessment and support needs to be put in place to ensure the child's education, health and safety and wellbeing can be properly taken into account in reasonable, and make any additional arrangements to support the child's ongoing education in the event of suspension or exclusion. We continue to encourage schools to use their powers to use alternative sanctions to support consistent by taking action to improve the outcomes of children in need of help and protection – they are safer through being in school.

We have from guidance where some settings cannot provide the full range of provision, we have set out how they should prioritise provision for children who are at risk of poor outcomes from coronavirus (COVID-19) and children are gradually being removed from the shielding patient list (CPL) as appropriate, following review with a clinician.

Since 31 March, shielding advice has been paused nationally. From 1 April, all CPL patients will receive a letter from NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSEI) to inform adults classified in other categories and over have been advised to follow the general advice not to attend. Pupils who live with someone who is CEV should continue to attend school as normal.

Education providers covered by the Temporary Continuity Direction are required to ensure children who are registered at a school, and who would be at risk of harm or disruption if they are complying with government guidance or legislation related to coronavirus (COVID-19).

Alternative provision (AP) schools and providers

All pupils in alternative provision (AP) settings should attend school full-time, including:

- post-sixteen AP
- AP special schools
- AP Free schools
- independent AP schools

Where they are affected by the Remote Education Temporary Continuity Direction, AP settings must provide remote education to pupils covered by the direction where it would be contrary to government guidance or law about coronavirus (COVID-19).

AP settings must comply with health and safety law which requires employers to assess risks and put in place proportionate measures.

When working through the system of controls, AP settings should take steps to minimise social contact and mixing as far as is practicable.

All AP settings, especially large AP schools, should consider whether pupils can be grouped in small, fixed groups, with a dedicated member of staff responsible for the welfare of AP settings, and because they are not typically organised by year groups, AP settings may wish to adopt whole school bubbles as part of their system of controls.

There may be instances where some settings cannot provide the full range of provisions and provision at adequate staffing ratios, or with staff who are special training, or who are shielding, or who are self-isolating. In these circumstances, maintaining teaching and support staff more flexibly. Planning pursuit of the remaining time available. AP settings will have concerns about staffing capacity. they should talk to their local authority about how they can be supported. Local authorities are collaborating with families to agree an approach that is in the child's or young person's best interests.

Out of school settings

Safeguarding in out of school settings and youth clubs

We expect local authorities to follow the statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018).

All schools and colleges must also follow the statutory guidance Keeping Children Safe in Education.

Voluntary, charity, social enterprise (VCSE) and private sector organisations and agencies also should have appropriate arrangements in place to promote and protect children's welfare. Read the guidance on protective measures for out of school settings for children in care and services.

For organisations subject to charity law and regulated either by the Charity Commission or other 'principal' regulators, charity trustees are responsible for the safety of anyone benefiting from or working with them.

Read the Charity Commission's rules in safeguarding. for more information.

Sports clubs and organisations

Clubs and organisations should have arrangements in place as set out in chapter 2 of Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) to keep children safe. They should collaborate with safeguarding partners as required by the local flexible arrangements.

National Governing Bodies of sport that receive funding from either Sport England or Sport Wales are required to meet the Standards for safeguarding and protecting children in sport.

Elective home education

You should encourage parents to send their children to school, particularly those who are vulnerable.

Most home educated children will have a positive learning experience. However, this is not the case for all. Local authorities have statutory duties to ensure children are receiving a suitable education and to ensure children are safe and their welfare is promoted.

Elective home education should be a last resort, and local authorities should work with parents to ensure that children are receiving a suitable education.

Elective home education should be a last resort, and local authorities should work with parents to ensure that children are receiving a suitable education.

Multi-agency working

Local authorities and safeguarding partners (including the police and health services) should use virtual communication where necessary and appropriate for agree quick decisions in the best interests of a child.

