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

Part of
Education and childcare during coronavirus

Department for Education

Updated 1 December 2020

This guidance is for parents and carers of children aged:

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

We have updated this guidance following the end of the national restrictions. This includes updated information on:

- attendance in early years and childcare
- GCSE and A Level exams in summer 2021
- Holidays
- masks for older children

Attending nursery, childminders, school and college

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

Different attending nurseries and childminders were able to return from 1 June and 15 June, and schools and colleges from 1 March and 8 June.

The scientific evidence shows that coronavirus (COVID-19) presents a much lower risk to children than adults of becoming severely ill. There is also limited evidence that children may play a lesser role in transmission than adults. We will keep this under review as we learn more about the virus in the community. More information is available in a document for the Medical Officers on the risks and benefits to health from schools, colleges and childcare settings during COVID-19.

Following the Prime Minister's announcement on 23 November, nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges will be able to welcome visitors back.

To keep the risks low, things are a bit different. We have asked nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges to put in place a range of protective measures to keep the risks low.

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

Attendance

Attendance at nursery and childminders

Whether your child attends nursery, childminder provision or early years provision is your decision, but we do encourage you to take up places for your child. Nurseries and childminders have been welcoming back young children during their social bubble.

You can check if your child is eligible for any of the free childcare entitlements offered by the Department for Education. Some of these are available only to parents of some 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 attend school and college, for their educational progress, for their well-being and for their safeguarding and protection. School attendance is now mandatory again. This means that it is your legal duty as a parent to ensure your child attends school or college regularly, unless they are shielding or have a medical condition.

There is not a corresponding legal duty for post-16 education, but it is young people's duty to attend, they must attend if their school or college is open.

Local authorities and schools have a range of legal powers to enforce attendance if needed, and prosecute persistent absence in the most serious cases.

If you have concerns about your child attending school or college because you are worried about their safety or health, you should discuss your concerns with your school or college. Their school or college will be able to explain they are changing things to reduce risks. There are resources to support you with these conversations, including from the National Children's Bereavement Service.

Some parents choose to educate their children at home full-time (elective home education). Local authorities have a duty to ensure that children of school age receive an education, and they may offer advice and support to parents who are considering elective home education for your child. you should read the advice for parents considering 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 test 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 required to isolate by the Test and Trace or PHE Health protection teams

If your child is unable to attend school or college for these reasons, ask your school or college about how they can continue their 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 should also self-isolate. Your child's school or college will be able to provide more information about what this means, and what it develops symptoms.

If your child has been in close contact of someone who has tested positive, and subsequently develops symptoms fully as negative test result, they will still need to self-isolate for 10 days.

Shielding

Shielding guidance for shielders and protective people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from coronavirus (COVID-19).

More evidence has emerged that shows there is a very low risk of children becoming very seriously ill with coronavirus. This is true for children with existing health conditions. For fewer children should remain in the clinically extremely vulnerable group. Most children in this group can now attend school with their classmates.

If your child is still in the clinically extremely vulnerable group, the advice is that they should not attend school. The Chief Medical Officer at GOV.uk has updated his advice for children who are in the clinically extremely vulnerable group (specifically, a 10% cancer plus or recent transport or any immunosuppressive treatment). Their school or college will be able to provide more information if your child is advised to attend school or college.

Children who live with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable should attend school and college.

In the future, the government may reintroduce more formal restriction shielding measures for the clinically extremely vulnerable if the local or national level areas, based on advice from the Chief Medical Officer. The government will keep this under review, and will let people in the clinically extremely vulnerable group know if this changes.

Further information for parents is available from the Royal College of Pediatrics and Child Health.

If children are not able to attend school because they are following clinical or public health advice, we will not penalise.

Holidays

As usual, you should plan your holidays within school and college holidays. Avoid taking unnecessary trips to take your children out of their nursery or school.

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

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

Each nursery, childminder, school or college will have done their own health risk assessment, and put in place the measures they need to keep their place safe and keep their children safe.

As part of this, there are certain approaches that are best 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) amongst their children or young people and workforce, in line with government and PHE guidance. This may be asked to self-isolate for 10 days, including children, young people or college Staff, and follow the PHE advice service or local health protection team. Your child's school or college will be in touch with you if ensure anyone who lives with them more often than usual, including children who are not in their bubble, to self-isolate for 10 days. Anyone who should be asked to self-isolate will be contacted by the Test and Trace service.
- provide 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, for example, keeping children in their bubble and ensuring staff and children stay apart.

