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22 June 2021

## **NOTE FOR ALL CHILDCARE PROVIDERS**

To all registered childcare providers,

### **REVISED COVID GUIDANCE**

We are very grateful to the childcare sector for its continued support to children and families over the last difficult 15 months. We are also grateful for the continued adherence to the risk mitigations in the COVID guidance and appreciate the additional pressures that this has placed on teams in the last year.

We recognise that, as well as pressures on the sector, some of the risk mitigations in the guidance have had an impact on the ability to provide children and families with the quality and pattern of early learning and childcare that best meets their needs. Over recent weeks we have engaged with sector representatives to better understand these impacts and to consider how to ensure that our risk mitigations remain proportionate.

At its meeting on 18 May, the Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues agreed that we could align some of the COVID risk mitigations in our guidance to levels of community transmission and that a sensible approach to doing that would be to align to protection levels.

Reflecting the impact of the mitigations on reducing risk of transmission, the Sub-Group recommended:

- no change to the guidance on: face coverings; physical distancing between staff; ventilation; and staff working with the same cohorts of children as much as possible
- we can align to protection levels the 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
- we can align some of the mitigations to protection levels more quickly where provision is outdoors.

Since May we have worked closely with sector representatives on the COVID Reference Group for the formal childcare sector (formerly CCELC), the Sector Working Group, the sector unions and a sample of local authority ELC leads to develop some proposals about how these mitigations could be eased as settings move down through the protection levels. The Advisory Sub-Group approved these proposals at its meeting last week.

New guidance that aligns some of the risk mitigations to protection levels will not take effect straight away but we are sharing this guidance now to give settings time

to plan. The revised suite of guidance is attached and covers (separately) ELC settings, childminders and school-aged childcare.

Unless otherwise stated, the protective measures set out in guidance represent the 'core' or standard protective measures that should be in place in all settings across all five protection levels. Where measures can be aligned with protection levels these are set out in tables embedded in the guidance.

### **Timing of implementation**

Settings can begin applying the new guidance from Monday 5 July. To allow time for planning and staff training and, if this is preferred, to allow settings to make changes gradually, settings will have a further 14 days in which move to the new guidance. This means that by Monday 19 July all settings should be following the new guidance. On this date the current guidance on the SG website will be replaced with the attached version and the links below will be updated.

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

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

Settings that operate over term-time only and are closed in July should apply the new guidance when they re-open in August.

### **Planning assumption for August**

The First Minister indicated in her [statement](#) on 15 June that it is unlikely that any part of the country will move down a level from 28 June (the date at which the whole country had been expected to move to level 0) and that it is more likely that restrictions will be maintained for a further 3 weeks to allow for further progress with the vaccination programme. The First Minister stated that we do still hope that vaccination will allow us over this summer to move beyond level 0, and back to a much greater degree of normality. The current planning assumption for August should therefore be that settings will be in level 0.

### **Responding to local risk**

Community-level risk will continue to be monitored and managed by local health protection teams who will advise on how to respond. In the event of a local community outbreak and/or an outbreak in an ELC setting, at any protection level, settings may be asked by the local health protection team to implement additional restrictions, beyond those set out in this guidance, for a defined period of time. There may also be circumstances in which, based on clear evidence and public health considerations, specific settings require to close for a defined period of time. All such decisions will be made in line with the independent advice of local Directors of Public Health, who will take account of wider public health considerations according to their statutory duties. To keep children and staff in ELC settings safe and to reduce risk in the wider community, it is essential that settings follow any advice from their local health protection team.

## Summer holiday guidance

The current [guidance for school age childcare services](#) has been up-dated today to include a short-life annex - Coronavirus (COVID-19): summer holiday guidance for school age childcare services - which will remain in place from today until 18 August 2021. This Annex refers to and summarises links to existing guidance documents which are relevant for school age childcare services who are offering summer holiday childcare. It summarises guidance referring to trips, activities, meals and snacks and the consistency of cohorts. The attached PDF version of the school-aged childcare guidance has also been updated to include this annex.

## Further support and information

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

We will also be updating the training animation that accompanies the guidance and will develop a checklist that settings can use in each protection level to ensure they haven't overlooked any of the requirements in, what we know is has become, very lengthy guidance.

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



Alison Cumming  
Director, Early Learning and Childcare