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Education and childcare during coronavirus

Department for Education

Guidance

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

Updated 29 October 2020

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This guidance is for parents and carers of children at:

- registered nurseries and childminders[1]
- primary and secondary schools[2]
- further education colleges[3]

We have updated this guidance to include changes to the information on:

- self-isolation and shielding
- who needs to get a test for coronavirus (COVID-19)
- face coverings

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Returning to nursery, childminders, school and college

All children and young people, in all year groups, should have now returned to school and college full time.

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.

The scientific evidence shows that coronavirus (COVID-19) presents a much lower risk to children than adults of becoming severely ill. There is also some limited evidence that children may play a lesser role in transmission than adults. However, there will still be risks while coronavirus (COVID-19) remains in the community. More information is available in a statement from the Chief Medical Officers on the risks and benefits to health from schools, nurseries and childcare opening fully.

To manage the risks, things are a bit different this term. We have asked nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges to put in place a range of protective measures to help reduce the risks.

Your child's nursery, childminder, school or college will be able to give you more information about the changes they have made.

On 12 October, the Department of Health and Social Care published information on local COVID alert levels, including what they mean, why they are being introduced and what the different levels are.

The tiers of restriction for education and childcare, summarised in annex 3 of the contain framework and in guidance on higher education, work alongside the local COVID alert level framework.

At all local 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).

Attendance

Attendance at nursery and childminders

Whether your child attends nursery, a childminder or another early years provider is your decision, but we do encourage you to take up a place for your child. Attending childcare can help provide a routine as young children develop their social skills.

You can check if your child is eligible for any of the free childcare entitlements on the Childcare Choices website. These are worth on average £2,500 a year to parents of some 2-year-olds and up to £5,000 a year to 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 educational progress, for their wellbeing, and for their wider development. School attendance is now mandatory again. This means that it is your legal duty as a parent to send your child (if they are of compulsory school age) to school regularly if they are registered at one.

There is not a corresponding legal duty for post-16 education but if a young person fails to attend, their college may believe they have left the course.

Local authorities and schools have a range of legal powers to enforce attendance if a child or young person misses school without a valid reason.

If you have concerns about your child returning to school or college because you consider they may have particular risk factors, you should discuss these with your school or college. They should be able to explain ways they are changing things to reduce risks. There are resources to support you with these conversations, including this leaflet on returning to school after a period of absence.

Some parents choose to educate their children at home full-time (elective home education). Educating children at home works well when it is a positive choice and carried out with proper regard for the needs of the child. If you're considering elective home education for your child, you should read the advice on home-schooling and elective home education.

Self-isolation

A small number of children and young people may be unable to attend in line with public health advice to self-isolate because they:

- have had symptoms or a positive test result themselves
- live with someone who has symptoms or has tested positive
- are a close contact of someone who has coronavirus (COVID-19) and are requested to do so by NHS Test and Trace or the PHE advice service

If your child is unable to attend school or college for these reasons, ask your school or college what support they will provide for remote education.

If your child is identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) and is asked to self-isolate, you and other members of your household (including any other children in the same school) do not need to self-isolate unless your child, who is self-isolating, subsequently develops symptoms.

If your child has been a close contact of someone who has tested positive, and subsequently develops symptoms but has a negative test result, they will still need to self-isolate for the full 14 days.

Shielding

The UK Chief Medical Officers have issued a statement on schools and childcare reopening which states that there is a very low rate of severe disease in children from coronavirus (COVID-19).

New advice for those identified through a letter from the NHS, or a specialist doctor, as being in the clinically extremely vulnerable group (shielding list) was published on 13 October. This includes advice on the additional measures these individuals can take tailored to the relevant local COVID alert level in their area.

It states that all children and young people should return to school or college at all local COVID alert levels, including if they:

- are clinically extremely vulnerable (unless they are one of the very small number of pupils under paediatric care (such as recent transplant or very immunosuppressed children) who have been advised specifically by their GP or clinician not to attend school)
- have family members or people in their household who are clinically extremely vulnerable

In the future, the government will only reintroduce formal restrictive shielding advice in exceptional circumstances in specific local areas at very high alert level. The government will write to families separately to inform them if this is the case and they are advised to follow formal shielding.

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

Holidays

As usual, you should plan your holidays within school and college holidays. Avoid seeking permission to take your children out of school 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

Each nursery, childminder, school or college will have done their own health and safety risk assessment as part of their planning for the autumn term, and they will keep this under review.

As part of this, there are certain approaches that we have asked nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges to implement that are essential to reduce health risks.

Actions that nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges will take

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

- manage confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the school or college, in line with current public health guidance - this means your child may be asked to self-isolate for 14 days by their nursery, childminder, school or college (based on advice from the PHE advice service or local health protection teams) if they have been in close, face to face contact with someone who has tested positive for the virus
- ensure that everyone cleans their hands more often than usual, including when they arrive, when they return from breaks, and before and after eating - this should be done for 20 seconds with soap and running water or hand sanitiser
- promote the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach, to ensure good respiratory hygiene
- enhance cleaning and ventilation, including cleaning frequently touched surfaces more often

Nurseries and childminders will also minimise contact between individuals where they can. This could mean using different rooms for different age groups and keeping those groups apart.

