Department for Education

Guidance

Actions for early years and childcare providers during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak

Updated 30 December 2020

Contents

Main changes to previous guidance
Introduction
Who this guidance is for
Responsibilities of local authorities and early years providers
Risk assessments, and individuals with protected characteristics
Infection prevention and response: system of controls
Other safety in setting controls
Music, dance and drama
Children's attendance
Considerations for operating the setting
Safeguarding and welfare
Early years foundation stage and reforms
Ofsted
Childminders
Funding and business support

Print this page

Main changes to previous guidance

On 30 December 2020, we updated the guidance on:

- staff who are pregnant

On 22 December 2020, we updated the guidance on:

- tier 4 restrictions
- charging parents and carers (funding and business support section)
- what to do when an individual has had close contact with someone with coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms (systems of control section)
- containing any outbreak (system of controls section)
- the definition of close contact (system of controls section)
- when to count 10 days isolation period from (system of controls and childminder sections)
- the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) to say it is extended to April 2021 (funding and business support section)

On 14 December 2020, we updated information on:

- quality assurance visits (childminders section)
- 30-hour entitlements and amended references to autumn (childminders and funding and business support sections)
- the number of days of self-isolation (system of controls, returning from abroad and childminders sections)

A list of the previous updates to this guidance is available.

Introduction

It continues to be our aim that all children can attend early years provision. This guidance is intended to support early years settings to manage provision during coronavirus (COVID-19). We continue to work with the early years sector to understand how they can be best supported to ensure that sufficient safe, appropriate and affordable childcare is available for those returning to work now, and for all families who need it in the longer term.

We will keep this guidance under review as we continue to monitor the situation.

This guidance should be read alongside the following guidance.

Guidance on infection prevention and control:

- safe working in education, childcare and children's social care settings, including the use of personal protective equipment (PPE)

Guidance on funding:

- financial support for education, early years and children's social care
- check if you can claim for your employees' wages through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme
- use of free early education entitlements funding during coronavirus (COVID-19)

Other relevant guidance:

- temporary early years foundation stage (EYFS) coronavirus (COVID-19) disapplications
- Ofsted's response to coronavirus (COVID-19)
- EYFS reforms: government consultation response

Who this guidance is for

This guidance is for local authorities and all early years providers in England. This includes early years provision in:

- maintained schools
- non-maintained schools
- independent schools
- all providers on the Ofsted early years register
- all providers registered with an early years childminder agency

For reception, schools should, in the most part, refer to the guidance for schools: coronavirus (COVID-19), although some of the information in this guidance is relevant to reception.

This guidance does not apply to:

- nannies or au pairs, as they work in the child's or children's family home
- providers caring for children over the age of 5 and registered with Ofsted on either the compulsory or voluntary childcare register - providers caring for children over the age of 5 should refer to the guidance on protective measures for out-of-school settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak
- providers offering childcare through community activities, holiday clubs, breakfast or after-school clubs, tuition and other out-of-school provision, they should refer to protective measures for holiday and after-school clubs, and other out-of-school settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak

Responsibilities of local authorities and early years providers

Early years providers' responsibilities

We understand that it may not be possible for all settings to be open at this time. Early years settings should work together with local authorities to agree the provision needed locally to support the needs identified. Settings are expected to be flexible and work together where required.

We understand that in some areas, shared provision through early years hubs and clusters is in place. Separate guidance is available for early years settings on cluster and hub provision.

Settings are responsible for:

- safeguarding - local agencies, services and settings should work together to actively look for signs of harm given the greater risk of harm that some children may have been exposed to through coronavirus (COVID-19)
- supporting the learning and development of - and caring for - children who attend, as set out in the early years foundation stage (EYFS) framework
- in the case of vulnerable children, particularly those with social workers, early years providers should continue to encourage these children to attend regularly and notify their social worker if they stop attending
- planning and implementing the system of controls, building on the hierarchy of protective measures that have been in use throughout coronavirus (COVID-19) - the infection prevention and system of controls section sets out the public health advice which early years settings must follow

Early years settings are not required to keep children in small, consistent groups within settings - they can have normal group sizes. Settings should still consider how they can minimise mixing within settings, for example where they use different rooms for different age groups, keeping those groups apart as much as possible.

This change does not extend to cover provision for children over the age of 5. Where early years settings are also caring for children over the age of 5, they should ensure they are also following guidance on protective measures for out-of-school settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak which includes guidance on group sizes.

Providers that care for children both under the age of 5 and over the age of 5 separately, where it is possible to do so, may choose to apply the measures outlined in this guidance to those children under the age of 5, and the measures outlined in the protective measures for out-of-school settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak to those over the age of 5.

Providers that have mixed age groups together will need to, as far as possible, keep all children irrespective of age in small consistent groups of no more than 15. Each group must be with at least one staff member, or with more staff members to meet relevant ratio requirements.

All other system of controls measures must remain in place.

We are continuing to make progress in understanding the disease and transmission characteristics of coronavirus (COVID-19). In addition, early years settings are on average much smaller than schools. This allows a less restrictive approach to mixing, and operating within strict space and ratio requirements, within settings than schools.

Local authorities' responsibilities

Local authorities are responsible for:

- monitoring demand and capacity for childcare and should work with early years settings to ensure there are sufficient places to cater for those in priority groups as well as meeting local need - this may involve providing places in alternative settings if necessary or working with neighbouring local authorities to co-ordinate provision, while keeping in mind the impact on children and families
- continuing to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area, working with partner organisations and agencies, throughout coronavirus (COVID-19) (as set out in working together to safeguard children)
- supporting early years settings to assess the risks for children whose education, health and care (EHC) plans they maintain, and ensuring those children are safely cared for whether in a setting or at home
- working together with local agencies and services to actively look for signs of harm given the greater risk of harm some children may have been exposed to through the coronavirus (COVID-19) period

Ensuring sufficient places when settings have to close or have low-capacity or demand

We understand some settings may be unable to open, especially if they are experiencing staff shortages due to self-isolation and sickness, or particularly low levels of demand. Local authorities will work with local settings to determine the best way to ensure sufficient childcare.

Actions for local authorities to monitor and manage their local early years markets

Local authorities should:

- continue to work with each early years providers to monitor and manage their local childcare market
- develop an understanding of any gaps in childcare supply, as well as the barriers individual providers are experiencing and where they might temporarily be unable to open more widely or re-open (if they have been closed)
- where needed, manage the wider market flexibly to ensure that there is sufficient childcare provision, continuing to prioritise places for vulnerable children and children of critical workers, followed by 3- and 4-year olds, and then younger age groups - this may include:
  - moving children between providers where one provider has closed, and another has empty dedicated schools grant (DSG) funded places
  - operating through clusters and hubs to maintain educational provision, or, if necessary
  - using early years DSG block contingency budgets, where local authorities have them, or uncommitted central spend in the early years budget

Further information about funding for providers can be found in the guidance on the use of free early education entitlements funding during coronavirus.

Risk assessments, and individuals with protected characteristics

Risk assessment

Settings must comply with health and safety law, which requires them to assess risks and put in place proportionate control measures.

Settings should thoroughly review their health and safety risk assessment and draw up plans in re-opening, in the event that they have to close. Settings should have active arrangements in place to monitor that the controls are effective, working as planned, and updated appropriately, for example when any issues are identified, or when there are changes in public health advice.

When conducting risk assessments, settings should ensure consideration is given to staff and children with protected characteristics from groups where a disparity has been shown by the review of disparities in risks and outcomes (for example, age and sex, where people live, deprivation, ethnicity and/or people's occupation).

For more information on what is required of employers in relation to health and safety risk assessments, please see annex A of the guidance for schools.

If buildings have been closed or have had reduced occupancy during coronavirus (COVID-19), water system stagnation can occur due to lack of use, increasing the risks of Legionnaires' disease. Advice on this can be found in the guidance on legionella risks during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

Additional advice on safely re-occupying buildings can be found in the Chartered Institute of Building Services Engineers guidance on emerging from lockdown.

When the setting is in operation, it is important to ensure good ventilation and maximise this wherever possible, for example, by opening windows where this is safe to do so (bearing in mind safeguarding in particular). Advice on this can be found in Health and Safety Executive guidance on air conditioning and ventilation during the coronavirus outbreak.

Supporting people who may be at increased risk from coronavirus (COVID-19)

Employer health and safety and equalities duties

Settings have a legal obligation to protect their employees, and others, from harm and should continue to assess health and safety risks and consider how to meet equalities duties in the usual way. Following the steps in this guidance will help towards mitigating the risks of coronavirus (COVID-19) to children and staff and help settings to meet their legal duties to protect employees and others from harm.

All staff should follow the measures set out in the system of controls section of this guidance to minimise the risks of transmission. This includes continuing to observe good hand and respiratory hygiene and minimising contact where possible, including maintaining social distance between staff within settings.

Setting leaders should explain to staff the measures the setting has put in place to reduce risks. We anticipate adherence to the measures in this guidance will provide the necessary reassurance for staff to attend early years settings.

If staff are concerned, including those who may be clinically vulnerable, clinically extremely vulnerable or who believe they may be at possible increased risk from coronavirus, we recommend setting leaders discuss any concerns individuals may have around their particular circumstances and reassure staff about the protective measures in place.

Staff who are clinically extremely vulnerable

Clinically extremely vulnerable people should not go to the workplace if they live or work in areas where shielding advice is active. This applies to tier 4 areas only. Otherwise, if staff cannot work from home, they can still go to work in tiers 1, 2 and 3.

Under tier 3, staff and employers may wish to discuss flexibilities that support clinically extremely vulnerable staff, such as staggered start times to reduce travel during rush hour.

Read further guidance for the clinically extremely vulnerable.

Staff who are clinically vulnerable

Clinically vulnerable staff can continue to attend early years settings. While in settings they should follow the sector-specific measures in this guidance to minimise the risks of transmission.

This includes taking particular care to observe good hand and respiratory hygiene, minimising contact and maintaining social distance from other staff in settings. This provides that ideally, adults should maintain a 2 metre distance from others. Where this is not possible avoid close face to face contact and minimise time spent within 1 metre of others. While the risk of transmission between young children and adults is likely to be low, adults should continue to take care to socially distance from other adults including older children and adolescents.

People who live with those who are clinically extremely vulnerable or clinically vulnerable can attend the workplace.

