What parents and carers need to know about early years providers, schools and colleges in the autumn term

Updated 10 October 2020

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Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance for parents and carers

This guidance is for parents and carers of children:

- in maintained nurseries and childminders
- primary and secondary schools[1]
- further education colleges[2]

We have updated this guidance to include local COVID alert levels.

Returning to nursery, childminders, school and college

Education is important for children of all ages and now, with return to school and college full time from the beginning of the autumn term:

Children attending nurseries and childminders were able to return from 1 June. From 20 July, nurseries were able to return to their normal group sizes.

Primary schools and secondary schools were able to open from 1 June, and colleges and childminders were able to open from 1 June for those who need to attend.

The scientific evidence shows that coronavirus (COVID-19) presents a much lower risk to children than it does to adults. Children are less likely than adults to be infected or become ill with coronavirus (COVID-19). Children are also less likely than adults to spread the virus while coronavirus (COVID-19) remains in the community.

To manage the risk, there will be some changes to how they work. We have asked nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges to put in place a range of protective measures, including:

- frequent cleaning of premises
- enhanced hygiene
- increased ventilation
- flexible working
- physical distance

We have asked this guidance to include local COVID alert levels.

The Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson, has set out the expectations for the return of children and students in a letter to parents.

At school alert levels, the expectation is that education and childcare provision should continue as normal.

The government has been very clear that limiting attendance at schools and other educational settings should be a last resort. It should only be used if it is the only way to prevent travel, high or very high transmission of the virus in the community, or if schools or other settings are taken separately on a case-by-case basis in the light of local circumstances and recommendations about the incidence and transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Attendance

Attendance at nursery and childminders

Whether your child attends nursery, a childminder or another early years provider is a matter for you and your provider. We know that most children will be returning to their usual early years provision, and we expect this to be the case for most children.

You can check if your child is eligible for any of the free childcare entitlements on the Childcare Choices website. Most children who are aged from 2 to 4 year to parents of 2 year olds and up to £15,000 a year for parents of 3 and 4 year olds.

Attendance at school and college

It is vital that children and young people return to school and college. For their education, development and for their mental health and well-being. Attendance is mandatory for children of compulsory school age. Parents should be aware that if a 5 year old does, or is current to start your child if they are of compulsory school age, they must attend school.

Shielding advice for all adults and children was paused from 1 August. This means that children and young people can return to school or college if they:

- are on the shielded patient list
- have been shielding with their family

See the guidance on shielding and protecting people defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable to COVID-19 for more information.

Children and young people who are clinically extremely vulnerable to coronavirus (COVID-19) should not need to discuss their care with their health professional before returning to school or college. Their health professional will have already provided advice to their family.

If children are not able to attend school because they are following clinical and shielding advice, you will not be penalised.

Holidays

As usual, you should plan your holidays within school and college holidays. Avoid taking your children out of school or college during term time.

Keep in mind that you and your children may need to self-isolate when you return from a trip overseas.

Helping make nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges as safe as possible

Early nursery, childminder, school or college visits will ease them back into the school routine and will be important for their well-being.

As part of this, there are certain approaches that we have asked nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges to implement that are essential to keep children safe.

Actions that nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges will take

We have asked nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges to:

- manage contact between children and staff in nurseries, schools and colleges in line with current public health guidance. This means your child may be asked to sit with their classmates in a classroom, socialise with their friends at their school or college and be looked after by their regular teachers. Nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges will be contacted with someone who has tested positive for the virus
- ask staff and students to wear face coverings in communal areas, including when they arrive, when they move around the school or college, when they are in classes, and for some students who are 11 and over, when they are in secondary schools and colleges and on public transport
- ask staff and students who are 11 and over in secondary schools and colleges to wear face coverings in classrooms, unless they are exempt for medical reasons

Nurseries and childminders will also minimise contact between individuals where they can. This could mean children in nurseries and childminders will be asked to remain in their group over a period.

Primary schools will also minimise contact and encourage maintaining distance as much as possible. This could mean children in primary schools will be asked to remain in each school or college. This will involve seeing children and young people in:

- smaller groups than usual
- separate classrooms or areas of the school or college
- maintain distance between individuals

We know that young people will want to socialise and talk to their friends and their teachers. It is ideally that for younger children the emphasis will be on learning and well-being, and for older children, it will be on learning.