Multi-agency child protection conferences

Multi-agency working is crucial to ensuring the protection of children at risk of harm. Local authorities should use virtual meeting platforms for child protection conferencing or conference calling solutions where it is both necessary and appropriate.

Sharing information between agencies

You can share your personal information about a child, including without consent, if it is necessary for the exercise of functions imposed by legislation, such as:

- safeguarding or promoting welfare
- in order to keep a child safe from harm
- to protect their physical, mental or emotional wellbeing

This type of data sharing is not prevented or limited by the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) or Data Protection Act 2018.

If you're concerned about sharing safeguarding data:

- get legal advice where appropriate
- get advice from other professionals
- seek the child's consent if it is appropriate to do so
- read information sharing for practitioners providing safeguarding services
- read Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018

Disabled children and young people

Families caring for a disabled child or young person are entitled to short breaks services, also known as respite.

While coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions apply, local authorities should continue to enable access to respite care for disabled children and carers including:

- short breaks services for children away from home
- short breaks services in the home
- residential holiday schemes for disabled children

You should:

- ensure that services for disabled children remain a priority
- consider flexible options to deliver support
- consider using third parties where services are disrupted

Direct payments can:

- help families buy respite care and equipment to use at home
- support families with a disabled child if their usual services have been suspended or reduced

The Council for Disabled Children's short break service guidance also creative ways to provide short breaks, including: Short breaks: a practical guide to what you can do again (1) under families can also form a pickup bubble with another family.

Caring families for a disabled child under 5 (or who was under 5 in December 2020) that require continuous care, can form a support bubble with another household.

Short breaks services

Families caring for a disabled child or young person are entitled to short breaks services, also known as respite services. We encourage local authorities to prioritise short breaks services for families caring for a disabled child or young person. Under section 6 The variable, some local authorities have made more use of direct payments that could.

Local authorities will need to work with their short breaks (respite) care providers to ensure:

- children are offered services
- services can operate during the school holidays, which can be a pressure point for families with caring responsibilities

Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel

Notifying the Panel

Local authorities must send a serious incident notification to the Panel when a child dies in a serious harmed, and abuse or neglect is known or suspected. Notifications must be made within 5 working days of a local authority becoming aware of the incident.

The online notification system is available 24 hours a day.

Rapid reviews

Safeguarding partners should complete and report rapid reviews within 15 working days.

Read Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel: practice evidence

Local child safeguarding practice reviews

Local child safeguarding practice reviews should be completed and published as soon as possible but no later than 6 months after the decision to initiate the review.

At least 7 working days before publication, safeguarding partners must send a copy of the report to the Panel.

Read: Local child safeguarding practice reviews: statutory guidance

Copies of the final reports should be sent to the Panel at CSPRReview@dfe.gov.uk

Full guidance is available in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018.

Fostering

Suitability assessments

Where a fostering service provider is in the process of assessing the suitability of a prospective foster carer, they should follow the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and that suitability assessment was started before 25 September 2020, the fostering service provider should follow the Fostering Services (Coronavirus Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations (England) Regulations 2011 made by the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 are still in effect.

This means that fostering service providers can continue to decide whether:

- to refer the carer to a panel for a recommendation on suitability
- a panel should go ahead under reduced agency
- to progress the assessment process while still waiting for medical reports.

Self-isolating or ill foster carers

We expect that children will continue living with their foster carers in most cases while following guidance on self-isolation and social distancing.

If foster carers develop symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) the

- foster family should follow the guidance with people vulnerable coronavirus (COVID-19) infection guidance to avoid the spread of infection.
- fostering service should follow the adult care in adoption, adoption and children's social care settings guidance including the use of personal protective equipment (PPE).

If this is not possible, fostering services should find alternative temporary placements while the foster carer is ill and then return the child to their usual home afterwards.

The number of children a foster household can care for

The age range and number of placements for foster households should be flexible during the pandemic.

