



E: ELCPartnershipForum@gov.scot

2nd February 2020

NOTE FOR ALL CHILDCARE PROVIDERS

To all registered childcare providers,

UPDATE ON CHILDCARE RE-OPENING TO ALL PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN

Thank you to all childcare providers and childminders who have continued to support children and families during the stay at home period.

Today the First Minister announced the Scottish Government's intention that childcare settings can re-open to all pre-school children from 22nd February. This is subject to continued progress in suppressing the virus and will be subject to final confirmation in two weeks' time.

The decision to plan for the re-opening of early learning and childcare (ELC) reflects the crucial role that ELC plays in supporting children's development, and the challenge of delivering this crucial support remotely. It has been informed by the evidence that younger children are less susceptible to acquiring and transmitting the virus than adults and older children, and the low risk to staff of ELC-associated transmission and outbreaks, when community prevalence is low, including risks associated with the new variant.

This decision has been taken following a detailed review of the evidence on transmission and infection in Scotland, as well as on the impact of the new variant of the Coronavirus, and careful consideration of the impact on health and children's wellbeing and development. The advice of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues, which carried out the review, will be published [here](#) on Wednesday 3rd February.

At present, access to childcare for children of school age will not be extended. Only children of key workers and vulnerable children should continue to attend school age childcare services (other than childminding services).

Details of changes to access for different providers

Childcare settings for pre-school aged children

Childcare settings for pre-school aged children should plan to re-open to all children from 22nd February and should plan to do so using current [safe operating guidance](#). This is subject to continued progress in suppressing the virus and will be subject to final confirmation in two weeks' time.

School aged childcare settings

The current position for school aged childcare settings remains. Only children of key workers and vulnerable children can access school age childcare settings (other than childminding services). When community transmission levels allows, this will be extended to a wider range of children, as part of a phased re-opening of education.

Childminders

As is already the case, and to reflect the lower risk in small settings with fewer opportunities for adult to adult transmission, childminders caring for fewer than 12 children can continue to operate under existing [guidance](#) for children of any age.

Childminders caring for 12 or more children can plan to care for all children of pre-school age, and for children of any age who are the children of key workers or other priority groups, from 22nd February. This is subject to continued progress in suppressing the virus and will be subject to final confirmation in two weeks' time.

This represents a slight easing in the current restrictions for larger childminding settings, those caring for 12 or more children. However, children of school-age who are not the children of key workers or other priority groups should not begin attending a larger childminding setting again at this time. Like other childcare settings, these settings should be restricted to supporting pre-school aged children.

The following table summarises the childcare that provision that will be available from 22nd February, subject to a final review of the public health data on 16th February.

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| Child's Age | Childcare Provision |
|------------------|---|
| Under school age | All children under school age can return to ELC/ childcare, in their normal settings including childminders. Only essential informal childcare is permitted. Only children, and not their parents, should enter the home of another household. |
| School-aged | Children of key workers and children in other priority groups can continue to access childcare. All other school-aged children can access formal childcare with a childminder caring for fewer than 12 children. These are the only registered settings where formal childcare for these children is permitted. Only essential informal childcare is permitted. Only children, and not their parents, should enter the home of another household. |

Guidance for re-opening to all pre-school children

When considering re-opening to all pre-school children, providers should plan to do so using current [safe operating guidance](#). This guidance is reviewed regularly so that it reflects the most up-to-date public health advice. We are seeking further expert advice on whether there are any additional mitigations that are required ahead of re-opening and any changes will be clearly communicated.

All the available evidence continues to show that, when public health measures are followed, childcare settings are low risk environments.

For all childcare settings, public health guidance continues to emphasise importance of:

- enhanced hygiene and cleaning practice;
- limiting children's contacts by managing cohort sizes;
- maximising the use of outdoor spaces and access to fresh air;
- strict adherence to self-isolation for those who have symptoms and to other Test and Protect measures for all; and
- 2 metre physical distancing between adults and the use of face covering when this cannot be observed.