Staff who are pregnant

Pregnant women are considered 'clinically vulnerable' or in some cases 'clinically extremely vulnerable' to coronavirus (COVID-19) and therefore require special consideration as set out in the guidance for pregnant employees.

Employers should carry out a risk assessment to follow the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (MHSW). More information is available on workplace risk assessment for vulnerable people.

Information contained in the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the Royal College of Midwives guidance on coronavirus (COVID-19) in pregnancy should be used as the basis for a risk assessment.

Pregnant women of any gestation should not be required to continue working if this is not supported by the risk assessment.

Women who are 28 weeks pregnant and beyond, or are pregnant and have an underlying health condition that puts them at a greater risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19) at any gestation, should take a more precautionary approach. Employers should ensure pregnant women are able to adhere to any active national guidance on social distancing or advice for pregnant women considered to be clinically extremely vulnerable (this group may previously have been advised to shield).

Staff who may otherwise be at increased risk from coronavirus (COVID-19)

Some people with particular characteristics may be at comparatively increased risk from coronavirus (COVID-19), as set out in the review of disparities in risks and outcomes report. This looked at different factors including age and sex, where people live, deprivation, ethnicity, people's occupation and care home residence. The reasons are complex and there is ongoing research to understand and translate these findings for individuals in the future. If people with possible risk factors are concerned, we recommend settings discuss their concerns and explain the measures the setting is putting in place to reduce risks. Setting leaders should try as far as practically possible to accommodate additional measures and follow advice relevant to local restriction tiers.

People who live with those who have comparatively increased risk from coronavirus (COVID-19) can attend the workplace.

Infection prevention and response: system of controls

Keeping children and staff safe is our utmost priority. This section of the guidance sets out the public health advice that early years settings must follow to minimise the risks of coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission. It also includes the process that should be followed if anyone develops coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms while attending the setting. This guidance has been developed with advice from Public Health England (PHE).

The public health advice in this guidance makes up a PHE-endorsed system of controls, building on the hierarchy of protective measures that have been in use throughout coronavirus (COVID-19). When implemented in line with a revised risk assessment, these measures create an inherently safer environment for children and staff where the risk of transmission of infection is substantially reduced for children and staff.

The system of controls provides a set of principles that, when followed, will effectively minimise risks. All elements of the system of controls are essential. All settings must cover them all, but the way different settings implement some of the requirements will differ based on their individual circumstances. Where something is essential for public health reasons, as advised by PHE, we have said 'must'. Where there is a legal requirement, we have made that clear. This guidance does not create any new legal obligations.

There cannot be a 'one size fits all' approach where the system of controls describes every scenario. Setting leaders will be best placed to understand the needs of their settings and communities, and to make informed judgments about how to balance delivering high quality and education with the measures needed to manage risk. The system of controls provides a set of principles to help them do this and, when followed, they will effectively minimise risks.

System of controls: protective measures

Having assessed their risks, settings should work through the system of controls, adopting measures in a way that addresses these risks, works for their setting, and in line with the learning and development needs of children. This should include full educational and care support for children who have SEND.

Settings should:

- ensure that all staff understand the system of controls and how they are applied in the setting. Time should be taken for staff to review the actions in the system of controls and ask questions
- ensure that parents and carers are aware of the system of controls, how this impacts them and their responsibilities in supporting it

If settings follow the guidance on the system of controls, they will effectively reduce risks in their setting and create an inherently safer environment.

System of controls

This is the set of actions early years settings must take. They are grouped into prevention and response to any infection.

Prevention

1) Minimise contact with individuals who are unwell by ensuring that those who have coronavirus (COVID19) symptoms or who have someone in their household who does or have been advised by NHS test and trace to self-isolate, do not attend settings

2) Where recommended, the use of face coverings

3) Clean hands thoroughly and more often than usual

4) Ensure good respiratory hygiene by promoting the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach

5) Maintain enhanced cleaning, including cleaning frequently touched surfaces often using standard products, such as detergents

6) Minimise contact between groups of children where possible

7) Where necessary, wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE)

8) Keep occupied spaces well ventilated

Numbers 1, 3, 4, 5 and 8 must be in place in all settings all the time.

Numbers 2 and 6 must be properly considered, and settings must put in place measures that suit their particular circumstances.

Number 7 applies in all specific circumstances.

Response to any infection

9) Engage with the NHS Test and Trace process

10) Manage and report to Ofsted and the PHE advice line confirmed cases, of coronavirus (COVID-19) amongst the setting community

11) Contain any outbreak by following local health protection team advice

Numbers 9 to 11 must be followed in every case where they are relevant.

System of controls: prevention

1. Minimise contact with individuals who are unwell by ensuring that those who have coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms, or who have someone in their household who does, do not attend settings

When an individual develops coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms or has a positive test

Ensure children, staff and other adults do not come into settings if they have coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms for at least 10 full days from:

- the day after the start of their symptoms
- the test date if they did not have any symptoms but have had a positive test, (whether this was a Lateral Flow Device or Polymerase Chain Reaction test)

Anyone developing those symptoms during the day is to be sent home. These are essential actions to reduce the risk in settings and further drive down transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19). All settings must follow this process and ensure all staff are aware of it.

If anyone in the setting becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, or has a loss of, or change in, their normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia) they:

- must be sent home to begin isolation, the isolation period includes the day the symptoms started and the next 10 full days - if any of the individual's household members are also present at the setting they will need to be sent home at the same time
- are advised to follow guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection
- should arrange to have a test to see if they have coronavirus (COVID-19) - those prioritised for testing include education and childcare workers

Other members of their household (including any siblings) should isolate. Their isolation period includes the day the first person in their household's symptoms started (or the day their test was taken if they did not have symptoms, whether this was a Lateral Flow Device or Polymerase Chain Reaction test), and the next 10 full days.

If a child is awaiting collection:

- they should be moved, if possible, to a room where they can be isolated behind a closed door with appropriate adult supervision
- if it is safe to do so, a window should be opened for ventilation
- if it is not possible to isolate them, move them to an area which is at least 2 metres away from other people
- if they need to go to the bathroom while waiting to be collected, they should be taken to a separate bathroom if possible - the bathroom should be cleaned and disinfected using standard cleaning products before being used by anyone else
- PPE must be worn by staff caring for the child while they await collection if a distance of 2 metres cannot be maintained (such as for a very young child or a child with complex needs) - more information on PPE use can be found in the guidance on safe working in education, childcare and children's social care settings
- as is the usual practice, in an emergency situation call 999 if someone is

seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk - anyone with coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms should not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital

Further action to take when someone tests positive can be found in the system of controls on how to:

- engage with the NHS Test and Trace process
- manage and report to Ofsted and PHE advice line confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) amongst the setting community

The information on what to do if a child is displaying symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) is available in a printable A4 format.

When an individual has had close contact with someone with coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms

Any member of staff who has provided close contact care to someone with symptoms even while wearing PPE, and all other members of staff or children who have been in close contact with the person with symptoms (even if wearing a face covering), do not need to go home to self-isolate. They must, however, self-isolate if:

- the symptomatic person subsequently tests positive
- they develop symptoms themselves (in which case they should arrange for a test)
- they are requested to do so by NHS Test and Trace or the PHE advice service (or PHE local health protection team if escalated)

Everyone must wash their hands thoroughly for 20 seconds with soap and running water or use hand sanitiser after any contact with someone who is unwell. The area around the person with symptoms must be cleaned after they have left to reduce the risk of passing the infection on to other people. See guidance on cleaning of non-healthcare settings outside the home.

Evidence from PHE shows that routinely taking the temperature of children is not recommended as this is an unreliable method for identifying coronavirus (COVID-19).

2. Where recommended, the use of face coverings

The government is not recommending universal use of face coverings in early years settings because the system of controls provides additional mitigating measures. Some are less able to wear face coverings and this includes children under the age of 11 (PHE advises that for health and safety reasons, face coverings should not be used for children under 3). Misuse may inadvertently increase the risk of transmission, and there may also be negative effects on communication and thus children's development.

When social distancing is difficult to maintain in communal areas

It is not mandatory for staff and visitors to wear face coverings in early years and childcare settings. In situations where social distancing between adults in settings is not possible (for example, when moving around in corridors and communal areas), settings have the discretion to recommend the use of face coverings for adults on site, for both staff and visitors.

There are some places outside of the setting where it is required by law to wear a face covering. For example, on public transport. Further information can be found in face coverings: when to wear one and how to make your own.

Exemptions

Some individuals are exempt from wearing face coverings. This applies, for example, to those who:

- cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical or mental illness or impairment, or a disability
- speak to, or provide assistance to, someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expression to communicate

The same exemptions apply in early years settings, and we would expect leaders and staff to be sensitive to those needs.

Access to face coverings

It is reasonable to assume that staff will now have access to face coverings due to their increasing use in wider society. PHE have made available resources on how to make a simple face covering.

Where anybody is struggling to access a face covering, or where they are unable to use their face covering due to having forgotten it, or it having become soiled/unsafe, early years settings should take steps to have a small contingency supply available to meet such needs.

Safe wearing, removal and disposal of face coverings

Settings should have a process for removing face coverings when staff or visitors who use face coverings arrive at the setting, and when face coverings are worn at the setting in certain circumstances. This process should be communicated clearly to staff and visitors.

Safe wearing of face coverings requires cleaning of hands before and after touching – including to remove or put them on – and the safe storage of them in individual, sealable plastic bags between use. Where a face covering becomes damp, it should not be worn, and the face covering should be replaced carefully.

3. Clean hands thoroughly and more often than usual

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is an easy virus to kill when it is on the skin. This can be done with soap and running water or hand sanitiser.

To clean hands, wash thoroughly for 20 seconds with running water and soap and dry them thoroughly, or use alcohol hand rub or sanitiser ensuring that all parts of the hands are covered.

Settings must ensure that children clean their hands regularly, including:

- when they arrive at the setting
- when they return from breaks
- when they change rooms
- before and after eating
- after using the bathroom

Regular and thorough hand cleaning is needed for the foreseeable future.

Points to consider and implement:

- ensure the setting has enough hand washing or hand sanitiser stations available so that all children and staff can clean their hands regularly
- supervise use of hand sanitiser, given risks around ingestion. Young children and those with complex needs should continue to be helped to clean their hands properly - skin friendly cleaning wipes can be used as an alternative
- build these routines into setting culture, and ensure younger children and those with complex needs understand the need to follow them as far as possible

4. Ensure good respiratory hygiene by promoting the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach

The 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach continues to be very important, so settings must ensure they have enough tissues and bins available in the setting to support children and staff to implement this routine. Dispose of tissues into a disposable rubbish bag and immediately clean hands with soap and water or use a hand sanitiser. As with hand cleaning, settings must ensure younger children are helped to get this right, and all children understand that this is now part of how the setting operates.