Actions you can take

Do not send your child to their nursery, childminder, school or college if:

- they have been diagnosed with COVID-19
- someone in their household is showing symptoms

Nurseries and schools will be in touch with parents to inform your nursery, childminder, school or college the results.

If the test is positive, they will work with Public Health England to contact coronavirus (COVID-19) infections, and engage with the NHS Test and Trace process.

It is really important that you keep your nursery, childminder, school or college informed of important these actions by following the advice set out here and wider public health advice and guidance.

Face coverings

The latest evidence and advice is that children aged 12 and over should wear a mask in secondary schools and colleges.

Nationwide, we are not recommending face coverings are necessary in nurseries, childminders, primary schools and colleges. We do not recommend face coverings in nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges for children who are exempt for medical reasons.

Secondary schools and colleges (for schools where pupils are in year 7 or above) and colleges will have the choice to ask that pupils, staff and other visitors wear face coverings in communal areas where they cannot easily be maintained a distance of 1.5 metres. If they think that this is necessary in order to manage the risk of transmission.

When an area moves to local alert level 'high' or 'very high', in settings where pupils are in year 7 or above, we will ask that pupils, students and staff wear face coverings in communal areas where social distancing cannot easily be maintained.

Based on current evidence, we do not recommend face coverings for primary children. This is because the approaches schools and colleges are putting in place will minimise contacts between children in a school or college, and it is important that children can see their teachers and other children in their school or college.

Children in nurseries, childminders and primary school children will need to wear a face covering in other settings where they come into contact with people they do not usually meet, such as when travelling on public transport or visiting places of worship or offices. Youngsters will have the discretion to decide whether to do so if they are travelling with their family and they feel it is appropriate for them to do so.

In colleges, students may also be asked to wear face coverings where:

- there is a local outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) and the local Director of Public Health has advised that students should wear face coverings in classrooms
- a student who is in a bubble that is asked to self-isolate and students are likely to attend other classes or other colleges and should not be in contact with people who are clinically extremely vulnerable

Arriving and leaving nursery, the childminder, school or college

Some nurseries, schools or colleges may need to stagger or adjust start and finish times. This will be to reduce the number of people in close contact. Your child's nursery, childminder, school or college will let you know what the new arrangements will be. Nurseries, childminders and young people get to school or college.

Children and young people in secondary school or colleges will need to travel to nurseries, childminders, school or college if they are a member of their household has symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Using public transport

Everyone needs to follow the guidance on travelling the demand for public transport. If possible, you should have an alternative transport options, especially walking or cycling for short journeys.

This will help to ensure that there is enough public transport capacity to allow those who need it most, such as those who do not have their own family or friends' bubble, to travel safely.

- Using Nurseries or walking to school
- Using Childminders or cycling to school

If you and your child rely on public transport to get to their nursery, childminder, school or college, there are additional measures in place to make travel safe. Transport providers will be in touch with you if your child's start in their nursery, childminder and young people get to school or college.

Children and young people who are vulnerable or parents must not travel to nursery, childminders, school or college if they or a member of their household has symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Free home to school transport for eligible children

Local authorities' duty to provide home to school transport for eligible children and apprentices. This will be unchanged for the autumn term.

Your local authority might ask you to accept a personal travel budget or mileage allowance instead of providing transport. Your local authority will let you know if this is the case and what it means for your child's journey to school or college.

We would ask you to accept that offer if you can. It will allow that your child's school or college to open more safely, and it will mean that your child can be accepted if you don't want to or are not able.

Local authorities will also be asking parents to consider accepting a personal payment or mileage allowance for a specified period of time. Set the local authority would provide transport for your child's journey to school or college.

Wearing face coverings when travelling to and from school and college

Most children and young people aged 11 and above are now required to wear a face covering on public transport. There are some exceptions to this requirement:

- have a disability that means they cannot wear a face covering
- are travelling with someone who relies on lip reading
- are travelling with someone who is deaf or hearing impaired

We advise that children and young people aged 11 and over also wear a face covering when travelling on school or college transport, or when they are in a car with those who are not in their household.

Schools and colleges will also make plans for providing remote education if needed. Schools and colleges will let you know what they are doing. Your child's nursery, childminder and school or college will support them to continue learning.

