Part of
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 12 November 2020

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This guidance is for parents and carers of children of:

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

We have updated this guidance to include information on the national restrictions which came into force on 5 November.

National restrictions

On Saturday 31 October the Prime Minister announced New National Restrictions to tackle the coronavirus (COVID-19) which came into force on Wednesday 5 November, and will last for at least 4 weeks.

Nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges will remain open during this period. Children and young people will continue to be able to go to school or attend, to support their education and their wellbeing. Nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges will continue to implement the measures they have been implementing since they reopened to keep children and staff as safe as possible. The vast majority of children, the benefits of being back in education far outweigh the risks of being out of school.

We have updated our guidance to reflect the fact that people will be able to meet other households for the purpose of education, including for parents and carers to attend parent evenings, meetings with tutors, or visiting their child's school or college, if these activities cannot be undertaken remotely. You can continue to meet in a group of up to 6 people, either outdoor or indoor, if these activities, or those circumstances. This includes activities or clubs outside PE and sports, such as Scouts and Brownies.

If you home educate your child, you may continue to use any out-of-school activities that form part of your child's education.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is still circulating locally and causing outbreaks in schools, childcare providers and colleges

Children who are vulnerable or clinically vulnerable continue to attend school

Face coverings

During this period, pupils and adults in schools and colleges will pupils in year 7 and above will continue to be required to wear face coverings in communal areas outside of the classroom, for example in corridors and common areas where social distancing cannot be easily managed.

Attending nursery, childminders, school and college

All children and young people, or other groups, should have now returned to their education setting.

Children attending nurseries and childminders were able to return from 1 June, the first day that it was safe for them to open and welcome children back.

The scientific evidence shows that coronavirus (COVID-19) presents a much lower risk to children than other respiratory illnesses. This is down to limited evidence that children may play a lesser role in transmission than adults, and that they are less likely to be affected by the disease. The Chief Medical Officers have published a statement on Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Children and on the risk and benefits to health from schools, nurseries and childcare settings.

To keep the risks, things, and as far as possible, children and young people, staff, nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges to out in place a range of measures to reduce the risk of transmission of the virus.

Your child's nursery, childminder, school or college will be able to give you more information about the measures in place.

On 10 October, the Department of Health and Social Care published a statement on the use of face coverings in schools. The Department for Education has introduced guidance that advises secondary schools and colleges to ensure that face coverings are worn in communal areas from Monday 14 December.

The tiers of restriction for education settings, as announced across 3 of the London Framework, and guidance on their implementation, were alongside the Government's Winter plan.

At all local alert levels, the expectation is that education and childcare settings will remain open to children and students.

The government has been clear that the overwhelming benefit of providing all other education settings should only be done as a last resort, even in areas with the highest alert level. The decision to close a school or college should be supported by a local Director of Public Health and be underpinned by 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, we expect that they will now be able to attend as many days as your child. Attending nursery can help provide a sense of routine and support their social skills.

Free childcare for 2-year-olds is eligible for any of the free childcare entitlements for 3- and 4-year-olds. This includes 15 hours of childcare for 2,500 a year for 3-year-olds and 15 hours of childcare for 2,500 a year for 4-year-olds.

Attendance at school and college

It is vital that children and young people attend school and college, for their educational progress, for their wellbeing, and for their safety and development. School attendance is now mandatory again. This means that it is your legal duty as a parent to ensure your child attends school regularly, and your child's school will be keeping a register of their attendance.

There is not a corresponding legal duty for parents of 16-18 year-olds to ensure a person has to attend, they have agreed to attend college or training.

Local authorities and schools have a range of powers to enforce school attendance. If you do not ensure your child attends school, you may be prosecuted.

If you have concerns about your child attending school or college because you are shielding or because your child is shielding, or because your child is clinically vulnerable or clinically vulnerable, we want to work with you to change things to reduce risks. There are exceptions to support you with these circumstances, including if your child is shielding or clinically vulnerable, or is a carer.

Some parents choose to educate their children at home full-time (elective home education). Elective home education means that your child is in a position to choose and carry out which program suits the needs of the child. If you're considering elective home education, we have produced a checklist and guidance on home education and elective home education.

Self-isolation

A proportion of children and young people may be unable to attend in-person education or school because is self-isolation because they:

- have had symptoms or a positive test result themselves
- live with someone who is symptomatic or has tested positive
- are a close contact of someone who has coronavirus (COVID-19) and are requested to by a local NHS Test and Trace team to self-isolate

If your child is unable to attend school or college for these reasons, with your school or college will provide work for your child to complete at home.