Some children with complex needs will struggle to maintain as good respiratory hygiene as their peers, for example, those who spit uncontrollably or use saliva as a sensory stimulant. This should be considered in risk assessments in order to support these children and the staff working with them. It is not a reason to deny these children a place at the setting.

5. Maintain enhanced cleaning, including cleaning frequently touched surfaces often using standard products, such as detergents

In line with the risk assessment and timetabling of the day, put in place and maintain a cleaning schedule that ensures cleaning is generally enhanced and includes:

- more frequent cleaning of rooms that are used by different groups
- frequently touched surfaces being cleaned more often than normal
- clear procedures for maintaining cleaning processes for food preparation areas, dining areas and table coverings
- different groups do not need to be allocated their own toilets, but toilets will need to be cleaned regularly and children must be encouraged to clean their hands thoroughly after using the toilet

All settings should follow the PHE guidance for cleaning non-healthcare settings.

6. Minimise contact between groups of children where possible

Early years settings are no longer required to organise children and staff in small, consistent groups so can return to normal group sizes. Returning to normal group sizes is based on the fact that the overall risk to children from coronavirus (COVID-19) is low. It also recognises that early years settings are typically smaller than schools. However, settings should still consider how they can minimise mixing within settings, for example where they use different rooms for different age groups, keeping those groups apart as much as possible. Minimising contact between groups can reduce the number of children and staff required to self-isolate in the event of children or staff testing positive for coronavirus (COVID-19).

Adopting the system of controls set out here in a robust way will ensure that there are proportionate safeguards for children and staff, and reduce the risk of transmission.

Parents and carers should be encouraged to limit the number of settings their child attends, ideally ensuring their child only attends the same setting consistently. This should also be the same for staff.

There may be situations where a child needs to attend more than one setting, for example, children attending a childminder before their nursery opens so that their parent or carer may go to work.

Settings, parents and carers should work through the system of controls collaboratively to address any risks identified and allow them to jointly deliver appropriate care for the child. This section of the guidance contains more information about the system of controls for settings.

7. Where necessary, wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE)

The majority of staff in early years settings will not require PPE beyond what they would normally need for their work. PPE is only needed in a very small number of cases, including:

- when an individual child becomes ill with coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms while at a setting, and only then if a distance of 2 metres cannot be maintained
- when a child already has routine intimate care needs that involves the use of PPE, in which case the same PPE should continue to be used

Guidance on safe working in education, childcare and children's social care provides more information about preventing and controlling infection, how PPE should be used, what type of PPE to use, and how to source it.

8. Keeping occupied spaces well ventilated

When the setting is in operation, it is important to ensure that it is well ventilated, and a comfortable environment is maintained.

This can be achieved by a variety of measures including:

- mechanical ventilation systems. These should be adjusted to increase the ventilation rate wherever possible and checked to confirm that normal operation meets current guidance (if possible, systems should be adjusted to full fresh air or, if not, then systems should be operated as normal as long as they are within a single room and supplemented by an outdoor air supply)
- natural ventilation – opening windows, when it is safe to do so. In colder weather windows should be opened just enough to provide constant background ventilation and periodically opened more fully when it is safe to do so to purge the air in the space

Further action on this can be found in Health and Safety Executive guidance on air conditioning and ventilation during the coronavirus outbreak and CIBSE coronavirus (COVID-19) advice.

To balance the need for increased ventilation while maintaining a comfortable temperature, the following measures should also be used as appropriate:

- opening high level windows in preference to low level to reduce draughts
- increasing the ventilation while spaces are unoccupied
- re-arranging furniture where possible to avoid direct draughts

Heating should be used as necessary to ensure comfort levels are maintained, particularly in occupied spaces.

System of controls: response to any infection

9. Engage with the NHS Test and Trace process

Settings must ensure that they understand the NHS Test and Trace process. Settings must ensure that staff members, parents and carers understand that they will need to be ready and willing to:

- book a test if they are displaying symptoms - the main symptoms are a high temperature, a new continuous cough or a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste
- staff, children and their household members must not come into the setting if they have symptoms. They must be sent home to self-isolate if they develop them in the setting. All children can be tested if they have symptoms, including children under 5, but children under 11 will need to be helped by their parents or carers if using a home testing kit
- provide details of anyone they have been in close contact with if they were to test positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) or if asked by NHS Test and Trace
- self-isolate if they have been in close contact with someone who tests positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms

Anyone who displays symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) can and should get a test. Tests can be booked online through the NHS website, or ordered by telephone via NHS 119 for those without access to internet.

Essential workers, which includes anyone involved in education or childcare, have priority access to testing.

The government will ensure that it is as easy as possible to get a test through a wide range of routes that are locally accessible, fast and convenient. We will release more details on new testing avenues as and when they become available and we will work with early years settings, so they understand the easiest route to get a test.

Settings should ask parents, carers and staff to inform them immediately of the results of a test and follow this guidance.

If someone with symptoms tests negative for coronavirus (COVID-19) they should stay at home until they have recovered as usual from their illness. They can then safely return to the setting. The only exception to return following a negative test result is where an individual is separately identified as a close contact of a confirmed case, when they will need to self-isolate for 10 days from the day after contact with the individual who tested positive.

If someone with symptoms tests positive, they should follow guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection. They must continue to self-isolate for at least 10 days from the onset of their symptoms and then return to the setting only if they do not have symptoms other than a continuous cough or loss of sense of smell or taste. This is because a cough or anosmia can last for several weeks once the infection has gone. The isolation period includes the day the symptoms started and the next 10 full days. If they still have a high temperature, they should continue to self-isolate until their temperature returns to normal. Other members of their household should continue self-isolating for a full 10 days from the day after the individual tested positive.

Read further guidance on testing and tracing for coronavirus (COVID-19).

NHS COVID-19 app

The NHS COVID-19 app is a key part of the country's ongoing coronavirus (COVID-19) response, aiming to extend the speed, precision and reach of NHS Test and Trace. The app is available to download for free and is available to anyone aged 16 and over to download if they choose.

10. Manage and report to Ofsted and the PHE advice line confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the setting community

Actions to take when someone has tested positive

You must take swift action when you become aware that someone who has attended your setting has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19).

You must notify Ofsted of any confirmed cases in the setting (either child or staff member). You should also tell them if you have to close your setting as a result. Report as soon as you are able to, and in any case within 14 days. Please read the guidance on reporting incidents to ensure all of the information required is included.

You can contact the dedicated advice service introduced by PHE and delivered by the NHS Business Services Authority. This can be reached by calling the DfE helpline on 0800 046 8687 and selecting option 1 for advice on the action to take in response to a positive case. You will be put through to a team of advisers who will inform you what action is needed based on the latest public health advice.

The dedicated advice service will work with settings to carry out a rapid risk assessment to confirm who has been in close contact with the person during the period that they were infectious, and ensure they are asked to self-isolate. If, following triage, further expert advice is required the adviser will escalate your call to the PHE local health protection team.

The advice service (or PHE local health protection team (if escalated)) will work with settings to guide them through the actions they need to take. Based on their advice, settings should send home those people who have been in close contact with the person who has tested positive, advising them to self-isolate for 10 days from the day after contact.

Action card

The information above is available in a printable format: early years action card.

Close contact

'A contact' is a person who has been close to someone who has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) with a Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test. You can be a contact anytime from 2 days before the person who tested positive developed their symptoms, and up to 10 days after, as this is when they can pass the infection on to others.

A close contact includes:

- anyone who lives in the same household as someone with coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms or who has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19)
- anyone who has had any of the following types of contact with someone who has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) with a PCR test:
  - face-to-face contact including being coughed on or having a face-to-face conversation within 1 metre skin-to-skin physical contact for any length of time
    - been within 1 metre for 1 minute or longer without face-to-face contact
    - been within 2 metres of someone for more than 15 minutes (either as a one-off contact or added up together over 1 day)
    - travelled in the same vehicle or a plane

Record keeping and letter templates

The advice service (or PHE local health protection team if escalated) will provide definitive advice on who must be sent home. To support them in doing so, we recommend settings keep a record of:

- children and staff in specific groups or rooms (where applicable)
- close contact that takes place between children and staff in different groups/rooms

This should be a proportionate recording process. Settings do not need to ask staff to keep records in a way that is overly burdensome.

A template letter will be provided to settings on the advice of the advice service (or PHE local health protection team if escalated), to send to parents, carers and staff if needed.

Settings must not share the names or details of people with coronavirus (COVID-19) unless essential to protect others.

PHE reporting to the setting

The PHE local health protection team will also contact settings directly if they become aware that someone who has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) attended the setting - as identified by NHS Test and Trace.

When someone is sent home to self-isolate

Household members of those who are sent home do not need to self-isolate themselves unless the child or staff member who is self-isolating subsequently develops symptoms. If someone in a group that has been asked to self-isolate develops symptoms themselves within the 10 days from the day after contact with the individual who tested positive, they should follow guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection. They should get a test. Essential workers, which includes anyone involved in education or childcare, have priority access to testing.

When someone self-isolating develops symptoms

If someone who is self-isolating because they have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19):

- starts to feel unwell and gets a test for coronavirus themselves, and the test delivers a negative result, they must remain in isolation for the remainder of the 10 days from the day after they were in contact with the individual who tested positive. This is because they could still develop coronavirus (COVID-19) within the remaining days
- if the test result is positive, they should inform their setting immediately, and isolate for at least 10 days after their symptoms started (which could mean the self-isolation ends before or after the original 10-day isolation period). Their household should self-isolate for at least 10 days from the day after contact with the individual who tested positive, following guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection

Admitting children back to the setting

Settings should not request evidence of negative test results or other medical evidence before admitting children or welcoming them back after a period of self-isolation.

In the vast majority of cases, settings and parents and carers will be in agreement that a child with symptoms should not attend the setting, given the potential risk to others. In the event that a parent or carer insists on a child attending the setting, the setting can take the decision to refuse the child if, in their reasonable judgement, it is necessary to protect their children and staff from possible infection with coronavirus (COVID-19). Any such decision would need to be carefully considered in the light of all the circumstances and current public health advice.