We have already announced a catch-up package worth £1 billion to ensure that children and young people have the best possible chance for full flexible learning, with extra support for those who need it most.

Curriculum

We have set out what we expect schools to teach when equals return in the autumn. Schools will provide an ambitious and full curriculum in all subjects.

There may need to be changes to some subjects, such as PE and music, so that children can continue to learn safely in school.

We expect colleges to return to full, high-quality study programmes in the new academic year.

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Assessments and exams

Assessments in primary or junior schools

Children and young people have lost a considerable amount of their education due to coronavirus (COVID-19). We want to minimise the impact on their education and well-being (COVID-19). It is vital that we better understand the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on children and young people's education and well-being. We will use the information from these assessments to inform teaching and support. We will use all existing statutory primary assessments to return in the 2020 to 2021 academic year to inform their usual timetables.

GCSEs and A levels

No tests took place in summer 2020 due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. To enable pupils and students to progress, we ensured that pupils who would have sat A-level, AS level or GCSE exams this summer would receive a calculated grade.

Year 10 exams in summer

For each pupil, schools and colleges have provided a centre assessment grade for each GCSE, AS and A level they are expected to complete and submit to their exam board by a specified date in the summer. The deadline for this was 4 September. Centre assessments including, for example, non-exam assessment and mock results.

Ofqual has published a report on how the centre assessment grades, using a model developed by Ofqual, to arrive at the final calculated grade.

On Thursday 27 August, the Secretary of State confirmed that there would no longer be a standardisation process for GCSEs (level and GCSE). Instead, all pupils will be awarded the grade that their teacher has predicted, supported by a range of evidence that schools and colleges have been asked to gather and submit to their exam boards.

Ofqual has the evidence that a processing error has been made, these grades will be awarded.

Pupils will be able to sit the grades they receive in the summer to move into sixth form, college or other post-16 education or training in the autumn.

Additional exams in autumn 2020

We recognise that some pupils may be unhappy with their summer grade or they may need an improved result to move onto the next stage of their education. There will be a chance for pupils to sit exams in the autumn series. Ofqual has set out the details of how these exams will be delivered and how they will be graded in the autumn 2020.

Ofqual has also set out plans, so we can administer centre of exams. AS and A level exams will take place in October and GCSE exams in November.

Deadline for returning GCSE results

Pupils wishing to enter for autumn exams should do so on the school or college where they were in year 11 or sixth form in the summer. The deadline for entering was 11 September.

- 8 September for A and AS levels
- 9 September for GCSEs (except English and maths, for which the deadline is 6 October)

Ofsted inspections

In the autumn term, Ofsted inspectors will resume a sample of nurseries, childminders, primary schools, secondary schools, colleges and other children's social care providers and young people's services.

It is intended that routine Ofsted inspections will restart from January 2021. The latest timing is being kept under review.

School admissions

Admission appeals

If you have applied to a school and it does not offer your child a place, you have the right to appeal against this.

Admission appeals will take place remotely by telephone, video conference or writing, instead of face-to-face hearings.

Extra tests for selective schools such as grammar schools

If you're applying for a place for your child at a selective school[7], there may be some extra tests for your child to take.

It's up to those who are responsible for selective tests (either the school or the local authority) to decide whether to use tests. We have advised them to consider delaying entry tests to late October or early November. This means that you unlikely to get your child's results before you are asked to express your preferences for schools.

Support

In case your child does not meet the required standard in the entry test, you should be able to express your preferences for other schools. We have advised them to consider delaying their tests to late October or early November. This means that you unlikely to get your child's results before you are asked to express your preferences for schools.

Contact the admissions authority for your school (and where the planned test dates) because they are:

- making arrangements for the autumn term
- self-isolating

Schools and colleges will make alternative arrangements to assess your child if they are unable to attend.

Behaviour

Nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges may update their behaviour policies to reflect the new ways of working, including remote learning. They will let you know what these changes are.

School uniform

Uniform requirements

- Uniform requirements will be unchanged.
- Schools encouraging all schools to return to their usual uniform policies in the autumn.

Extra-curricular activities

- Schools encouraging all schools to return to their usual uniform policies in the autumn.

You do not need to clean uniforms differently or any more often than usual because of coronavirus (COVID-19).