If your child is identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19), your local NHS Test and Trace team will contact you and tell you to self-isolate. Your local NHS Test and Trace team will also let you know if you need to self-isolate where your child, where is self-isolating, subsequently attends school or college.

If your child has been identified as 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 period.

Shielding

If your child is clinically extremely vulnerable, please refer to the section on National Restrictions. Were guidance for shielding and protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from coronavirus (COVID-19) has been updated.

The UK Chief Medical Officers issued a statement on schools and childcare providers for children who are shielding or who are clinically extremely vulnerable from coronavirus (COVID-19).

After the period of national restrictions, it is expected that all children and young people will return to school or college and that they will attend school. This includes if they are clinically extremely vulnerable (unless they are even shielding) or live with someone who is shielding. If your child is being transported or accompanied to school or college by someone who is shielding (specifically the NHS UK children not to attend school).

Children who are clinically extremely vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable, but not shielding, should be able to attend school or college and receive education during the period of national restrictions.

In the future, the government will review the evidence and consider introducing advice or exceptional circumstances in specific local areas of very high alert level. This would be in the very unlikely event that it is safer for children to stay at home and they are advised to follow the shielding advice.

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

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 will not be able to enjoy holidays such as visiting other countries in the same way.

Helping make nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges as possible

Each nursery, childminder, school or college will have done their own health and safety risk assessment and have put in place measures to keep children, and they will keep this under review.

As part of this, there are some 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 nursery, school or college and their close contacts. Public Health England will support the nursery, childminder, school or college in this. Public Health England will also work with a college (based on advice from the PHE advice service or local health protection teams) to trace the contacts of 16 to 19 year-old students who are not living in their household
- ensure that everyone clears their hands more often than usual, including when they arrive and when they leave the nursery, school or college. This should be done for 20 seconds with soap and water or with a 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. They will do this by ensuring, as far as possible, that children in different age groups and keeping them in groups.

Schools and colleges will minimise contact and encourage maintaining distance as far as possible. They will do this by ensuring that pupils in each bubble will be different for each school or college. This will minimise asking children and staff to self-isolate.

Colleges will also adopt a bubble approach.

Nurseries and childminders will also minimise contact between individuals. They will do this by ensuring, as far as possible, that children in different age groups are kept in groups.

Children in nurseries, all childminders and primary school children will not need to wear face coverings.

Based on current evidence, face coverings will not be necessary in the classroom. Face coverings may be required in certain circumstances in other places and sufficiently reduce risk. Face coverings in secondary schools may be a significant impact on learning and teaching.

In colleges, students will need to wear face coverings where:

- the teaching setting is more similar to, or a workplace environment (for example, workshops, laboratories, or practical areas)
- it is a requirement in the workplace for students on placement or students who are likely to come into contact with other members of the public
- it is really important for the delivery of the course, for example, doctors and colleges should have a process for making sure face coverings are put on when needed, for example, if a patient or a student feels uncomfortable about their presence.

Some pupils, students and adults may be exempt from wearing face coverings for medical reasons, or for other reasons such as communicating with someone who relies on lip reading, clear speech or British Sign Language (BSL) or people who:

- have a disability that means they cannot wear a various face covering
- would find wearing a face covering severely distressing
- would be unable to remove a face covering on their own or find assistance in removing it

We expect people to be sensitive to these needs and to be aware that some people are not able to wear face coverings and that the reasons for this may not be visible to others.

Arriving and leaving nursery, the childminder, school or college

Nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges will put in place arrangements to adjust start and finish times. This helps keep groups apart as they arrive and leave the nursery, childminder, school or college, and to reduce the number of the amount of time they spend in the shared areas of the nursery, childminder, school or college.

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

Your nursery, childminder, school or college will be in touch to set out any changes they are making. This will include:

- new processes for drop-off and collection
- staff observing pathways for school pupils
- not being allowed onto the site without an appointment

Using public transport

Everyone needs to play their part in reducing the demand for public transport. This includes using other modes of transport, such as walking, cycling, scooting or cycling, particularly at peak times.

This will keep to ensure that there is enough public transport capacity to allow people who need to travel to do so safely. It will also benefit your family's health and fitness.