11. Contain any outbreak by following local health protection team advice

Contact your local health protection team if:

- the number of cases exceeds 2 within 14 days
- you have taken the action outlined but are still seeing more cases
- you are thinking you might need to close because of the number of people affected
- a child or staff member in your setting has been admitted to hospital
- you are getting significant interest from local media

Your local health protection team will advise you on the next steps.

In some cases, health protection teams may recommend that a larger number of other children self-isolate at home as a precautionary measure – perhaps the whole site or a group. If settings are implementing the controls from this list, addressing the risks they have identified and therefore reducing transmission risks, whole setting closure based on cases within the setting will not generally be necessary, and should not be considered except on the advice of health protection teams.

Other safety in setting controls

Travel and transport

Childminders and other settings should consider how they can work with parents and carers to agree how best to manage any necessary journeys, for example, pick-ups and drop-offs at schools, to reduce the need for a provider to travel with groups of children.

Journeys may also include those to indoor or outdoor environments, for example, to a park or to an indoor soft play area.

Settings, parents and carers should work through the system of controls collaboratively, to identify and address any risks and allow them to jointly deliver appropriate care for the child.

Mode of transport

If it is necessary for a childminder to pick-up or drop-off a child at school, or when taking children on a trip, walking is preferable. If this is not practicable, then a private vehicle for single household use is preferable. Use of public transport should be minimised.

Information on using private and public transport can be found in the safer travel guidance for passengers.

Visitors to the setting

There will be occasions when visits to the setting are necessary, but settings are encouraged to avoid visitors entering their premises, wherever possible. Visits that allow a vulnerable child to meet a social worker, key worker or other necessary support should continue on site. Visits for SEND therapies should also continue on site.

A record should be kept of all visitors which follows the guidance on maintaining records of staff, customers and visitors to support NHS Test and Trace.

New admissions

For new admissions, settings should consider providing virtual tours for prospective parents and carers.

If parents and carers are keen to visit in person, settings should consider:

- ensuring face coverings are worn if required in line with arrangements for staff and other visitors to the setting (see the section on face coverings)
- there is regular handwashing, especially before and after the visit
- holding visits after hours. If this is not possible, consider limiting visits to the outside play areas during regular hours, and ensure strict social distancing is observed

Prior to a visit, settings should ensure that parents and carers are aware:

- of the system of controls
- how this impacts them and their responsibilities during their visit
- how to maintain social distancing from staff, other visitors, and children other than those in their care

Parents settling children

Parents and carers are able to enter a setting to help their children adapt to their new environment. Settings should ensure that parents and carers:

- wear face coverings, if required, in line with arrangements for staff and other visitors to the setting (see the section on face coverings)
- stay for a limited amount of time (ideally not more than an hour)
- avoid close contact with other children
- are aware of the system of controls, how this impacts them, and their responsibilities in supporting it when visiting a setting with their child

See the section on infection prevention and system of controls for more information. It is important to explain these expectations, verbally or in writing, to parents and carers before or on arrival at a setting.

Other visits by parents and carers

Settings should restrict all visits to the setting to those that are necessary and make use of remote visits wherever possible.

In-person visits from parents can take place if they are necessary. Settings should work with parents to ensure parents still have visibility of the childcare environment during this time, through the use of remote visits, pictures and phone calls.

Guidance on parent and child groups is available.

Guidance on parents and carers coming into the setting for organised performances can be found in music, dance and drama.

External professionals

In instances where settings need to use other essential professionals such as social workers, speech and language therapists or counsellors, or other professionals to support delivery of a child's EHC plan, settings should assess whether the professionals need to attend in person or can do so virtually. Visits that allow a vulnerable child to meet a social worker, key worker or other necessary support should continue on site. Visits for SEND therapies should also continue on site.

If they need to attend in person, they should:

- follow guidance relevant to the setting
- keep the number of attendances to a minimum
- wash hands frequently
- where possible to do so, maintain social distancing
- be informed about the system of controls in settings

See further details on the system of controls.

Recruitment

Recruitment should continue as usual. As this guidance advises limiting the number of visitors wherever possible, it may be appropriate for settings to consider a flexible approach to interviews, with alternative options to face-to-face interviews offered where possible, such as using video conferencing.

Where face-to-face meetings are arranged, settings should make clear to candidates that they must adhere to the system of controls that is in place. Settings also have the discretion to require face coverings for candidates where social distancing cannot be safely managed.

When recruiting, settings must continue to adhere to the legal requirements regarding pre-appointment checks.

Supply staff and students

Settings can continue to engage agency staff and students. Supply staff and other temporary workers can move between settings but setting leaders will want to consider how to minimise the number of visitors to the setting where possible.

Where it is necessary to use supply staff and to welcome visitors to the setting, such as students, these individuals will be expected to comply with settings' arrangements for managing and minimising risk, including taking particular care to maintain distance from other staff.

To minimise the numbers of temporary staff entering the setting and secure best value, settings may wish to use longer assignments with supply staff and agree a minimum number of hours across the year.

The presence of any additional members of staff should be agreed on a weekly rather than a daily basis, where possible, in order to limit contacts.

Other visitors

Settings should consider how to manage other visitors to the site, such as contractors, and ensure site guidance on social distancing and hygiene is explained to visitors on or before arrival. Where visits can happen outside of setting hours, a record should be kept of all visitors - where this is practical - which follows the guidance on maintaining records of staff, customers and visitors to support NHS Test and Trace.

Guidance on visits from music, dance and drama peripatetic teachers can be found in the music, dance and drama section.

Supervised toothbrushing programmes

Supervised toothbrushing programmes may be re-established within settings using the dry brushing method.

The wet brushing model is not recommended because it is considered more likely to risk droplet and contact transmission and offers no additional benefit to oral health over dry toothbrushing.

For information on the cleaning and storage of toothbrushes and storage systems, see the guidance for supervised toothbrushing programmes in early years and school settings.

Malleable materials (messy play)

Settings should risk assess activities that involve malleable materials for messy play such as sand, mud and water, as part of their regular curriculum planning.

A risk assessment should consider whether:

- materials can be handled by a small, consistent group of children of no more than 15 at a time, and that no one else outside this group can come into contact with it
- the malleable material for messy play (for example sand/water/mud) can be used and cleaned - including being replaced - in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, where applicable. For example, see the managing risk in play provision implementation guide

Settings should follow the system of controls and ensure that:

- children wash their hands thoroughly before and after messy play
- frequently touched surfaces, equipment, tools and resources for messy play are thoroughly cleaned and dried before they are used by a different group

Further general cleaning advice can be found in the cleaning of non-healthcare settings guidance.

Side effects of children taking a vaccination or teething

Vaccines may cause a mild fever in children. This is a common and expected reaction, and isolation is not required unless coronavirus (COVID-19) is suspected.

Whilst teething can cause some known side effects such as flushed cheeks and sore gums, NHS guidelines state that fever is not a symptom of teething.

Parents and carers should monitor side effects from a vaccination or teething, and if they are concerned about their child's health, they should seek advice from their GP or NHS 111.

If coronavirus (COVID-19) is suspected, settings should follow the advice in the system of controls.

Local restriction tiers and contingency framework

At all local restriction tiers, there are exceptions from the legal gatherings limit for registered childcare, education or training. This means early years settings, including childminders, can continue to operate with normal group sizes.

The government has made it a national priority that early years settings should continue to operate as normal as possible during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. This remains the default position for all areas irrespective of local restriction tiers. To help with this, we have published a contingency framework for the rare circumstances in which early years settings might need to revise their delivery models for a short period of time to help contain virus transmission within a community. Such measures will be implemented in the fewest number of early years settings required, for the shortest time.

Decisions on any restrictions or closures in education or childcare settings are taken separately on a case-by-case basis, in the light of local circumstances, including incoming information about the incidence and transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Music, dance and drama

This guidance relates to organised group activity, not to spontaneous singing, dance and role-play that young children may naturally do, and should be encouraged to do, by early years practitioners.

Music, dance and drama build confidence, help children live happier, more enriched lives, and discover ways to express themselves. There may, however, be a cumulative risk of infection in environments where organised singing, chanting, playing wind instruments, dance and drama takes place.

Organised singing and wind instrument playing can be undertaken in line with this and other guidance, in particular guidance provided by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) for professionals and non-professionals in the performing arts. Singers and players should be 2 metres apart to limit both droplet and aerosol risks. For aerosol risks, ventilation should also be encouraged. DCMS is continuing to develop a more detailed understanding of how to mitigate this potential aggregate risk, but in that context, organisations should follow this guidance.

Minimising mixing groups and volume control

Settings should take particular care in music, dance and drama lessons that children remain in their usual groups.

Additionally, settings should keep any background or accompanying music to levels which do not encourage participants to raise their voices unduly. If possible, use microphones to reduce the need for shouting or prolonged periods of loud speaking or singing. If possible, do not share microphones. If they are shared, follow the guidance on handling equipment.

Organised performances

Settings in tier 3 and 4 should not host performances with an audience. In these cases, settings should use alternative methods such as live streaming and recording, subject to the usual safeguarding considerations and parental permissions.

Settings in other local restriction tiers, planning an indoor or outdoor performance in front of an audience, should follow the latest advice in the DCMS performing arts guidance, implementing events in the lowest risk order as described. If planning an outdoor performance they should also give particular consideration to the guidance on delivering outdoor events.

Music, dance and drama peripatetic teachers

Settings can continue to engage peripatetic teachers (for example, non-staff who visit settings). This includes staff from Music Education Hubs, when they provide services for early years. A record should be kept of all visits.

Peripatetic teachers can move between early years settings, however, settings should consider how to minimise the number of visitors that attend where possible. Visitors will be expected to comply with arrangements for managing and minimising risk, including taking particular care to maintain distance from other staff and children. To minimise the numbers of temporary staff entering the premises, and secure best value, settings could consider using longer assignments with peripatetic teachers and agree a minimum number of hours across the academic year.

If a teacher is operating on a peripatetic basis, and operating across multiple groups or individuals, it is important that they do not attend a lesson if they are unwell or are having any symptoms associated with coronavirus (COVID-19) such as a high temperature, a new, persistent cough, or a loss of, or change in, their sense of taste or smell (anosmia). In addition, they should:

- maintain distancing requirements with each group they teach, where appropriate. This means peripatetic teachers should not provide physical correction or demonstration with children
- make efforts to reduce the number of groups taught and locations worked in, to reduce the number of contacts made

Further information on the Music Education Hubs, including contact details for local hubs, can be found at the Arts Council England Music Education Hub.