Schools and colleges will minimise contact and mixing by, for example, keeping children in their bubble, ensuring lessons, assemblies and other events are different for each school or college, staggering arrival times and young people in:

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

We know that younger children find it harder to maintain social distancing. It is likely that for younger children the emphasis will be on separating groups, rather than on social distancing.

Actions you can take

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

- they are shielding (see above for COVID-19 guidance)
- someone in their household is shielding symptoms

Please keep if you or your child develops symptoms. Inform your nursery, childminder, school or college of the results.

We think is positive. Follow the PHE guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection.

Face coverings

Nationally, we are not recommending face coverings as necessary in classrooms or other school settings. We do not recommend face coverings in measures nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges put in place already reduce the health risks.

We do ask secondary school pupils in years 7 and above which are in the Tables, and when the school or college is in a local area with a local lockdown or tier 2 tier 3 tier area outside the classroom where social distancing is not possible. Secondary school pupils in years 7 and above should also wear face coverings in the premises and when travelling to school and college in communal areas with pupils in year 7 and above which are in Tier 2 and 3.

Secondary school pupils in Tier 2 and 3 areas, including year 6 and below, it is not mandatory for staff and visitors to wear face coverings.

In situations where social distancing is not possible, we do not rule out provide Old example which keeping school or college open, and communal areas, nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges will put in place other measures to reduce the risk. A negative impact on learning and teaching.

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

- the teaching setting is more similar to, or is, a workplace environment (for example, a workshop or a place of work for a T level)
- it is a requirement for a visiting speaker (for example, a guest lecturer)
- they to come into contact with other members of the public

It is really important that children, young people, parents, carers, schools and colleges should have a process for making sure face coverings are put on, taken off and stored or disposed of in a hygienic way. Your child's school or college will have a process.

Some pupils, students and adults may be exempt from wearing face coverings. These exemptions will apply to people who cannot tolerate a face covering because of a medical condition, disability or for other reasons.

- have a disability that makes it difficult to wear a face covering
- would find wearing a face covering wearing distressing
- are communicating with someone who relies on lip reading, facial expressions or mouth movements to communicate

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

Arriving and leaving nursery, the childminder, school or college

Some nurseries, childminders, schools or colleges may have staggered or adjust start and finish times. This helps keep groups apart as they arrive and leave. Your child's school or college will be in touch if this is how it is going to work, or you can find out from your child's school or college.

Schools and colleges will work with school transport and other transport providers to ensure they are ready.

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

- new processes for drop off and collection
- not allowing gathering at the school gate
- not being allowed into the site without an appointment

Using public transport

Everyone needs to play their part in reducing the demand for public transport, including those who do not rely on it themselves. Government is not recommending or putting pubilcly in place these.

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:

- London travel is ready for school
- Journey to school and college

Local authorities will provide public transport to get to their nursery, childminder, school or college. Your local authority will let you know if this will apply. In some areas, local authorities may be providing extra dedicated school transport services to ensure that children and young people can travel to school or college safely.

Children and young people, and their parents and carers must not travel to nursery, childminder, 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 aged 5 to 16 years old, and for those who are eligible to attend a grammar school, is unchanged.

Your local authority might ask you to accept a personal travel budget or arrangements to travel to school or college in a different way. This might be if they can ensure that a more suitable arrangement for your child to travel safely when 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 cannot make you accept if you do not want to, or if it is not suitable.

Local authorities should not expect you to commit to accepting a personal travel budget for the whole academic year. Local authorities should be flexible and actively accept least reasonable notice to reinstate home to school transport when needed.

Using dedicated school or college transport

Local authorities, schools and colleges will have their transport risk assessed by uniformly apply the social distancing guidelines for public transport, on dedicated school or college transport. This means:

- dedicated school or college transport often carries the same group of young people as they do in school
- dedicated school or college transport will generally not be shared with people who are not 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 of coronavirus (COVID-19) between people who do not live together. This might include:
- asking your child to sit a regular seat on this transport
- making sure bubbles are maintained when they travel together
- making sure vehicles are cleaned regularly
- ensuring that regular ventilation takes place on the flow of fresh air

It is important that you follow any local advice provided and that your child knows and understands the rules they need to follow to travel safely.

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 are exempt from wearing a face covering.

Your local authority will let you know if this applies to your school or college, and what it means for your child.

Local authorities should not expect you to commit to accepting a personal travel budget for the whole academic year. Local authorities should be flexible and actively accept least reasonable notice to reinstate home to school transport when needed.

Performances

Nurseries, schools and colleges may need to consider alternative approaches to rehearsing performances and holding performances with audiences.

