



E: ELCPartnershipForum@gov.scot

Monday 15 June 2020

NOTE FOR ALL CHILDCARE PROVIDERS

To all registered childcare providers,

New guidance to support planning for wider reopening of ELC Services

Today we have published new guidance to support settings in planning for the safe reopening of early learning and childcare (ELC) services in Phase 3 of Scotland's Routemap. That guidance can be found [here](#).

No date has yet been set for Phase 3 reopening as this depends on when the criteria set out in the [Scottish Government's Routemap](#) are confirmed to have been met. The Scottish Government and Care Inspectorate will confirm the earliest possible date for wider reopening through a further notification to all providers. We will seek to give advance notice as far as possible of the date when services, other than those providing critical childcare and those services already able to operate in Phase 1, can open.

Depending on when we enter Phase 3, this may mean that childcare providers have the option of reopening before the schools return on 11 August, where this fits with their normal operating patterns taking account of the guidance we have issued today. We expect term-time childcare settings to reopen in line with agreed term dates of 11 August – there is no requirement or expectation that they will open earlier in Phase 3.

This guidance is specifically to support planning for the safe reopening of daycare of children ELC services (including nurseries, playgroups, crèches and family centres) in Phase 3. Separate guidance to support planning for the safe reopening of school aged childcare services guidance will be published later in June. We will also update the separate guidance for childminding services and fully outdoor childcare services ahead of Phase 3. We will update you via the Care Inspectorate when updated guidance is available.

The safe reopening guidance has been created in collaboration with COSLA, ADES, the Care Inspectorate, and early learning and childcare sector stakeholders. It incorporates lessons learned from those settings who have been operating during COVID-19.

The guidance is firmly based in public health advice. It will be kept under review and updated as scientific and public health guidance evolves. This guidance includes a number of links to wider public health guidance and we would encourage you to revisit these links regularly to ensure you are aware of the latest developments.

The aims of this guidance are to:

- Provide clarity of expectation with regard to practical approaches to a safe, phased reopening of ELC; and
- To provide key principles for consideration when reopening in Phase 3

This guidance focuses on the practicalities and operational aspects of reopening that providers will want to take the time to think through. We know that the re-opening won't be a one size fits all approach and that the guidance will have different impacts of individual settings.

You know your settings, you know your own workforce and you know your children and families. This guidance is the first part of empowering you to feel confident to take local decisions about the reopening and safe operating of your setting once we reach Phase 3.

As we set out in our [Strategic Framework](#), we do not consider physical distancing between young children, or between children and their key workers, to be appropriate or desirable for children in early learning and childcare settings. Therefore, the safe reopening of early learning and childcare settings will involve a package of age-appropriate public health measures that minimise risks for staff, children and families, and our communities. These include:

- enhanced hygiene and cleaning practices;
- caring for children in small groups;
- minimising contact between those groups;
- maximising use of outdoor spaces; and
- physical distancing between adults in the setting, including parents and carers at drop-off and pick-up times.

ELC staff

Our collective responsibility is to enable all staff to feel confident when returning to the workplace. As settings plan to welcome back children and families and staff, staff wellbeing must be protected. Staff will need time to re-connect, to meet, talk and 'check in' with each other. We've added specific sections to the guidance which give advice on ensuring staff safety and wellbeing on their return to work.

We recognise that practitioners may find it valuable to access support for their mental health and wellbeing, in the lead-up to settings reopening and once settings do reopen, given many of you will be balancing the return to work with managing your own childcare needs and any stressors linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, including potential illness and bereavement within your own families.

The Scottish Government is working with partners from across the childcare sector to develop a directory of existing mental health, wellbeing and professional learning support for early learning and childcare, and out of school care, practitioners and childminders.

ELC staff working in local authority settings will hear from your local authority, if you haven't already, about plans for returning to work. We do not expect staff working in the private and voluntary childcare sector (other than those required to provide

critical childcare and those operating in Phase 1) to return to their setting until notified by the Care Inspectorate that it is safe to do so.

Financial and business support

We have published the safe reopening guidance in advance of Phase 3 so that settings have time to work through the implications of the package of public health measures for their individual context.