Organised music sessions in the early years, including singing, and playing wind instruments in groups

When planning music provision, settings should consider additional specific safety measures. Although singing and playing wind instruments do not currently appear to present a significantly higher risk than routine speaking and breathing at the same volume, there is now some evidence that additional risk can build from aerosol transmission with volume and with the combined numbers of individuals within a confined space.

With appropriate safety mitigation, however, singing and wind playing can still take place.

Measures to take include:

- playing instruments and singing in groups should take place outdoors wherever possible
- if indoors, use a room with as much space as possible, for example, larger rooms - rooms with high ceilings are expected to enable dilution of aerosol transmission
- if playing indoors, social distance each child 2 metres apart
- limit the numbers to account for ventilation of the space, it is important to ensure good ventilation - advice on this can be found in air conditioning and ventilation during the coronavirus outbreak
- singing and wind playing should not take place in larger groups such as choirs and ensembles unless significant space, natural airflow (at least 10l/s/person for all present, including audiences can be maintained
- position wind players so that the air from their instrument does not blow into another player
- use microphones where possible or encourage singing quietly

By considering and adopting these cumulative risk mitigation measures, the overall risk will be reduced.

Handling equipment and instruments for organised sessions

Measures to take when handling equipment, including instruments, include:

- increased handwashing before and after handling equipment, especially if being used by more than one person
- avoiding sharing instruments and equipment wherever possible
- if instruments and equipment have to be shared, disinfect regularly (including any props, microphones and music stands) and always between users, following guidance on cleaning and handling equipment
- consider limiting the number of suppliers when hiring instruments and equipment. Settings should agree with suppliers whose responsibility it is to clean hired instruments. Clean hire equipment, tools or other equipment on arrival and before first use. Store equipment and instruments in a clean location if settings take delivery of them before they are needed. Clean them before first use and before returning the instrument
- create picking-up and dropping-off collection points where possible, rather than passing equipment such as props, and microphones hand-to-hand

Individual lessons

Where settings offer individual lessons in music, dance and drama, these lessons can resume. This may mean teachers interacting with children from multiple groups, so settings will need to take particular care, in line with the measures set out above on peripatetic teachers.

Specific safety measures for individual music lessons should include:

- extending social distancing between child and peripatetic teacher (current guidance is that if the activity is face-to-face and without mitigations, 2 metres is appropriate), where good ventilation is possible - child and teacher should be positioned side by side if possible
- avoid sharing instruments and equipment wherever possible and place name labels on equipment to help identify the designated user
- if instruments and equipment have to be shared, regularly disinfect them (including any props, microphones and music stands) and always between users, following guidance on cleaning and handling equipment

Children's attendance

Children self-isolating or clinically extremely vulnerable

All children who normally access childcare are strongly encouraged to attend so that they can gain the learning and wellbeing benefits of early education.

A small number of children will still be unable to attend in line with public health advice to self-isolate because:

- they have had symptoms or a positive test result themselves
- they live with someone that has symptoms or has tested positive and are a household contact
- they are a close contact of someone who has coronavirus (COVID-19)

More evidence has emerged that shows there is a very low risk of children becoming very unwell from coronavirus (COVID-19), even for children with existing health conditions. Far fewer children should remain in the clinically extremely vulnerable group in the future following their routine discussions with their clinician.

All children should continue to attend education settings in tiers 1, 2 and 3 unless they are one of the very small number of pupils or students under paediatric or other NHS care and have been advised by their GP or clinician not to attend an education setting. Shielding advice is currently in place in tier 4, so all children still deemed clinically extremely vulnerable are advised not to attend settings.

Children and young people whose parents or carers are clinically extremely vulnerable can continue to go to settings.

Children who live with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable, but who are not clinically extremely vulnerable themselves, should still attend the setting.

Parents or carers who are anxious about their child returning to the setting

Settings should be mindful that many parents and carers may be reluctant or concerned about sending their child back to the setting and settings should put the right support in place to address this.

This may include:

- children who have themselves been shielding previously but have been advised that this is no longer formally advised
- those living in households where someone is clinically vulnerable or are clinically extremely vulnerable
- those concerned about the comparatively increased risk from coronavirus (COVID-19), including those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds or who have certain conditions such as obesity or diabetes

If parents or carers of children with possible risk factors are concerned, we recommend settings discuss their concerns and provide reassurance of the measures they are putting in place to reduce the risk.

Clear communications with parents and carers regarding the measures being taken to ensure the safety of their children will be necessary, including the role that they play, as parents and carers, in the safe operating procedures.

Settings should consider how to ensure communications are accessible to specific groups of parents and carers (such as those with English as an additional language) and parents and carers of vulnerable children, to encourage attendance of these groups.

Action to take when a child's usual provider is closed

Local authorities should work with settings which are closed to identify alternative provision for children who need places. Parents and carers can also approach local authorities if their usual provider is not open. If a child moves settings, important information should be provided by the parent or carer to the new setting on day one, including emergency contact details, dietary requirements and medical needs to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of the child.

In the case of vulnerable children, the closed setting should notify the local authority (and social worker, where relevant) that there are vulnerable children who need alternative provision. The closed setting should work with the families of vulnerable children and local authorities (and social workers, where relevant) to support this.

Where a setting has closed, and a vulnerable child moves to a different early years setting:

- the closed provider should do whatever it reasonably can to provide the receiving setting with any relevant welfare and child protection information
- the receiving setting should be aware of the reason the child is vulnerable and any arrangements in place to support them - as a minimum, the receiving setting should, as appropriate, have access to a vulnerable child's EHC plan, child in need plan, child protection plan or, for looked-after children, their personal education plan, and know who the child's social worker is (and, for looked-after children, know who the responsible virtual setting head is)
- the transfer of necessary information should ideally happen before a child arrives at the new setting and, where that is not possible, as soon as reasonably practicable - any exchanges of information will ideally happen between the designated safeguarding leads (or deputies), and between special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) or named individual with oversight of special educational needs provision for children with EHC plans

While providers must continue to have appropriate regard to data protection and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), this does not prevent the sharing of information for the purposes of keeping children safe. For more information please read the advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers.

Prioritising early years places

Since 20 July, normal group sizes have resumed so all children that are able can attend as normal. This means the prioritisation of children should no longer be necessary.

If there is a need to prioritise places (for example, where a nursery is oversubscribed, or unable to operate at full capacity), settings should give priority to:

- vulnerable children and children of critical workers
- then 3- and 4-year-olds, in particular those who will be transitioning to reception
- followed by younger age groups

Considerations for operating the setting

Settings experiencing staff shortages due to sickness or self-isolation

Childcare settings that are experiencing staff shortages should:

- work with their local authority to identify how appropriate provision can be put in place while keeping staffing arrangements as consistent as possible
- where necessary, pool staff with another setting, or take on qualified and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checked staff from other educational settings (including local registered childminders) which have been closed, or invite local registered childminders to work with them at the setting - registered childminders can already do this under the 50 / 50 registration flexibility they have
- wherever possible, ensure staffing arrangements are consistent on a weekly basis, rather than a daily basis, in order to limit contacts

Staff needing to self-isolate after returning from abroad

The government has set a requirement for people returning from some countries to self-isolate for 10 full days after the day they arrive back. Guidance is available on how to self-isolate when you travel to the UK and self-isolating after returning to the UK: your employment rights.

It is recommended that setting leaders discuss leave arrangements with staff to inform workforce planning.

There is a risk that where staff travel abroad, their return travel arrangements could be disrupted due to factors arising beyond their control in relation to coronavirus (COVID-19), such as the potential for restrictions on travel in the place they are visiting.

Where it is not possible to avoid a member of staff having to self-isolate when they are due to return from leave, settings should consider if it is possible to temporarily amend working arrangements to enable them to work from home.

When the premises from which a setting operates is closed, such as community centre, village or church hall

Since 1 June, community centres, village halls and places of worship have been able to open for providers on the early years register which usually use those premises.

Providers should ensure:

- they are acting in line with the guidance on safe working in education, childcare and children's social care settings
- they are managing risks related to other users of the premises

Operating breakfast and after school clubs and other providers of wraparound childcare

All providers of wraparound childcare, and other out-of-school settings, are able to operate for both indoor and outdoor provision, provided they have safety measures in place. In Tier 4, parents and carers can access childcare activities (including wraparound care) where reasonably necessary to enable parents to work, seek work, attend education or training, or for respite care.

Wraparound providers which are only registered with Ofsted on the early years register should:

- continue to follow this guidance
- implement the protective measures set out for early years settings

Where wraparound providers are caring for children over the age of 5, they should ensure that they are also following the protective measures guidance for out-of-school settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, including on group sizes.

Providers caring for children over the age of 5 should ensure, as far as possible, that they are keeping children over the age of 5 in small consistent groups every time they attend.

In cases where providers care for both children under the age of 5 and over the age of 5, they may choose to apply the measures outlined in this guidance to those children under the age of 5, and the measures outlined in the protective measures guidance for out-of-school settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak to those children over the age of 5.

Where providers have mixed age groups together they will need to, as far as possible, keep all children irrespective of age in small consistent groups of no more than 15 with at least one staff member or with more staff members to meet relevant ratio requirements.

Use of private and public outdoor spaces

Settings should maximise the use of private outdoor space.

Settings can take groups of children on trips to outdoor public places and do not need to be limited to 6 people, provided:

- it is for the purpose of education or childcare
- they remain within the EYFS staff child ratios
- they conduct a risk assessment in advance
- the risk assessment demonstrates that they can remain socially distant (2 metres) from other people and groups, wherever possible
- good hygiene is maintained throughout
- thorough handwashing happens before and after the trip
- the trip is carried out in line with relevant local restriction tier guidance and coronavirus (COVID-19) secure measures on transport and at the destination
- appropriate insurance arrangements are in place

The Association of British Insurers (ABI) has produced information on travel insurance implications following the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. If settings have any questions about their cover, or would like further reassurance, they should contact their insurance provider.

Trips to indoor spaces (including soft play)

Settings may take children on trips to indoor spaces, for example, to a soft play centre when they are permitted to be open in all local restriction tiers.

Settings must ensure they have fully assessed the risks and have completed a risk assessment prior to a trip.

Settings, parents and carers should work through the system of controls collaboratively, to identify and address any risks and allow them to jointly agree appropriate care for the children.

