



E: [ELCPartnershipForum@gov.scot](mailto:ELCPartnershipForum@gov.scot)

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To all registered childcare providers,

I wish you a very Happy New Year. Thank you for everything that you are continuing to do to for children, families and your staff in these challenging times. I know that the Omicron variant is posing real difficulties for the sector, particularly in terms of staffing. This is something that we are keeping under very close review with colleagues in public health and the Care Inspectorate, and why I am writing to you today to set out the detail of the changes to self-isolation policy that came into effect on 6 January and important temporary adjustments to ratios (item two below).

In summary, this notice provides additional information about:

1. The updated guidance for the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC), School-Aged Childcare and Childminding sectors;
2. The Care Inspectorate's temporary adjustment to adult to child ratios and new notification process relating to Omicron;
3. Updated information (warn and inform) letters; and
4. General guidance on keeping safe.

### **1. Updated guidance for the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC), School-Aged Childcare and Childminding sectors**

The suite of COVID-19 guidance for ELC settings, School-Aged Childcare and Childminding has now been updated, largely to reflect the policy changes on testing and self-isolation that came into force on 6 January.

- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): early learning and childcare services - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-early-learning-and-childcare-services)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): childminder services guidance - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-childminder-services-guidance)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): school age childcare services guidance - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-school-age-childcare-services-guidance)

The remainder of this section summarises the key changes that have been made to the guidance.

#### **1.1 Revised approach to self-isolation from 6 January 2022,**

This takes account of the latest advice and progress with the booster programme. Under this new approach:

##### **Positive Cases (regardless of vaccination status)**

- must isolate for 10 days; however, if the person tests negative on two consecutive LFD tests (taken at least 24 hours apart, with the first test no earlier than day 6) they may leave isolation if they have no fever after their second negative test.
- This applies to children who are positive cases aged under five years.

### Contacts aged under 5

- Contacts aged under 5 years are not required to undertake daily LFD testing in order to leave isolation.
- They should be encouraged but are not required to take a one-off LFD test before ending their period of isolation. If any contact develops symptoms at any point during or after the post-contact period, they should take a PCR test.

### Fully Vaccinated Adult Contacts

Please note that **the definition of a “fully vaccinated adult” now refers to three doses** of an MHRA approved vaccine. Fully vaccinated adults and all contacts who are aged under 18 years and 4 months and do not have Covid-19 symptoms should:

- take 7 daily LFD tests and report the results instead of isolating – there is no requirement for a PCR test to be released from self-isolation;
- as set out above, **children aged under 5 who are close contacts do not need to self-isolate or take daily LFD tests** – they should be encouraged, but are not required, to take a one off LFD test before ending isolation;
- if you’re a close contact who can end self-isolation, you can help protect others by following [our guidance on how to stay safe and help prevent the spread](#).

### Unvaccinated/Partially Vaccinated Adult Contacts

Please note, this group now includes adults with only 0-2 doses.

- Unvaccinated or partially vaccinated adult contacts must take a PCR test and isolate for 10 days.

Full information on the self-isolation guidance can be founded on NHS Inform at: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Self-isolation guidance for individuals with possible coronavirus infection | NHS inform](#)

## 1.2 Advice on confirmatory PCR tests

Where people test **positive** on a lateral flow device (LFD) test they are now not advised to get a PCR test to confirm infection, unless they are advised to by a clinician, but to follow isolation advice as it applies to them as a positive case. There is an exception for people who may be eligible for the Self-Isolation Support Grant who are advised to take a PCR test to ensure they can confirm their infection to be potentially eligible for financial support. If someone with COVID symptoms tests **negative** on a LFD they should disregard this and undertake a PCR.

### **1.3 Updates to the critical national infrastructure self-isolation exemption for public services**

The Critical National Infrastructure (CNI) Exemption Scheme ended on the 6 January 2022 and has been replaced by the population wide changes to isolation policy set out above. **However, there may be a need for people who were isolating before 6 January 2022 to continue to attend work under the guidance of that scheme that was in place at the time:**

- people who are already daily testing under the CNI scheme from 5 January or earlier should continue to follow the CNI guidance until the end of their isolation period;
- people who were asked to isolate prior to 6 January but who have not yet been able to return to work under the CNI scheme may engage in daily testing and return to work in line with the rules set out in the CNI guidance, if required.

Public health experts and clinicians have advised that the booster programme offers much higher level of protection than two doses of the vaccine against the Omicron variant. More than 90% of COVID cases in Scotland are now confirmed as Omicron. Given ongoing transmission risks and the need to dampen transmission, three doses of the vaccination for individuals is essential to achieving this. This is the rationale behind recent changes to self-isolation policy that now require three doses.

I appreciate that some ELC staff may not yet have had their booster vaccination. I would be very grateful for your help in encouraging staff of all ages to come forward for their boosters / third jags as soon as they are able to. Most should be eligible within a few weeks at most. Details of where to book in for your boosters are below.

### **2. The Care Inspectorate's adult to child ratios and new notification during Omicron**

The Care Inspectorate has today outlined new guidance on temporary adjustments that can be made to adult to child ratios, and a new notification process, in order to help settings cope with the impact of sudden staff absences arising from Covid-19. Providers must first exhaust all other options for additional staffing and undertake a risk assessment. This will apply only for children aged two years and over and for no more than 72 hours at a time. Further details can be found here: [Adult to child ratios and new notification during Omicron 2022.pdf \(careinspectorate.com\)](#)

### **3. Updated information (warn and inform) letters**

We have updated the information ('warn and inform') letters to parents and staff to reflect the latest guidance: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): early learning and childcare services - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

#### 4. Keeping Safe

I'd like to take the opportunity to remind staff in the whole childcare sector of the key steps that you can take to protect yourselves, your colleagues and the children you care for.

- **It is more important than ever to ensure we are all fully vaccinated.** While childcare staff have higher rates of COVID vaccination uptake than the general population, dose 1 and 2 coverage amongst younger staff is lower.
- **Access a booster vaccination.** Booster vaccination book now via the online portal at [www.nhsinform.scot/vaccinebooking](http://www.nhsinform.scot/vaccinebooking) or call 0800 030 8013.
- **Continue to take regular LFD tests, at least twice weekly.** Testing can help reduce the risks of COVID outbreaks in childcare settings. This, in turn, can help reduce the likelihood that staff or children and young people will have to self-isolate due to outbreaks. Staff whose settings are participating in the childcare testing programme can continue to access kits that way. The updated guidance highlights that test kits now require only a nasal swab and take 15/20 minutes to provide a result – you may wish to communicate this to staff where you feel this would promote uptake of testing. For childminders or those whose settings are not participating in the programme, [testing kits can be accessed via the universal offer of free testing](#).
- Take sensible precautions at home, [wear a face covering where required](#) and follow the First Minister's advice to minimise social mixing with other households as much as possible.

The First Minister is making a statement today and we will to communicate any further changes to you through the usual channels, using Care Inspectorate Provider notices where possible, and also sharing updates via our twitter account @ELCScotGov.

Thank you once more for all you are doing for Scotland's children.

Best Wishes



**ELEANOR PASSMORE**

Deputy Director, Early Learning & Childcare