Testing of childcare staff

The safety of children and childcare staff remains our priority. The evidence continues to show that childcare settings are low risk environment. However, we understand the importance of offering staff and families as much reassurance as possible.

Arrangements are already in place for all ELC and school age childcare staff who are concerned they may have been at risk of infection, and wish to be tested. Today the First Minister confirmed we will introduce a routine testing programme for all staff working in schools.

The initial introduction of this routine testing programme will be available to school-based ELC and childcare staff. We are currently working through the logistics of making the same testing available to standalone local authority ELC settings, and settings and services in the Private, Voluntary and Independent sector.

In the meantime, childcare staff in stand-alone local authority settings, and those in Private, Voluntary and Independent nursery settings, can continue to access asymptomatic PCR testing [through their employer](#) if they have concerns about having been exposed to the virus.

Supporting parents/carers

We know that settings continue to keep in touch with parents/carers and that some parents/carers may be worried about whether childcare settings are safe for their child/children to return to.

Day care of children services and childminders continue to work hard to create low risk, high quality and nurturing environments for children to develop, play and have fun. All the evidence and public health data tells us that ELC settings remain low risk environments, and that risks to children are very low. However you may wish to remind parents and carers that they have a role to play.

Parents and carers can continue to reduce the risk of the transmission of COVID-19 by:

- Wearing a face covering at pick up and drop off;
- Maintaining physical distancing of at least 2 metres from other adults at all times; and
- Hand washing/sanitising before and after pickup and drop off.

We will continue to update [Parent Club](#) website to keep all parents and carers informed of the re-opening of childcare settings.

Financial Support


The [Temporary Restrictions Fund](#), for day care of children settings and childminders caring for 12 or more children, will open on 4th February for applications for the first round of grants covering the four week period from 4th January.

A second round of grants covering the period from 1st February will open in March.

While the restrictions continue, those who continue to be subject to the restrictions will be able to apply for a grant. Full details of round 2 and future rounds of the Temporary Restrictions Fund will be made available on the [Scottish Government website](#) as soon as possible.

Further information

The following resources can be used to support the re-opening of provision to all pre-school children.

| Resource | What | Link |
|---|---|--|
| Infographics | Infographics to support the public health guidance for ELC, Childminders and School Aged Childcare | ELC - ELC Graphic 9 Dec 2020 (www.gov.scot) Childminders - Childminder Graphic 9 Dec 2020 (www.gov.scot) School Aged Childcare - SAC Graphic 9 Dec 2020 (www.gov.scot) |
| Jason Leitch videos | A video by National Clinical Director, Jason Leitch which seeks to provide staff working in childcare with reassurance, from a clinical perspective, about the risk in their settings. | ScotGov Childcare video from National Clinical Director Jason Leitch for all childminders and ELC workers |
| Letter from the Chief Medical Officer in Scotland | A letter which issued from the CMO to the childcare sector on 27 January providing information on the public health evidence base around Covid-19 transmission and childcare settings. |  Letter to all ELC workers and Childm |
| FAQs – Care Inspectorate | The Care Inspectorate have a FAQs page. | COVID-19 FAQs (careinspectorate.com) |
| Care Inspectorate COVID-19 Toolkit | The Care Inspectorate have created a COVID-19 essentials toolkit | Coronavirus (careinspectorate.com) |
| ELC Wellbeing Hub | The Hub hosts a wealth of information and practical advice on managing wellbeing and features a function which allows practitioners and childminders to be connected with others in the sector, as well as the opportunity to book onto free online events. | https://teameicwellbeinghub.org/ |

Next steps

As evidence and advice develops, further notices will be provided as early as possible on:

- Final review of the public health data to confirm the re-opening date for childcare for pre-school aged children;
- The published evidence from the Advisory Sub Group on Education and Children's issues;
- Information about any strengthening or changes within the safe operating guidance which applies to your service; and
- Return arrangements for childcare for school aged children.

Remember to keep an eye on Twitter 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 ELC sector to support Scotland's children and families. Follow us @ELCScotGov.

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

Alison Cumming
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