- Cycling Strategy an address to cycling
- Sustrans are leading effort on the school run

If you and your child rely on public transport to get to their nursery, college or university, please follow the safety measures that are in place to apply. In some areas, local authorities may be providing extra dedicated school transport services. Please contact your local authority for more information.

Children and young people, and their parents and carers must not travel to school or college by taxi or private hire vehicle unless as a member of their household (for a signature of coronavirus (COVID-19)).

Free home to school transport for eligible children

Local authorities may be required to make free home to school transport for eligible children who cannot travel to school or college by other means (see guidance).

Travel out authority might ask you to accept a personal travel budget or mileage allowance instead of a seat in dedicated transport. This may be so that your child can travel to school or college by a means that is reasonable for your family.

We would ask you to accept that offer if you can. It will not affect your child's eligibility for school transport in the future, and it will help us to make sure we can plan for travel in the most cost-effective way.

Your local authority may also be prepared to accepting a personal or organised or mileage allowance for your child's school or college. 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 be required to ensure safety measures are in place to protect children and young people on dedicated school or college transport. This is because:

- it is important that children can continue to have the same group of people on a regular basis
- it is important that parents can 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 maintain social distancing between people on school or college transport, and to minimise the number of times it is very practicing to local circumstances. This might include:

- setting up pick-up points for school or college transport
- making sure boarding and disembarking is orderly and in manageable
- making sure vehicles are cleaned regularly
- ensuring that transport operators maximise the flow of fresh air

Your local authority will be in touch with parents and carers of your child to know and understand the impacts of following any rules that are set out.

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 school transport. This is because it is not always possible to maintain a safe distance from people who do not live in your household.

- 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

Children in year 7 and above will also be required to wear face coverings on dedicated transport to secondary school or college, unless they are exempt. Children in year 6 and below are not required to wear a face covering on transport. You will need to discuss this with your child's school.

Your child needs to draw a cut to school with someone outside of their household bubble or household. They should:

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

Your child should be encouraged to travel to school actively. Kid schools and colleges should have plans for helping children and young people to travel safely, relaxed, stored and disposed of properly. They should let you know what their arrangements are.

Curriculum

We have set out a number of expert schools to teach now that pupils have returned. Schools will provide an ambitious and broad curriculum in all subjects.

Pupils in year 11 and year 13 will receive a full curriculum. Pupils in other years will be taught a broad and balanced curriculum, with a focus on English and mathematics.

We have updated our guidance on the Early Years Foundation Stage to allow temporary changes to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in coronavirus (COVID-19) times. We have also published a guidance on the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in coronavirus (COVID-19) times. Details of the amendments can be found in the EYFS Coronavirus dissemination webinar.

GCSEs and A levels

On Monday 12 October 2020, we confirmed that exams will go ahead next year and next KS. A number of GCSE subjects will be taken in the summer, with a gap more time to catch up on their learning.

Ofqual will publish a set of GCSE, AS and A level, Level 3 and Pre-U exams, and vocational and technical qualifications.

Ofqual will also consult on the criteria for GCSE exams. We expect this will publish more details in January.

Additional exams in autumn 2020

Ofqual will also publish a set of GCSE, AS and A level, Level 3 and Pre-U exams, and vocational and technical qualifications, for students who need to take them in the autumn.

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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[footnote 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.

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.

When taking your children to a test or picking them up, you should not wait outside the venue or congregate in groups with people who you do not live with or who are not within your support bubble. You should follow safe distancing rules.

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 attend their school or college.

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

During the period of national restrictions, schools and colleges should be continuing to offer before and after school activities for their pupils, to enable parents to work, seek work or to undertake education or training, and to provide respite care (for vulnerable children). You can continue to access this provision, as well as other out-of-school activities, in these circumstances.

Schools will need to make sure any breakfast and after school activities 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.

During the period of national restrictions, independent providers of after-school, holiday clubs and other out-of-school activities for children, can also continue to operate. However, parents should only be accessing these providers for face-to-face provision where it is reasonably necessary for them to do so for:

- childcare purposes, to enable them to work, search for work, or to undertake education or training
- the purpose of respite care for a vulnerable child
- existing arrangements by home educating parents to ensure their child receives a suitable full-time education

Where providers are continuing to operate face-to-face provision, they should continue to follow the government 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.

From Thursday 5 November, the national restrictions replace the local restrictions in your area, until Wednesday 2 December.

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

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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