Schedule 7 of the Children Act 1989 allows:

- local authorities to grant exemptions to the usual fostering limit in specific circumstances
- local authorities to place up to 6 children in exceptional circumstances

Where there continues to be a concern about fostering capacity, we ask:

- identify potential fostering households that may be able to accommodate additional children
- consider where it would be appropriate and safe for some children (for example, siblings) to share a bedroom
- speak to foster families and children about these options
- consider if carers that have recently stepped fostering could return temporarily, if they are not vulnerable or at high risk

No foster carers should be expected to look after additional children without proper discussion and appropriate support.

Support for foster families

Fostering provides an independent, free to access advice and helpline for anyone interested in fostering and existing foster families.

Read Testing for care staff and carers for information on what testing is available.

Access to short break services (respite)

Short break services (or respite care) allow:

- children to leave their foster home to stay with a respite carer
- another carer to come into the fostering household to give the carer a rest

Consider whether you can offer respite care safely during the pandemic while managing risk, including through:

- existing support bubbles
- community care models
- relationships between local carers

Medical reports for foster carer assessment

The temporary regulations in place until 30 September 2021

- allow fostering service providers to proceed with obtaining the information required under Schedule 7 to the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 before they have medical reports
- do not remove the need for medical reports as they still must be obtained before the panel makes a recommendation on the suitability assessment of the prospective foster carer and their household

A final decision cannot be made without a medical report being considered as part of the suitability assessment.

You should:

- get medical reports at stage 1 if they are available and take reasonable steps to understand where their capacity may impact on their transport
- if medical reports are not available at stage 1, consider whether it is fair to obtain medical information and this may cause a delay. Medical information could affect the outcome

You must record when you use this flexibility.

Adoption

Suitability assessments

Where an adoption agency is in the process of assessing the suitability of a prospective adopter, they should follow the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 made by the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 if the assessment was started before 25 September 2020, then they must continue to place that individual as through all the amendments made to the 2005 Regulations by the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 are in force.

This means that:

- an adoption agency can decide if it wishes the case to a panel for a recommendation on suitability
- a panel could go ahead under reduced quorum (not having enough members to carry out business and conduct)
- an adoption agency can move to stage 2 of the process while still waiting for medicals and DBS checks.

Moving to stage 2 of adopter assessment process without medical reports

The temporary regulations:

- allow adoption agencies to proceed to stage 2 of the assessment process before they have medical reports
- do not remove the need for medical reports

A final decision cannot be made without a medical report being considered.

You should:

- get medical reports at stage 1 if they are available
- let applicants know that a final decision cannot be made without their medical information and that this may cause a delay
- decide, if you know of any medical history that may affect the outcome, whether or not to progress the application to stage 2 on the basis of this medical history until you have received medical reports

You must record when you use this flexibility.

The temporary regulations do not allow a person who is deemed not suitable due to medical reasons only to apply to the Secretary of State for a review.

Introductory meetings for children with new adopted parents and kinship carers

You should assess introductory meetings:

- case by case
- by risk

Face-to-face introductory meetings can continue if:

- it is possible to do so
- all parties are comfortable with the arrangements.

Introductory meetings may have to be postponed for example, where someone in the foster family is in a vulnerable category.

Residential provision

Keeping residential settings safe from coronavirus (COVID-19)

Local authorities and providers must:

- safe workers in education, childcare and children's social care settings, including the use of personal protective equipment (PPE)
- NHS Test and Trace service in the workplace
- Testing for care staff and carers

When making decisions about keeping residential settings safe from coronavirus (COVID-19) you should consider:

- that the disruption to routines or limited contact with family and friends may be making children anxious
- that this may cause or increase challenging conditions
- supporting staff by reducing the number of hours they work in one shift, or providing more time away from the home
- ensuring staff are aware of social distancing guidelines where possible
- getting food and other essential items delivered
- cleaning frequently touched surfaces, including bathrooms, toilets and kitchens more often
- encouraging frequent handwashing and changing hand towels regularly

If you have staff shortages that could be the closure of a home:

- tell your relevant placing local authorities immediately
- inform Ofsted, who may require the information with DfE

Visits by social workers or police investigating child protection concerns should balance consideration of the:

- risks to children and young people
- risks to staff
- risks to the workforce
- guidance on social distancing and hygiene
- voluntary responsibilities, including safeguarding

Quality assurance checks and visits should continue so that care provided is safe and staff feel supported.