Schools and colleges will minimise contact and encourage maintaining distance as far as possible. They will decide how best to do this because it will be different for each school or college. This will involve asking children and young people to:

- stay within specified separate groups (or bubbles)
- maintain distance between individuals

We know that younger children may not be able to maintain social distancing. It is likely that for younger children the emphasis will be on separating groups, and for older children, it will be on distancing.

Actions you can take

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

- they are showing coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms
- someone in their household is showing symptoms

Arrange a test if you or your child develops symptoms. Inform your nursery, childminder, school or college of the results.

If the test is positive, follow guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection, and engage with the NHS Test and Trace process.

Your child does not need a test if they:

- have a runny nose, are sneezing or feeling unwell, but do not have a temperature, cough or loss of, or change in, sense of smell or taste
- are advised to self-isolate because they have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19), for example, another pupil in their class, but are not showing symptoms themselves

It is really important that you help nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges to implement these actions by following the advice set out here and wider public health advice and guidance.

Face coverings

Nationwide, we are not recommending face coverings are necessary in nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges generally. This is because the measures nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges are putting in place already reduce the health risks.

Schools and colleges have the choice to ask that pupils in year 7 and above, staff and other visitors wear face coverings in areas outside the classroom (such as corridors) where social distancing is difficult, if they think that is the right thing in their school or college. Children in nurseries, at childminders and primary school children will not need to wear a face covering.

When an area moves to local alert level ‘high’ or ‘very high’, in settings where pupils in year 7 and above are educated, face coverings should be worn by adults and pupils when moving around the premises outside of classrooms, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing cannot easily be maintained. Where new local restrictions are agreed, schools will communicate the new arrangements.

Based on current evidence, face coverings will not be necessary in the classroom. This is because the approaches schools and colleges are putting in place will sufficiently reduce risk in the classroom, and because they may have a negative impact on learning and teaching.

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

- the teaching setting is more similar to, or is, a workplace environment (for example, a restaurant which may be open to the public)
- it is a requirement in the workplace or indoor environment and students are likely to come into contact with other members of the public

It is really important that face coverings are worn correctly. All schools and colleges should have a process for making sure face coverings are put on, removed, stored and disposed of properly. They should let you know what their process is.

Some pupils, students and adults may be exempt from wearing face coverings. These exemptions will apply in early years, schools and colleges, so any requirement to wear a face covering does not apply to children and young people who:

- have a disability that means they cannot wear or remove a face covering
- would find wearing a face covering severely distressing
- are with someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expression to communicate

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 helps keep groups apart as they arrive and leave the premises. If schools or colleges choose to do this it should not reduce the amount of time they spend teaching - but it could mean that your child's start or finish times change.

Schools and colleges will work with any school transport and other transport providers to coordinate, as necessary.

Your nursery, childminder, school or college will be in touch to set out any changes they are making. This might also include new processes for drop off and collection.

Using public transport

Everyone needs to play their part in reducing the demand for public transport. If possible, you should look for alternative transport options, especially walking or cycling, particularly at peak times.

This will help to ensure that there is enough public transport capacity to allow those who need to use it to travel safely. It will also benefit your family's health. See the guidance from:

- Living Streets on walking to school
- Sustrans on keeping safe on the school run

If you and your child rely on public transport to get to their nursery, childminder, school or college, the safer travel guidance for passengers will apply. In some areas, local authorities may be providing extra dedicated school transport services to help children and young people get to school or college.

Children and young people, and their parents and carers 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 free home to school transport for eligible children is unchanged. This is set out in the home to school travel and transport guidance.

Your local authority might ask you to accept a personal travel budget or mileage allowance instead of a seat on dedicated transport. This may be so they can ensure there is enough dedicated transport capacity for everyone who needs it.

We would ask you to accept that offer if you can. It will not affect your child's eligibility for dedicated transport in the future. The local authority can't make you accept if you don't want to or are not able to.

Local authorities should not expect you to commit to accepting a personal payment or mileage allowance for a specified period of time, but the local authority would need reasonable notice to reinstate home to school transport for your child.

Using dedicated school or college transport

Local authorities, schools and transport providers will not be required to uniformly apply the social distancing guidelines for public transport, on dedicated school or college transport. This is because:

- dedicated school transport often carries the same group of young people on a regular basis
- children and young people on dedicated school transport do not mix with members of the public

Local authorities, schools and transport providers will do all that is reasonably practicable to maximise social distancing where possible and minimise the risk of transmission. What is practicable is likely to vary according to local circumstances. This might include:

- asking your child to use a regular seat on this transport
- making sure boarding and disembarking is orderly and/or managed
- making sure vehicles are cleaned regularly
- ensuring that transport operators maximise the flow of fresh air

It is important that you follow any local advice provided and that your child knows and understands the importance of following any rules that are set.