Setting leaders should follow the guidelines relevant to the indoor centre (for example, a soft play centre).

Once inside:

- setting leaders should remain with the children in their group
- the group should socially distance from other individuals and groups
- children and staff should wash hands thoroughly on arrival and before leaving
- adults (and children over 11) will be required to follow the face covering policy for the indoor space. This may include wearing a face covering before entering and keeping it on until they leave, except when eating or drinking at a table, or whilst in the playframe

Further information on soft play and indoor play areas can be found in the operational guidance for indoor play areas for children: operational guidance for soft play equipment.

Read further guidance from DCMS.

Parent and child groups

From 2 December 2020, the exception to gatherings for parent and child groups allows for groups to meet for the benefit of children under the age of 5. Groups must be organised by a business, a charitable, benevolent or philanthropic institution, or a public body, and limited to no more than 15 participants - children aged under 5 are not included in the 15 participant limit. Where a group includes someone covered by an exception (for example, someone who is working as part of the group, such as a group leader), they are not counted as part of the gatherings limit.

Parent and child groups should only be held in venues and spaces that are permitted to be open and not in private dwellings. Groups should check for any additional relevant guidance for their?local restriction tier. To find out which local restriction tier applies to a particular postcode, use the search tool: find out the coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions in a local area.

Parent and child groups that meet in:

- Ofsted registered settings can operate in all local restriction tiers
- community spaces, such as in a place of worship, community centre or library, can operate in all local restriction tiers and should follow COVID secure guidance for the venue

Informal groups, such as those organised by a parent, need to comply with the gathering and household mixing rules for the relevant local restriction tier.

Settings should follow the advice in this guidance to ensure that participants follow the system of controls, which will help towards mitigating the risks of coronavirus (COVID-19) for all children and adults in the setting.

It is important for group participants to maintain:

- social distancing between adults who do not live together and who are not in the same bubble
- good hand hygiene. Participants should clean their hands as they arrive and as they leave

Registered settings have the discretion to recommend the use of face coverings for adults in Ofsted registered sites, both staff and visitors (see the system of controls section for more information).

Group leaders should ensure:

- a risk assessment is completed prior to groups and activities taking place
- groups and activities take place separately to areas being used at the same time by registered children attending an Ofsted registered setting
- the areas used are well ventilated (see the section on ventilation)
- any rooms used by these groups are cleaned after each use
- a record of all visitors to the setting is kept

Staying in touch with parents or carers whose child is at home

Since 20 July, normal group sizes have resumed so all children should be able to attend as normal, with the exception of those children who may still have to shield.

We recognise that many settings have already shared resources for children who are at home and we are grateful for this.

Settings should consider how:

- to continue to support the learning of children who do not attend settings including how these children can maintain contact with their key person and peers through the early years setting
- parents and carers can be supported to provide a positive learning environment at home

Settings can also direct parents to:

- the Hungry Little Minds campaign. It features tips and practical activities that parents can do at home with children to support their early learning. There are many simple ways to help children learn and it does not have to be formal. Having everyday conversations, make-believe play and reading together all make a big difference to children's development
- settings can also direct parents to the BBC's Tiny Happy People and the National Literacy Trust's Family Zone for more ideas and content
- help children aged 2 to 4 to learn at home during coronavirus (COVID-19)

Settings should work with local authorities to monitor the welfare of:

- vulnerable children who are not attending provision
- other children they might wish to keep in touch with, for safeguarding purposes

Monitoring of early years and childcare provision during coronavirus (COVID-19)

We launched a data collection process in April 2020 to ensure there is up-to-date information on early years and childcare provision during coronavirus (COVID-19).

We have published summaries of attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

We will:

- continue to run the early years and childcare data collection until further notice to ensure that we have information on how many children are accessing provision and if there are sufficiency issues
- keep the frequency and end date of the data collection under review

All local authorities have received information on how to access the data collection, the frequency of collection and how to contact us with any queries.

We have asked Ofsted to monitor which providers on the early years register are open or closed. The information Ofsted is seeking from registered early years and childcare providers during coronavirus (COVID-19) will give the setting-level data it requires to fulfil its safeguarding requirements as the regulator.

We understand that most local authorities are already collecting the data requested, so, in the majority of cases, providers will not need to do anything different or new. The Ofsted data collection does not duplicate the data that we are requesting from local authorities and should not place an ongoing reporting burden on providers.

Safeguarding and welfare

Children may be experiencing a variety of emotions in response to coronavirus (COVID-19), such as anxiety, stress or low mood. This may particularly be the case for vulnerable children, including those with a social worker. It is important to contextualise these feelings as normal responses to an abnormal situation. Some may need support, a few may be showing signs of more severe anxiety or depression. Others will not be experiencing any challenges. Attending the setting allows social interaction with other children and staff, which benefits wellbeing.

Settings must continue to take all necessary steps to keep children safe and well during this period and have regard to the statutory guidance on working together to safeguard children. The safeguarding and welfare sections of the EYFS foundation framework still apply, including requirements relating to child protection arrangements. Settings should work closely with local authorities.

Settings should also provide more focused support where issues are identified that individual children may need help with, drawing on external support where necessary and possible. Settings should also consider support needs of particular groups they are already aware of needing additional help (for example, children in need), and any groups they identify as newly vulnerable. To support this, settings may wish to access the free resource MindEd learning platform for professionals, which contains materials on peer support, stress, fear and trauma, and bereavement.

MindEd have also developed a coronavirus (COVID-19) staff resilience hub with advice and tips for frontline staff.

Where there is a concern that a child is in need or suffering or likely to suffer from harm, the early years setting (generally led by the designated safeguarding lead or deputy) should follow their child protection policy and part 1 of the statutory safeguarding guidance keeping children safe in education and consider any referral to statutory services (and the police) as appropriate.

Reviewing and updating child protection policies

Settings should consider whether any review of their child protection arrangements is needed as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19). This could take the form of a coronavirus (COVID-19) annex and could include:

- how to identify and act on new safeguarding concerns about individual children as they return to childcare
- designated safeguarding lead (and deputy) arrangements
- any updated advice received from the local safeguarding partners
- any updated advice received from local authorities, for example, EHC plan risk assessment, attendance and keep-in-touch mechanisms
- working arrangements with children's social workers and the local authority virtual settings head (VSH)
- what staff and volunteers should do if they have concerns about a staff member or volunteer who may pose a safeguarding risk to children
- how the updated policy links to the broader risk assessment to be conducted, described in annex A of the guidance for schools

All staff and volunteers should be made aware of the new policy and be kept up to date as it is revised.

Changes to the role of the safeguarding lead

Settings must continue to have a practitioner designated to take lead responsibility for safeguarding. It is acceptable for the safeguarding lead not to be based on-site if this is not practical, for example, they may be working from home or be based at another setting, as long as they are still available to provide support, advice and guidance to staff. It is important that all childcare staff and volunteers have access to a designated safeguarding lead practitioner and know on any given day who that person is and how to speak to them.

Keeping children safe online

Settings should continue to consider what strategies they are using to keep children safe online during this period, including:

- checking apps, websites and search results before using them with children
- supervising children when accessing the internet

Further details can be found in safeguarding children and protecting professionals in early years settings: online safety guidance for practitioners.

This advice is also relevant for parents and carers.

Supporting children's mental health and wellbeing

Staying at home for a prolonged period and the change of routine may have caused difficulties for some children, such as changes in behaviour or mood.

As more children return to settings, settings should:

- consider the mental health, pastoral or wider wellbeing support children may need, including with bereavement
- how to support them to transition into the setting after a long period of absence

Settings may want to refer to guidance for parents and carers on supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing during the coronavirus outbreak as a starting point.

Staff may require appropriate instruction and training on identifying and supporting vulnerable children and parents and carers that return to the setting. For example, by signposting them to appropriate local services such as mental health, domestic abuse or substance abuse services. Providers should contact their local authority to understand what support is available and agencies and providers should work together to actively look for signs of harms as appropriate.

It will be necessary to consider how vulnerable children, who are currently attending the setting, continue to have their needs met and to be supported as the setting takes on more children.

Supporting children with SEND and changes to SEND legislation

Particular care will be needed in supporting children with SEND to return to their settings. Re-adjustment to the routines in a setting may prove more challenging for some children with SEND than others, and consideration and planning will need to be given as to how to support children to settle back into their setting.

Settings should be alert to the fact that there may be children:

- with additional or worsened social, emotional and mental health needs as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19)
- who have fallen further behind their peers as a result of time out of childcare settings, or missed diagnosis as a result of a period of absence

Settings will need to ensure they have the staffing needed to support children with SEND at safe ratios and that they have a member of staff designated as a SENCO, interim SENCO or a named individual with oversight of special educational needs provision for children with SEND.

From 1 May to 31 July 2020, Section 42 of the Children and Families Act 2014 was modified by a notice issued under the Coronavirus Act 2020. Local authorities and health commissioners were required to use their 'reasonable endeavours' to secure or arrange the specified special educational and health care provision in education, health and care (EHC) plans.

Following the expiry of the modification notice on 31 July 2020, we do not intend to issue further notices to modify this duty, unless the evidence changes. The focus is now on supporting local authorities, health commissioning bodies and education settings to ensure that children with EHC plans receive the support they need now that they are back in their settings.

Early years foundation stage and reforms

Application and disapplication of the early years foundation stage framework

The EYFS statutory framework sets the standards that schools and childcare settings must meet for the learning, development and care of children from birth to 5 years old.

Temporary amendments to EYFS legislation ended on 25 September 2020. This means the EYFS learning and development and assessment requirements resumed from 26 September 2020 and must continue to be met. The 2 month transitional period for requirements relating to staff qualifications and Paediatric First Aid changes ended on 25 November 2020.

Further government imposed restrictions, or requirements relating to coronavirus (COVID-19), may affect a provider's ability to comply with the EYFS. Therefore, new regulations, which came into force on 26 September 2020, allow the temporary changes to be re-applied if coronavirus (COVID-19) related local or national restrictions are imposed by government and the provider has deemed these restrictions to mean they are unable to deliver the EYFS as required.

Details of the temporary changes, which cover learning and development, assessment and safeguarding (including Paediatric First Aid) can be found in the guidance on EYFS coronavirus disapplications. Settings and local authorities should fully familiarise themselves with this guidance to ensure they understand the flexibilities available to them.

Planning for and supporting children's learning

Where children are new to the setting, or re-joining after time away, priority should be given to helping them adapt to their new routines and resettle, especially where there have been staffing or other significant changes.

