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To  
Directors of Education  
ELC Leads

Copied to  
Chief Executives  
CERG  
COSLA  
Unions  
COVID Reference group

3 August 2021

Dear Colleagues,

## **EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE – COVID GUIDANCE TO SUPPORT THE SAFE OPERATION OF SETTINGS**

As we prepare for the return of term-time ELC provision, I would like to thank you once again for your hard work in observing the COVID risk mitigations and for your commitment and support to children and families. I know that many of your settings will have remained open over the summer but I hope that everyone has managed to take at least some time for a well-earned break.

Following the First Minister's statement today, I am writing to advise you of some important changes to the [guidance to support the continued safe operation of ELC settings](#).

### **New changes to the guidance**

In her statement to parliament this afternoon, the First Minister explained that **when Scotland moves beyond level 0 on 9 August there will be two important changes to self-isolation policy.**

Firstly, from 9 August, close contacts of positive cases will not be required to self-isolate if they are double vaccinated, at least two weeks have passed since their second dose and they take a PCR test that returns a negative result.

For under 18s (most of whom are not eligible for vaccination), the blanket self-isolation requirement for close contacts will also be removed. For those aged over 5 this would be  
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conditional on the child/young person remaining asymptomatic and receiving a negative PCR test. There will be an exception for under 5s – a PCR test may be recommended for under 5s, but their exemption from self-isolation should not be made conditional on this.

The [guidance to support the continued safe operation of ELC settings](#) has been revised today to reflect these changes.

The guidance has also been revised to reflect advice from the Advisory Subgroup on Education and Children's Issues that, to ensure closer (although not complete) alignment with the developing position in wider society, **when Scotland moves beyond level 0 on 9 August, the requirement will be for physical distancing of at least 1 metre.** However, as agreed with the Subgroup, the guidance explains that, if settings already have 2 metre physical distancing arrangements that work well, and do not limit capacity, then they may retain these.

There is a further key change to the guidance, this time with effect from today. **The guidance now allows visits from parents in level 0 and below in a managed way, where this is necessary to support children, for example, during their transition to a new setting.** Further details on the numbers of parent that can visit and mitigations that should be apply to these visits is set out the guidance.

We have worked closely with the Advisory Subgroup on Education and Children's Issues and with sector representatives through the COVID Reference Group and Sector Working Group, who have helped us to assess the impact of these changes using a four harms approach. We believe that the changes summarised above are not only proportionate to the health harms associated with COVID (reflecting the progress made with the vaccination programme) but will also help to minimise the pressure and disruption that children and staff have faced in ELC settings.

### **Strengthening access to CO2 monitors**

In her statement today, the First Minister stated that there would be a renewed focus on the importance of ventilation in childcare settings to reduce the risk that the virus could be present in concentrated amounts. We are therefore working with local authorities (via ADES and COSLA) to ensure that all day care of children services have access to CO2 monitoring, whether via mobile or fixed devices. This is to support the goal of all spaces within settings being assessed for ventilation issues, with a view to remedial action being taken.

The primary role for local authorities will be to purchase devices for all settings in their area. Local authority teams will work with providers known to the authority wherever possible. However daycare of children services that are not funded to provide statutory ELC will be asked to contact their local authority to arrange provision of devices. Services will retain responsibility for the operation of the monitors (including staff training) and for recording relevant information about the assessment of spaces in the setting. Local authorities have been asked to provide, where appropriate, basic operating information.

Services should ensure the information gathered as a result of these assessments are used to inform actions to improve ventilation where required. This may include, for example,

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remedial works where appropriate (e.g. accelerated maintenance to remedy unopenable windows or faulty ventilation) or providing further guidance to users (e.g. on regular opening of windows, etc.).

Local authorities have been asked to complete their assessments of local authority-controlled schools and ELC settings by the October half term – wherever possible, and subject to sufficient supplies of CO2 monitors being available for purchase. Additional funding of £10m is being made available to support this work.

## Other changes to guidance since June

As many settings have been closed over the summer, staff may welcome a reminder of other changes to the guidance, about which I wrote to you in June, for implementation by 19 July. Those changes allowed us to align some of the COVID risk mitigations in our guidance to protection levels. In level 0 and below this meant that we were able to ease restrictions on: cohort size; visits to the setting by specialist staff; the use of peripatetic staff; blended placements; and some aspects of enhanced cleaning regimes.

To help settings to familiarise themselves with the guidance as quickly as possible, I've attached a 'checklist' of mitigations that set out all of the key mitigations in the guidance, highlighting those that have changed since end of the summer term in June. The checklist is not intended as a substitute for reading the full guidance (links below).

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): early learning and childcare \(ELC\) services - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/Topics/healthandcare/coronavirus/early-learning-and-childcare)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance for school age childcare services - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/Topics/healthandcare/coronavirus/school-age-childcare)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): childminder services guidance - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/Topics/healthandcare/coronavirus/childminder)

## Next steps

We do not plan to make any further changes to the ELC guidance when we move beyond level 0. With the changes set out above, the intention is to retain the guidance until at least the end of September - by which point all over 18s will have been offered two doses of the vaccine and 14 days will have passed. However, we will keep this under constant review, depending on the data and evidence.

Please encourage your teams and settings to engage with our Twitter account (@ELCScotGov and @OSCScotGov), where we will keep you updated on the latest changes; answer questions; share ideas and best practice; and celebrate the fantastic efforts of the childcare sector to support Scotland's children and families.

Thank you again for everything you and your teams do for Scotland's children and families, particularly in these challenging times.



## ALISON CUMMING

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