Wearing face coverings when travelling to and from school and college

Most children and young people aged 11 and over are now required to wear a face covering on public transport. This does not apply to children and young people who:

- have a disability that means they cannot wear a face covering
- would find wearing a face covering severely distressing
- are travelling with someone who relies on lip reading to communicate

If your child is aged 11 or over, it is likely they will be asked to wear a face covering when travelling on dedicated transport to secondary school or college, unless they are exempt. It is important that they comply with any rules about face coverings on their transport. You will need to ensure that they have a suitable face covering.

If your child needs to share a car to school with someone outside of their support bubble or household, they should:

- share with the same people each time
- open the windows for ventilation
- if they are aged 11 or over, wear a face covering

It is really important that face coverings are worn correctly. All schools and colleges should have a process for making sure face coverings are put on, removed, stored and disposed of properly. They should let you know what their process is.

Curriculum

We have set out what we expect schools to teach now that pupils have returned. Schools will provide an ambitious and broad curriculum in all subjects.

There may need to be changes to some subjects, such as PE and music, so that schools can teach these subjects as safely as possible.

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

Schools and colleges will also make plans for providing remote education if needed. This means that if your child needs to stay at home, due to shielding or self-isolation, their school or college will support them to continue learning.

We have already announced a catch up package worth £1 billion to ensure that schools have the resources they need to help pupils make up for lost teaching time, with extra support for those who need it most.

Assessment and exams

Assessments in primary or junior schools

Children and young people have missed a critical period of their education due to schools having to close to the majority of pupils to control the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). It is vital that we better understand the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on children's education and give support to schools that need it the most.

New regulations came into force on 26 September 2020 to allow temporary changes to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) if coronavirus (COVID-19) related local restrictions are agreed. This is because local restrictions may affect a provider's ability to comply with the EYFS statutory framework in full. Details of the amendments can be found in the EYFS coronavirus disapplications guidance.

GCSEs and A levels

On Monday 12 October 2020, we confirmed that exams will go ahead next year and most AS, A level and GCSE exams will be delayed by 3 weeks to give pupils more time to catch up on their learning.

The main exam series will start on 7 June 2021, just after the May half-term, and end on 2 July 2021.

See the blog post on the delay to 2021 exams for more information. We will publish more details later in the autumn.

Additional exams in autumn 2020

The autumn series is a crucial part of ensuring fairness for students who would like to sit an examination this year or were unable to receive a grade because, for example, they are private candidates. It is important that these pupils can sit exams in autumn 2020.

To support these pupils, we are running an additional series of exams. AS and A level exams will take place in October and GCSE exams in November 2020.

Deadlines for entering autumn 2020 exams

Pupils wishing to enter for autumn exams should do so via the school or college where they were due to sit their exams in the summer. The deadlines for entering were:

- 4 September for A and AS levels
- 18 September for GCSEs (except English and maths, for which the deadline was 4 October)

Ofsted inspections

In the autumn term, Ofsted inspectors are visiting a sample of nurseries, childminders, state-funded schools and colleges to discuss how they are supporting children and young people coming back. These visits will not result in a graded judgement.

It is intended that routine Ofsted inspections will restart from January 2021. The exact 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 this decision.

Admission appeals can now be held by telephone, video conference or in writing, instead of face-to-face hearings.

Entry tests for selective schools such as grammar schools

If you are applying for a place for your child at a selective school[4], there may be some changes to how entry tests are run this year.

It is up to those who are responsible for selective tests (either the school or the local authority) to decide when to run tests. We have advised them to consider delaying entry tests to late October or early November. This means that you are unlikely to get the results before you are asked to express your preferences for schools (31 October).

In case your child does not meet the required standard in the entry test, you should use your final preference(s) for a local non-selective school, where you consider you have a good chance of securing a place.

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If you decide to choose only grammar schools, but your child does not meet the required standard in the entry test, your child will be allocated to a non-selective school. This will not be one of your chosen schools.

Contact the admission authority if your child cannot attend the planned test date(s) because they are:

- showing symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19)
- self-isolating

The school or local authority will make alternative arrangements to assess your child for ability or aptitude.

Behaviour

Nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges may update their behaviour policies to reflect any new rules or approaches they are making. They will let you know what these changes are.

School uniform

Schools decide their own uniform policy.

We have encouraged all schools to return to their usual uniform policies.

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 during 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, including relevant local COVID alert level 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 should be working to resume any breakfast and after-school activities. 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.

Independent providers of after-school, holiday clubs and other out-of-school activities for children, can also be open to children and young people of all ages. The government has published guidance for providers on the protective measures they should put in place to minimise the risk of infection and transmission of the virus.

It remains important that we also continue to minimise the risk of transmission of the virus due to increased mixing between different groups of children. When choosing after school or holiday clubs, and other out-of-school activities for your child, you should consider:

- sending your child to the same setting consistently
- the number of different settings they attend overall

Before sending your child to a setting, you should also ask providers what measures they have put in place to keep children, staff members and parents or carers safe.

There is further advice available for parents on the use of out-of-school clubs and activities. This includes details on the key measures that every setting should have in place, as well as key things to look out for when choosing an out-of-school setting for your child. The out of schools settings guidance also covers groups of home-educated children.

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 will provide remote education if:

- groups of pupils or students 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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Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance and support

The UK has left the EU

Check the new rules for January 2021

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