Attendance by parents, carers and others will need to be restricted, and nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges will need to take steps to safeguard the children and young people in their care.

Guidance for Year 6 groups, should not hold performances with an audience.

Assessments and exams

Assessments in primary or junior schools

To recognise the challenges that primary schools are facing, primary assessments in summer 2021 will be entirely phase and cohort:

- phonics
- English reading and writing
- mathematics

We are also helping schools to take a more flexible approach if pupils are absent for a period of time. Ofsted will not inspect schools during the period they are closed to everyone, including pupils and parents, and will not inspect schools with 20% Pupil and 20% and June 2020 revisited.

The usual key stage tests in English and mathematics, and key stage 1 and 2 tests for English grammar, punctuation and spelling will not take place in 2021. Instead, we will ask teachers to use their professional judgement to assess pupils, although schools may decide to use tests if it helps them. Schools will not be required to report or science teacher assessments at either key stage.

We have already announced that we will provide a grant of £1 billion to ensure that schools can provide the support their pupils need to make up for lost learning time, with extra support for those who need it most.

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Assessments and exams

GCSEs and A levels

On Thursday 3 December 2020, we confirmed changes to GCSE, AS and A levels in 2021.

Grading in 2021 will be as fairly as we possible the overall profile of grades awarded in 2020 to students who were in a similar position to students who sit exams in a qualification. To ensure fairness, grades awarded will be comparable to those made in the 2020 exams including adjustments made to ensure fairness and rigour. Ofqual will publish more information on how the government and Ofqual have worked together to ensure this impact.

The Ofqual consultation on the summer 2021 exams provides more information.

This follows confirmation that exams will go ahead next year and most AS, A level and GCSE students will receive their results by the end of August, the same date as last year.

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

Ofsted inspections

We suspend routine Ofsted inspections, and putting a sample of nurseries, childminders, state-funded schools and colleges to discuss how they are managing and providing education to children. We will also inspect a sample of colleges and further providers, and initial teacher training providers during the summer term.

Ofsted will carry out these inspections (January 2021), inspectors will carry out inspections of a sample of nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges currently rated inadequate and some that require improvement. These will be unannounced, and will focus on safeguarding, the quality of education and teaching (including distance learning) and leadership and management.

During the spring term, assurance inspections will take place in nurseries and childminders and schools. The purpose of these inspections is to help Ofsted set out what it is like for children in their early years setting and to seek assurance that leaders are taking the steps necessary to ensure children are safe and receive a good education.

Ofsted will also have the power to impact any setting in response to any concerns about safeguarding, the quality of education or the welfare of children.

(which could include remote education).

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

Nearly every selective school[footnote 4] will already have run their selection tests for children whose parents want a place for September 2021.

If you are applying for a school which is yet to test, or you are applying for an in-year or late place and need to travel for your child to be tested, that travel is considered to be essential travel.

On arriving at or leaving test centres, parents and children should take the 3 simple actions we must all take to keep on protecting each other – wash hands, cover face, and make space.

Parents and children should not congregate around the test venue before during or after the test, and neither parents nor their children, may attend the test if they are:

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

If you or your child are showing symptoms or self-isolating, contact the school (or local authority if it is running the test). 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 for pupils, 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 supports 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

Schools and colleges can resume educational day trips in the UK. They must follow the latest public health guidance, including relevant local restrictions, 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.

We recognise the enormous benefits overnight residential educational visits can provide for children and young people.

In February 2021, we will review the possibility of changing our advice on domestic residential education visits to resume from Easter 2021, if the scientific evidence allows.

Extra-curricular activities

Schools and colleges should be working to resume all of their before and after school activities for their pupils. You can continue to access this provision, as well as other out-of-school activities, as you normally would. There are some legal gatherings restrictions on indoor activities for students aged 18 or over, but it does not include those who were under the age of 18 on 31 August. Those students who have turned 18 during the course of the academic year are not subject to these additional restrictions.

Schools will still 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.

Independent providers of after-school, holiday clubs and other out-of-school activities for children, may also continue to be open for both indoor and outdoor provision. They should continue to follow the government guidance 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.

Managing cases in nurseries, schools and colleges, and 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 restriction tiers, the government's policy is that education settings will remain open. Any restrictions on education would only be as a last resort and would only be initiated by the central government. In all circumstances, in all settings, vulnerable children and young people and the children of critical workers should have access to full time or usual provision. Where circumstances relate to local restrictions, this is clearly set out in the coronavirus (COVID-19) contingency framework for education and childcare settings.

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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Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance and support

Brexit transition

Check the new rules for January 2021

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