Settings may want to:

- consider how stories, singing and games can be used to help children settle into new everyday routines
- plan how children can learn in age-appropriate ways about how they can keep themselves safe, including regular handwashing and using tissues
- consider how to encourage children to learn and practise these habits through games, songs and repetition

Settings can refer to the following helpful resources:

- Professional association for children and early years (PACEY): supporting children in your setting
- Dr Dog explains coronavirus
- 2 metres apart activity
- Our hand washing song
- Talking to children about COVID-19 (novel coronavirus)

As set out in the section on the application and disapplication of the early years foundation stage framework, unless a setting is using the new regulations to disapply elements of the EYFS due to further local or national coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions, the learning and development and assessment requirements are applicable and must be met.

Where settings are impacted by coronavirus (COVID-19) related restrictions and are using the new regulations to disapply elements of the EYFS, they may wish to focus on supporting communication and language areas of learning and development.

EYFS reforms

We have published the government response to the consultation on EYFS reforms. This response confirms what changes will be made to the EYFS.

An early adoption year is underway with primary schools that volunteered to make the changes in 2020 to 2021, ahead of statutory rollout to all early years settings in the 2021 to 2022 academic year.

Postponement of the statutory implementation of the Reception Baseline Assessment

In response to the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on schools, the statutory implementation of the Reception Baseline Assessment has been postponed until the 2021 to 2022 academic year. Instead, schools were invited to take part in an early adopter year, which took place in the second half of the 2020 autumn term to familiarise themselves with the assessment and training materials before the Reception Baseline Assessment becomes statutory.

Requirements for Paediatric First Aiders (PFA) being on site

As set out in the section on the application and disapplication of the early years foundation stage framework, unless a setting is using the new regulations to disapply elements of the EYFS due to further local or national coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions, providers must ensure a member of staff with a full PFA certificate is on site at all times when children are present, as set out in the EYFS.

See the section on the application and disapplication of the early years foundation stage framework for further information.

Renewing paediatric first aid (PFA) certificates

If PFA certificate re-qualification training is prevented for reasons associated directly with coronavirus (COVID-19), or by complying with related government advice, the validity of current certificates were able to be extended to 25 November 2020 at the latest. This applies to certificates which expired on or after 16 March 2020 and includes paediatric first aiders in provision registered on the General Childcare Register and all early years provision.

If asked to do so, providers should be able to explain why the first aider has not been able to re-qualify and demonstrate what steps have been taken to access the training. Employers or certificate holders must do their best to arrange requalification training at the earliest opportunity.

Emergency first aid

The Health and Safety Executive published guidance on first aid during coronavirus (COVID-19) which will support local risk assessments and provides guidance for first aiders.

It is clear that treating any casualty properly should be the first concern. Where it is necessary for first aid provision to be administered in close proximity, those administering it should pay particular attention to sanitation measures immediately afterwards, including washing hands.

Varying staff to child ratios and qualifications

Paragraph 3.30 of the EYFS states:

'Exceptionally, and where the quality of care and safety and security of children is maintained, changes to the ratios may be made.'

We consider the extent of coronavirus (COVID-19) to be an exceptional temporary circumstance in which the staff to child ratios set out in the EYFS can be changed if necessary. Early years settings and schools, however, remain responsible for ensuring the safety and security of children in their care.

Amendments made to regulations allow in certain circumstances for further exceptions to be made to the qualification level that staff hold in order to be counted in the ratio requirements.

For more detail, see EYFS coronavirus disapplications.

Advice on separate baby room requirements for children under the age of 2 years

The EYFS requirement to have a separate baby room is a safety issue for the protection of very young children particularly when they are asleep. Paragraph 3.59 of the statutory framework for the EYFS already allows for the mixing of children when this is appropriate. If the layout of the premises does not allow for a separate 'baby room' with its own door, a suitable area may be partitioned off to provide safety for younger children.

Taking on new staff (including volunteers) even if a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check has not been completed

The requirements set out at paragraph 3.11 of the EYFS remain in place.

Settings must obtain criminal records checks for new members of staff including volunteers. If an application has been made but the DBS disclosure has not arrived new staff and volunteers can still care for children provided they are supervised by someone who has a DBS check. Under no circumstances can an unchecked member of staff be left alone with children.

Where new staff are recruited, or new volunteers enter the early years setting, they should continue to be provided with a safeguarding induction.

Enhanced DBS checks for staff moving temporarily to another early years setting

Where members of the early years and childcare workforce are already engaging in regulated activity and already have the appropriate DBS check:

- there is no expectation that a new DBS check should be obtained for them to temporarily move to another setting to support the care of children
- the onus remains on the receiving setting to satisfy themselves that someone in their setting has had the required checks - this requirement can be satisfied by seeking assurance from the current employer rather than requiring new checks

Ofsted

Notifications requirements for settings providing childcare

We have asked Ofsted to work with us and with local authorities to find out which early years providers, including childminders, are open or temporarily closed.

This means that Ofsted requires further information about whether some providers are open or closed.

If your operating circumstances change (that is, you open or close):

- let Ofsted know by sending an email to enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk with 'change in operating hours' in the subject field
- in the body of the email, confirm the unique reference number for each setting and the details of the change - the URN can be found on the setting's registration, inspection report(s), and Ofsted reports page

In addition, any confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the setting (either child or staff member), or if the setting has been advised to close as a result, should be swiftly reported to Ofsted through the usual notification channels.

Ofsted inspections during coronavirus (COVID-19)

The Secretary of State for Education announced the suspension of routine Ofsted inspections on 17 March 2020.

The safeguarding responsibilities of settings have not changed, and Ofsted's inspection and regulatory work triggered by safeguarding concerns will continue. On 3 December 2020, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector announced Ofsted's plans for the spring term. Routine graded inspections will not resume until the summer term of 2021.

Resuming Ofsted inspections

The Secretary of State for Education announced the suspension of routine Ofsted inspections on 17 March 2020. On 3 December 2020, the Secretary of State for Education announced plans for a phased return to routine early years inspections.

From January 2021, Ofsted will conduct assurance inspections under the Education Inspection Framework. The purpose of these inspections is to find out what it is like for children in their early years setting and to seek assurance that providers continue to meet registration requirements and remain suitable for registration on the early years register and, if applicable, the childcare register.

During these assurance inspections, Ofsted will consider the requirements of the EYFS, which sets the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe.

These inspections will result in a 'met' or 'not met' outcome. Ofsted will publish a report for parents that will explain what the provider is doing to create a high-quality setting which is welcoming, safe and stimulating, and where children can grow in confidence.

Ofsted will also continue with its registration and regulatory work for early years and childcare providers.

Ofsted plans to resume routine inspections for early years providers from the start of the summer term (April 2021).

Ofsted action on unregistered provision

The health, safety and wellbeing of children is our first consideration, and

the government continues to expect childcare to take place only within registered settings.

See Ofsted's response to coronavirus (COVID-19) in Ofsted: coronavirus (COVID-19) rolling update for more information.

Childminders

Early years entitlement funding for childminders

On 17 March 2020, the Chancellor of the Exchequer confirmed the government would continue to pay local authorities for free early years entitlement places for 2-, 3- and 4-year-olds.

On 20 July, we announced that we will continue through the autumn. We will continue to fund childcare, at the level we would have done before coronavirus, until the end of the 2020 calendar year. This gives nurseries and childminders another term of secure income, regardless of whether fewer children are attending.

We have published guidance on the use of free early education entitlements funding during coronavirus. This sets out how local authorities should fund early years providers during coronavirus (COVID-19).

Childminder eligibility for the Self-employment Income Support Scheme

Eligibility for the scheme is based on employment structures and not professions. You can apply if:

- you are self-employed, or a member of a partnership
- have lost profits due to coronavirus (COVID-19)
- meet further eligibility criteria

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) will contact individuals who are eligible and invite them to apply online.

Childminders working with other childminders to look after more children together

Up to 3 registered childminders (or a mix of up to 3 registered childminders and assistants) can work together in the same domestic premises.

However, if:

- more than 3 childminders work together they will need to apply to Ofsted to register childcare on domestic premises
- registered to deliver childcare on domestic premises, 4 or more childminders (or a mix of 4 or more childminders and assistants) can work together in the same domestic premises, which would enable them to care for larger groups of children and still meet ratio requirements

Read further details of requirements for childminders and childcare on domestic premises.

Quality assurance visits

The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families, Vicky Ford MP, wrote to Ofsted's Chief Inspector about supporting childminder agencies to retain their registration where the minimum number of quality assurance visits required has not been met as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19). This will ensure that childminder agencies (and their childminders) can continue to adhere to the government's guidance on protective measures and reduce external visitors.

The safeguarding responsibilities of childminder agencies (CMAs) and their childminders have not changed. CMAs must continue to prioritise visits to any of their registered childminders if they have concerns about the quality of a provider or wish to check any registered non-domestic premises (as set out in section 3.4 of childminder agencies: a guide).

In the summer term, all CMAs will be expected to resume their quality assurance visits - if they are not already doing so - and comply with the legal requirements of their registration to carry out the relevant minimum number of quality assurance visits to their registered childminders every year.

This is alongside Ofsted's plans to resume its routine inspections in the summer term (as announced on 3 December 2020).

Further information for CMAs is available in Childminder agencies undertaking visits during COVID-19.

Childminder with household member self-isolating

Household member self-isolating due to contact with a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19)

This advice applies where a childminder usually looks after children in their own home, and where a childminder's household member is self-isolating.

If this is:

- only as a result of coming into contact with a positive case
- the household member is not showing symptoms of coronavirus
- the household member does not require a test

The childminder can continue to provide childcare at their registered setting. The childminder should ensure they keep open communication with parents and carers of children attending about the self-isolation.

The household member who is self-isolating must not have any contact with the children being cared for in the setting. For example, the person isolating must use a separate bathroom where possible. If the person self-isolating has to use a shared bathroom or other communal areas, these must be thoroughly cleaned after every use.

The childminder must:

- comply with health and safety law, which requires a risk assessment. The risk assessment must demonstrate that the provision of childcare in their setting is safe and aligns with the system of controls. further guidance can be found on cleaning in non-healthcare settings outside the home
- put in place proportionate control measures - for more information on what is required of employers in relation to health and safety risk assessments, please see annex A of the guidance for schools

The childminder should:

- thoroughly review their health and safety risk assessment
- have active arrangements in place to monitor that the controls are effective, working as planned, and updated appropriately (for example when any issues are identified, or when there are changes in public health advice)

Further guidance on risk assessments and keeping children and staff safe can be found in the section on infection prevention and system of controls.