Visits

Face-to-face contact with families is allowed and should be prioritised where reasonably necessary.

Independent person visits are also allowed and should be:

- face-to-face where reasonably necessary
- prioritised and carried out virtually, if this is felt appropriate as a result of public health advice

Virtual visits to children's homes should follow the same principles set out in Virtual visits to foster and adoptive homes. All virtual visits must be recorded.

Restricting a child's movements if they have coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms

Advice for children and children care set out clear DfE's FAQ have symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19).

A child or residential care with coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms will need to self-isolate.

Staff:

- can continue to enter and leave the home, but consistent staff roles should be used where possible
- should follow infection control precautions
- should follow the guidance on coronavirus (COVID-19) care centre – but be aware that low cleanings may inhibit communication with people who rely on lip reading to support their expressions and clear sound
- should follow social distancing guidelines as far possible while considering the emotional needs of the children

Local authorities and providers should:

- decide if the child can be safely cared for at the children's home
- make decisions with the co-operation of the young person
- prioritise stability and security of care when making decisions about whether children should be moved to other homes
- decide if the child is temporarily moved to alternative provision
- decide if children who are well should be moved to an alternative temporary placement

A temporary move to an alternative placement should be a last resort.

As far as possible, arrangements for restrictions should be put in place with the consent of the child and their family. Local authorities and providers should be flexible and encouraged to sustain free and why the temporary restrictions in place. Temporary restrictions should not be no longer than is necessary and must be kept under careful and constant review.

You should get advice from Public Health England (PHE) on the Health Protection Regulations 2010 and Health Protection (Coronavirus) Act 2020 if the young person refuses to follow public health guidance.

The Act gives Public Health Officers the power to impose proportionate requirements, including requiring a person to self-isolate on a person suspected or confirmed to be infected with the coronavirus (COVID-19).

Children and young people have the right to appeal the decision and should be given advocacy support information.

If there is no alternative you should contact your local protection team.

Restrictions on visitors and gatherings in residential settings

As children's homes are usually considered to be a 'household' there are no restrictions on children or staff of the home gathering together.

When deciding which visitors a household can have, you should self-isolate consider:

- the physical layout of the residential setting
- who shares a kitchen or bathroom
- bedrooms and staffing arrangements
- the ability to maintain hygiene

Both children and independent children can continue to visit children. Ofsted are also permitted to enter children's homes for inspection and regulation purposes.

The social distancing guidance allows face-to-face contact between children and their:

- parents, if children don't live in the same household as their parents
- siblings where they do not live together and one or more of them is a looked after child or a 16 or 17 year old care leaver.

Managing a young person's behaviour if they won't follow social distancing guidelines

Understanding social distancing guidelines can be difficult for children.

If they do not follow the guidelines you should:

- consider each case separately
- encourage those who know them and including residential care staff, foster carers or parents, to use their knowledge of the child to support them
- discuss persistent problems with the child's responsible authority to develop a plan to encourage the child to comply
- consider if restrictions are curing the child to find other ways to encourage the child to comply
- not use restraint to make children and young people comply

Read Ofsted's guidance about physical intervention and restrictions of liberty.

Residential family centres

Face-to-face contact in residential family centres

The temporary regulations in place until 30 September 2021 allow reviews with children who are in residential family centres to be carried out by virtual means (in accordance with regulation 20(6)(a) of the Residential Family Centres Regulations 2002) to take place by telephone, video link or other electronic communication.

Virtual reviews should be:

- exception
- used as a result of public health advice
- used when a face-to-face visit isn't practical due to coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions

You must record all uses of this flexibility. You should include reasons why a virtual interview was used.