School food

School and college kitchens should be fully open from the start of the autumn term.

They will provide food to all pupils who want it, including free school meals and universal infant free school meals as usual for those who are eligible.

Online safety

Most people, including children, have been spending more time online, whether that is in the classroom or at home.

See the support for parents and carers to keep children and young people safe from online harm. It suggests resources to help keep children and young people safe from different risks online and where to go for support and advice. Support to stay safe online includes information on security and privacy settings.

Mental health and wellbeing

Nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges will understand that some children and young people may be experiencing feelings such as anxiety, stress or low mood as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

There are online resources available to help you and your child with mental health, including:

- MindEd, a free educational resource from Health Education England on children and young people's mental health
- Rise Above, which aims to build resilience and support good mental health in young people aged 10 to 16
- Every Mind Matters, which includes an online tool and email journey to support everyone to feel more confident in taking action to look after their mental health and wellbeing
- Bereavement UK and the Childhood Bereavement Network, provide information and resources to support bereaved pupils, schools and staff

Barnardo's See, Hear, Respond service, provides support to children, young people and their families who aren't currently seeing a social worker or other agency, and who are struggling to cope with the emotional impacts of coronavirus (COVID-19). You can access via the 'See, Hear, Respond' service self-referral webpage or Freephone 0800 151 7015.

It is also vital to report any safeguarding concerns you have about any child. Contact the NSPCC helpline.

Education, health and care (EHC) plans

During the outbreak, we needed to make some of the specified special education and health care provision within EHC plans more flexible.

This flexibility has now ended, which means that if your child has an EHC plan they should receive the support they need as usual when they return to school.

School and college trips

From the autumn term, schools and colleges can resume educational day trips in the UK. They must follow the latest public health guidance and wider guidance for schools and colleges on the actions they can take to reduce risks.

We currently advise against overnight trips in the UK and overseas educational visits.

Extra-curricular activities

Schools can run breakfast and after-school activities from the autumn term. Schools will need to make sure these can be delivered in line with the wider guidance on protective measures. This means they may need to run things differently.

Talk to your child's school to check whether they are running breakfast and after-school activities.

Out-of-school settings, such as holiday or after-school clubs, can open to children and young people of all ages. It remains important that they put protective measures in place to help reduce the risk of transmission.

To minimise risks, consider:

- sending your child to the same setting consistently
- limiting the number of different settings you access

Ask the organisation that runs the activity what they are doing differently to reduce any risks.

There is advice available for parents on the use of out-of-school clubs and activities.

Local restrictions

Nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges will contact their local health protection team if they:

- have 2 or more confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) among pupils or staff within 14 days
- see an increase in children or staff absence rates due to suspected or confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19)

The local health protection team will advise what action is required. Usually, closure will not be necessary, but some groups may need to self-isolate.

If an outbreak in a school or college is confirmed, a mobile testing unit may be dispatched. They will test everyone who may have been in contact with the person who has tested positive. Testing will first focus on the person's class, followed by their year group, then the whole school or college, if necessary.

At all local COVID alert levels, the expectation is that education and childcare provision should continue as normal. The government has been very clear that limiting attendance at schools and other education settings should only be done as a last resort, even in areas where a local alert level is 'high' or 'very high'. Decisions on any restrictions necessary in education or childcare settings are taken separately on a case-by-case basis in the light of local circumstances, including information about the incidence and transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Your child's school or college should provide remote education if:

- groups of pupils need to self-isolate
- a larger restriction of attendance at school or college is needed

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1. Nursery and childminder or nurseries and childminders refer to registered nurseries, registered childminders, pre-schools, playgroups and maintained nursery schools. ↩
2. Primary and secondary schools includes independent schools, maintained schools, academies, free schools, infant schools, junior schools and middle schools. ↩
3. Colleges refers to sixth form colleges, general further education colleges, independent training providers, designated institutions, adult community learning providers and special post-16 institutions. ↩
4. Selective schools include grammar schools (which select all their children based on their high academic ability), partially selective or 'bilateral' schools which select a proportion of their intake by ability or aptitude, schools which 'band', i.e. they test all children for ability but admit children of all abilities (equal numbers of high and low ability children) and schools which admit 10% of their intake based on aptitude in the performing or visual arts, sport, modern foreign languages, design and technology or IT. ↩

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