It is possible that putting in place these public health measures will impact on the number of places that can be provided safely at one time. Employers will also need to consider carefully the particular circumstances of their own employees and the implications for staffing models.

The ELC and Childcare Sector Recovery Group is looking closely at the financial sustainability of the sector throughout the pandemic response. We know that this is fundamental to the ability of the sector to reopen. The Scottish Government has asked the sector representative bodies to work with their members to understand the impacts of the safe reopening guidance in terms of capacity and income generation; and the impacts of local funded ELC delivery plans as they are developed. The Group will provide input to the overall COVID-19 Education Recovery Group (which advises the Scottish Government and local government) on any further measures that may be required to support sustainability.

Please continue to check our dedicated gov.scot pages for the latest information on the financial and business support measures in place to support the childcare sector during closures and recovery: -

- [Childminders: financial support](#)
- [Private and third sector providers: financial support.](#)

Parents and Carers

Understandably parents and carers have a lot of questions also want to be absolutely sure that it is safe for their child to go back to ELC. It is important for ELC settings to be safe for children, but equally important for them to be high quality and nurturing environments. Settings will be supported to ensure that wellbeing is at the heart of their planning.

I am sure that you will be in touch with parents and carers from your settings when you have information to share with them about what will be changing. In the meantime, Parent Club is a fantastic resource with lots of information and advice for parents and carers. They have a dedicated page which has FAQs for parents about the reopening of ELC and schools - www.parentclub.scot/articles/reopening-schools-faqs. This is regularly updated with new information.

Reminder of current arrangements

It is important to remember that right now we remain in Phase 1 of the Scottish Government's [Routemap](#). No further changes to ELC and childcare provision are expected until we enter Phase 3. This means:

- The virus still exists and it is important that we continue to follow the guidance around physical distancing (where possible), increased hygiene measures and that we self-isolate if you or members of your household have any symptoms of COVID-19. More information can be found at [NHS Inform](#).
- The public health advice remains that children should – wherever possible – still be at home.
- If you are providing childcare to key worker children and vulnerable families then you should continue to do so. During Phases 1 and 2 there may be an increase in the number of key worker families looking for critical childcare provision due to other changes in their household circumstances.
- As was the case during the initial period of lockdown, settings (other than childminders and fully outdoor provision) should only open if required to provide critical childcare for keyworkers and vulnerable children. Preferably this should be delivered as part of a coordinated local authority plan.
- Settings may provide critical childcare for eligible families and vulnerable children without an explicit agreement with the local authority, on a private basis. If you do decide to reopen you must notify the Care Inspectorate. In such cases the cost of childcare will not be met by the local authority. Providers should agree fee arrangements privately with parents.
- In considering offering provision to families, you must be mindful that the public health advice remains that children should – wherever possible – still be at home. All childcare providers have a statutory duty to have regard to the Chief Medical Officer for Scotland's advice, under the Coronavirus Act 2020.
- Detailed guidance on the definition of key workers and how decisions should be made about provision can be found at [School and ELC closures – guidance for keyworkers](#). **Keyworker childcare should only be made available where it is absolutely necessary to ensure that keyworker parents/carers with no other option for childcare can continue to work in their role of delivering essential services.**
- From Wednesday 3 June 2020 all childminders and fully outdoor childcare provision were able to reopen their services more fully if they wished to do so, due to the particular characteristics of these environments. Restrictions remain in place and guidance for the safe reopening of [childminding services](#) and [fully outdoor childcare settings](#) was published on Monday 1 June 2020.

Next steps

This guidance is the first instalment of a package of resources to support services in planning and preparing for wider reopening during Phase 3. We are working with the sector to agree and develop the further sources of support and guidance which would most benefit all those working within ELC as we move towards the reopening of all services. This will include:

- Guidance from Education Scotland to support practice and pedagogy when welcoming children to an ELC setting
- Advice for settings on the Test and Protect programme as it could apply to staff and children within ELC
- Information and advice on wellbeing and professional learning support for the workforce
- Opportunities for providers to come together virtually to share practice challenges and solutions, and to access advice from the Care Inspectorate, Education Scotland and the Scottish Government.

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 early learning and childcare 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.

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