Care leavers

Responsibilities to care leavers

Local authorities must meet their statutory responsibilities towards care leavers including to:

- provide personal advisers
- prepare and review pathway plans

Local authorities should:

- tell care leavers about any additional support available to them
- consider using additional government funding for discretionary payments to cover rent, utilities and rent if care leavers are struggling financially
- use discretionary payments to be authorised and paid out at short notice if necessary
- continue other forms of financial support for care leavers including setting up home allowances

Personal advisers

Personal advisers should:

- contact care leavers during the pandemic, including those over 21 who are eligible for support up to age 25, but who were not accessing support before the pandemic
- communicate with care leavers in a way that is most effective for them, including by phone or video
- continue face-to-face where reasonably necessary, while following the Working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance to conduct staff and young people assess the right level and frequency of contact with each care leaver
- always consider the wishes and feelings of the young person

Independent living

Decisions about the future of young people who have left, or are about to leave, care should:

- take into account the views of young people who have left, or are about to leave, care

- take the pandemic into consideration
- minimise any additional stress for them

No one should have to leave care during the pandemic if they do not want to.

Local authorities must still comply with Regulation 39 of The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, where they are considering ceasing to look after children.

Care leavers can be moved between different accommodation settings if:

- it is what the young person wants
- the setting is safe in relation to coronavirus (COVID-19)

Loneliness and isolation of care leavers

For loneliness and isolation support:

- read the guidance on supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing
- contact the Become care advice line
- get help from the Drive Forward Foundation
- contact the Care Leaver's Association

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC)

Local authorities receiving a newly arriving unaccompanied asylum seeking child (UASC) should:

- try to find out which countries they have travelled from and through
- ensure that they are tested for COVID and put them in suitable accommodation to self-isolate for 10 days, following the guidance on how to self-isolate when you travel to the UK
- be aware that it is the responsibility of the person who has custody or charge of a child to make sure the child self-isolates so far as is reasonably practicable

The local authority that initially collects the child should assess the child's needs as they would do in normal circumstances and if the child is accommodated for more than 24 hours by that local authority, they will be responsible for the child as a 'looked-after child'.

Local authorities can:

- use their existing accommodation service providers
- find temporary accommodation during coronavirus (COVID-19) through the Crown Commercial Service

Family law courts

Read the guidance on moving towards delivering remote hearings and The Road Ahead for information on how the family justice system is operating during the pandemic.

Family Contact

Read Visits for more information.

Court Orders

We expect:

- contact between children in care and their birth relatives to continue
- the spirit of any court-ordered contact with children in care to be followed

Contact arrangements should:

- be assessed on a case-by-case basis
- consider the social distancing guidance
- consider the guidance on meeting people outside your household
- consider the needs of the child

The social distancing guidance allows contact between children and parents or children and siblings if they do not live in the same household as:

- both or one of their parents
- their siblings when one or more of them is a looked after child or a 16 or 17 year-old care leaver

Contact with children should be face-to-face where reasonably necessary but can be virtual if this is not possible.

You should:

- reassure the child that it is a temporary measure
- consult foster parents and other carers to meet the needs of the child and support the virtual contact

If a child is too young to benefit from virtual contact you should:

- work with families to plan safe face-to-face contact
- follow the social distancing guidance

You should always ask the child what they want. They may welcome virtual contact with their birth families.

Ofsted inspections

Ofsted's inspection and regulation powers remain unchanged. Its regulatory role and work is continuing, and it has taken a range of actions to ensure that it is responding proportionately to the current context. Ofsted is providing regular updates to educational and children's social care settings, and local authorities on its approach to key issues.

You should read:

- Ofsted: coronavirus (COVID-19) rolling update for the latest information on all Ofsted inspections
- Ofsted's guidance on social care common inspection framework and assurance visits
- Ofsted's framework for inspecting local authority services (ILACS)

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Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance and support

Brexit

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