Household member self-isolating due to testing positive for coronavirus (COVID-19)

This advice applies where a childminder usually looks after children in their own home and a member of the childminder's household has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19).

The childminder should also take the necessary action for responding to and reporting confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the setting, as set out in system of controls.

A childminder cannot care for children in their home because all household members must self-isolate.

The household must self-isolate. Their isolation period includes the day the first person in their household's symptoms started (or the day their test was taken if they did not have symptoms) whether this was a Lateral Flow Device (LFD) or Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test and the next 10 full days. They should follow the guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection.

Funding and business support

Funding for free childcare places

On 17 March 2020, the Chancellor of the Exchequer confirmed the government would continue to pay local authorities for free early years entitlement places for 2-, 3- and 4-year-olds.

On 20 July, we announced that we will continue to fund childcare, at the level we would have done before coronavirus, until the end of the 2020 calendar year. This will give nurseries and childminders another term of secure income, regardless of whether fewer children are attending.

We have published guidance on the use of free early education entitlements funding, setting out how local authorities should fund childcare providers for the early years entitlements during coronavirus (COVID-19).

It is important for local authorities to ensure sufficiency of childcare and delivery of the early years entitlements for all children - not just vulnerable children and children of critical workers.

Until the end of the 2020 calendar year, local authorities should fund providers, which have been open, at broadly the levels they would have expected to see in the 2020 autumn term had there been no coronavirus (COVID-19). They should also fund providers which have been advised to close, or left with no option but to close, due to public health reasons. Local authorities should not fund providers which are closed, without a public health reason, from the start of the 2020 autumn term.

Early years entitlement funding for local authorities during 2020 to 2021

On 20 July, we announced that we would continue to fund childcare, at the level we would have done before coronavirus, until the end of the 2020 calendar year. This will give nurseries and childminders another term of secure income, regardless of whether fewer children are attending.

We have published guidance on the use of free early education entitlements funding which provides further details on how we expect local authorities to be funded to 2021.

Temporary changes to parents and carers eligibility to the 30 hours free early education entitlement and Tax-Free Childcare

Temporary changes have been made to the 30 hours free entitlement and Tax-Free Childcare offers so that all eligible parents and carers, including critical workers, are not disadvantaged during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

From 1 November, parents who are temporarily not meeting the minimum income requirement for 30 hours free childcare or Tax-Free Childcare as a direct consequence of the coronavirus outbreak will be treated as eligible if they would normally meet the threshold and are in receipt of government coronavirus support schemes, such as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS).

Parents who fall out of eligibility for 30 hours free childcare due to job loss or severely reduced income may enter a grace period. The grace period is intended to ensure children do not need to immediately leave childcare provision and to give parents support with transitioning out of the scheme or moving between jobs. If a parent's circumstances change again whilst in a grace period and they become eligible, they can reconfirm through the Childcare Service and the 30 hours free entitlement would continue without a break for their child.

Grace period dates can be checked with a parent's childcare provider and are based upon an individual's reconfirmation dates. Parents falling out of eligibility and due to reconfirm between 31 October and 31 December 2020 may be entitled to a grace period lasting until 31 March 2021. Further information on grace periods for the 30 hours free entitlement can be found in the statutory guidance.

If, after the grace period, a parent has not reconfirmed their eligibility for 30 hours, they remain eligible for the 15 hours universal entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds. There is also support available for parents with childcare costs outside of the free early education entitlements for lower income families. For example, eligible families can get help with up to 85% of their childcare costs through Universal Credit, subject to a monthly limit of £646 for one child or £1108 for 2 or more children.

We have laid the Childcare (Early Years Provision Free of Charge) (Extended Entitlement) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 to ensure that critical workers who exceed the maximum income threshold (of £100,000) set out in the Childcare (Early Years Provision Free of Charge) (Extended Entitlement) Regulations 2016, due to increased income mainly attributable to earnings from work undertaken directly or indirectly as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, can continue to take up 30 hours free childcare. We have set a new upper threshold of £150,000. The change will only be effective for the tax year starting with 6 April 2020 and ending with 5 April 2021.

Applying for, or reconfirming, the 30 hours entitlement or Tax-Free Childcare when a child is not currently attending a setting

All eligible parents are encouraged to continue to apply for, and reconfirm, their 30 hours and Tax-Free Childcare entitlement. There is further information on 30 hours free childcare and Tax-Free Childcare.

Business support for early years and childcare settings

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) will be extended until the end of April 2021 (up to 80% of current salary for hours not worked, up to a maximum of £2,500). Information about how to make a claim is available in claim for wages through the coronavirus job retention scheme.

Further guidance is available in:

- furlough scheme extended and further economic support announced
- claim for wages through the coronavirus job retention scheme
- coronavirus job retention scheme: step by step for employers

The guidance around early years providers' access to the CJRS remains as published: coronavirus: financial support for education, early years and children's social care

The launch of the Job Support Scheme has been postponed because of national developments related to coronavirus (COVID-19).

In addition:

- we are continuing to work with the sector to understand how the early years sector can best be supported to ensure that sufficient safe, appropriate and affordable childcare is available for those returning to work now, and for all families who need it in the longer term
- the Job Retention Bonus will no longer be paid in February, as the CJRS has been extended until the end of April 2021 - read further details about the extension
- private early years and childcare settings are eligible for a business rates holiday for one year - that means non-local-authority providers of childcare (registered with Ofsted and providing the EYFS) will not be charged business rates in 2020
- nurseries which are eligible for a charitable status relief will also not be charged business rates in 2020 to 2021
- some settings operate from shared spaces which may now benefit from a 100% rates relief. We strongly encourage those shared spaces to reflect any business rates savings in their rent charges
- there is an extension of the self-employment Income Support Scheme for those who are self-employed or members of a partnership and have lost profits due to coronavirus (COVID-19) - the scheme allows individuals to claim a taxable grant worth 80% of trading profits up to a maximum of £2,500 per month for 3 months, HMRC will contact individuals who are eligible and invite them to apply online
- for the self-employed (including childminders), the minimum income floor will also be temporarily relaxed, meaning Universal Credit can be accessed at a rate to match statutory sick pay (SSP)
- the Business Interruption Loan Scheme will be interest-free for 12 months, an increase from 6 months
- VAT payments due with VAT returns between now and the end June 2020 were deferred - UK VAT registered businesses will not need to make those payments until March 2021
- working tax credit has been increased by £1,000 a year
- the government also announced a £20 per week increase to the Universal Credit standard allowance and Working Tax Credit basic element, and an increase in the Local Housing Allowance rates for Universal Credit and Housing Benefit claimants so that it covers the cheapest third of local rents
- some early years settings may be eligible for the Local Authority Discretionary Grants Fund, details and eligibility criteria for this can be found in the guidance on applying for the Local Authority Discretionary Grants Fund

Charging parents and carers if they are unable to take up their child's place

Providers should continue to be fair and balanced in dealings with parents or carers and must continue to avoid unfair charging practices. Providers should refer to:

- the open letter to the early years' sector published by the Competitions and Markets Authority (CMA) on the 28 July 2020
- the CMA's detailed advice to the nursery and early years sector about coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions and consumer law advice
- the CMA's broader advice on cancellations and refunds for consumer contracts affected by coronavirus (COVID-19) health restrictions

The general principle is that providers should not charge parents or carers for services that cannot be provided. If there is a barrier to accessing childcare, based on government guidance or the law, the provider should not charge the parents or carers for this period. For example, from 28 September people in England are required by law to self-isolate if they test positive for coronavirus or are contacted by NHS Test and Trace. Accordingly, if a child is self-isolating having been contacted by NHS Test and Trace, the provider should not charge the parent or carer for this period.

Charging for consumables

Settings may charge for consumables, such as nappies, in line with the early education and childcare statutory guidance for local authorities. As per this guidance, they should consider the impact of charges on disadvantaged families.

Arrangements for providing meals

Where children qualify for benefits-related free school meals, because they meet the qualifying criteria, including receiving education both before and after lunch during term-time, they should receive this support as normal.

In any instance where an eligible child is self-isolating at home due to coronavirus (COVID-19), this support should continue to be provided (where possible) for example via the provision of a food parcel.

In all other settings, where free meals do not apply, settings may charge for meals in line with national entitlements guidance. Settings should consider the impact of charges on disadvantaged families.

Kitchens must comply with the guidance for food businesses on coronavirus (COVID-19).

Insurance of early years providers during coronavirus (COVID-19)

Business interruption insurance

For childcare providers which have a policy that covers government-ordered closure and unspecified notifiable diseases, the government's social distancing measures may be sufficient to allow businesses to make a claim against their insurance, provided the other terms and conditions in their policy are met.

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) rules require insurers to treat customers fairly, including:

- handling claims fairly and promptly
- providing reasonable guidance to help a policyholder make a claim
- not rejecting a claim unreasonably
- settling claims promptly once settlement terms are agreed

The government is working closely with the FCA to ensure that the rules are being upheld during this crisis and fully supports the regulator in its role. The Association of British Insurers (ABI) and its members have agreed a set of principles for handling business interruption claims to support and provide clarity to customers.

Customers who feel they have not been treated fairly should:

- first make a formal complaint to their insurer
- refer the matter to the Financial Ombudsman Service if they do not feel that their complaint has been dealt with satisfactorily

Businesses that have not purchased the appropriate level of cover should seek assistance through the government's wider support package if they are in financial difficulty. This includes measures such as business rates holidays, small business grants, and the CJRS.

Public liability insurance

Providers must carry the appropriate insurance (for example, public liability insurance) to cover all premises from which they provide childcare, including childminding. Some existing public liability policies may have been written or adjusted during the term of the policy (where permitted) to exclude coronavirus (COVID-19) risks, and some insurers may choose to exclude coronavirus (COVID-19) when offering public liability policy renewals.

Nurseries should check the terms and conditions of their public liability insurance policies and consult with their insurance providers and brokers to determine their coverage for coronavirus (COVID-19). It is worth noting that different insurers may take a different view, therefore settings are encouraged to shop around to seek the most suitable cover at the best price.

For general advice on insurance matters (but not on specific policies) including those related to coronavirus (COVID-19), the ABI can be contacted by phone on 0207 600 3333 or email at info@abi.org.uk.

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Yes No

There is something wrong with this page

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