

## Frequently Asked Questions – Re-opening of Early Learning and Childcare Settings (includes school aged childcare services)

This is **additional** guidance for the re-opening of ELC settings. Please see FAQs for Daycare of children’s services or childminders for further guidance.

### PPE

#### Should staff be wearing PPE when caring for children?

Staff do not need to wear PPE when providing general care for children. The use of PPE should continue to be based on a clear assessment of risk and need for the individual child or young person. This might include where the care of a child already involves the use of PPE, for example wearing gloves and an apron for nappy changing, toileting accidents or cleaning up after a child has been sick or cut themselves (bodily fluids). More information can be found [here](#).

### Environment

#### Sharing school premises and community premises

Many school age childcare services operate from school or community premises that are shared with others. Where services have their own entrance, exit and general facilities including toilets and kitchen facilities they should follow this guidance as a stand-alone service.

**Where services share facilities with schools, they should consider the following:**

- early discussion with the local authority to agree use of premises
- potential implications of the school operating model
- arrangements for cleaning
- maintaining physical distance from other users
- arrangements for use of the outdoor spaces

**Where services make use of community spaces and facilities, they should consider the following:**

- early discussion with local authority or landlord to agree continued use of premises or facilities
- potential implications of sharing spaces with other community groups including maintaining physical distance with other users

- arrangements for cleaning
- maximising use of outdoor spaces where available
- risk assessments and associated measures should be consistent

#### What safety checks do we need to carry out before opening?

If premises have been closed for many weeks or if parts of the building have been out of use for a long period, the provider must undertake a health and safety check of the building concerned prior to reopening, including water quality sampling for legionella and other bacteria.

#### Should we take children's temperatures on arrival?

The presence of a temperature is only one common symptom of coronavirus. Information from Health Protection Scotland states that some of the symptoms of the virus are a fever, cough and change or loss of smell and taste. It is important that all symptoms are considered, temperature checks on arrival are not currently advised for early learning and childcare services. Information on fevers in children can be found [here](#).

#### What are the spacing standards for children?

The current floor space requirements are:

- for children under two years – a minimum of 3.7 square meters, per child
- for children aged two to under three years – a minimum of 2.8 square metres per child
- for children three and over – a minimum of 2.3 square metres per child.

In addition to this, consideration should be given to any additional space required to manage contact between groups of children. Further information about planning a quality environment can be found here: [early learning, childcare and out of school care services: design guidance](#).

#### How should we manage the allocation of places in our ELC setting?

The guidance advises that you should carefully consider the capacity within your setting and ensure your approach is clear and transparent when making allocations. Key principles to considering capacity include physical capacity, staffing and hours of opening. Where capacity is limited, providers should ensure that the following three groups have priority access to that capacity:

- key worker families requiring critical childcare

- children who may be provided with access to day-care services under section 2 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995
  - children eligible for the funded entitlement of 600 hours of ELC i.e. eligible 2-year olds and all 3- and 4-year olds
  - local authorities and providers will have discretion over how to allocate overall capacity in line with these principles and the local GIRFEC practice model.
- Local authorities and childcare providers should work together in meaningful partnership to meet the needs of local children and families.

Update January 2021 - It has been agreed with clinicians that, during this exceptional period (26 December 2020 to 31 January 2021), settings may exceptionally re-group vulnerable children and children of key workers (i.e. move them into different groups to those they were in prior to the festive break). This should be kept to the minimum necessary to ensure effective, safe learning and play arrangements are in place. It should be done in a way which meets children's needs and enables them to engage in learning which is age and stage appropriate. More information can be found [here](#).

#### Can children walk past each other in corridors?

Brief or transitory interactions such as passing in corridors or crossing play spaces to access other space are considered low risk for younger children. However, maintaining physical distances between groups of children will reduce risks further. Providers should ensure that settings have sufficient space available to ensure that groups are not mixing. To provide capacity to accommodate this guidance, a flexible approach to the use of all existing spaces within the setting may need to be taken. However, some consideration should still be given to children's movement between different parts of the settings, for example settings may wish to adopt one-way systems within corridors and stairs, use external areas to move between parts of the building and use signage to communicate any new systems in place.

**School aged children** – A face covering should be worn where adults and children **over** the age of 12 are moving about the setting in corridors and confined communal areas (including toilets) where physical distancing is particularly difficult to maintain. In school age childcare settings this would only apply where groups of children age over 12 are moving about in close contact. Children do not need to wear masks when within the main play area / hall.

If groups are sharing a large room which has only one entrance door how do we ensure the two-meter rule between groups as children move in and out?

Plans will need to be risk assessed about how this is managed while considering potential contact and how to solve this. For example, staggered arrival times and avoiding having children gathered at the doorway at the same time. Loose furniture, signs and floor markings could be used to help children to navigate their new environment.

Should groups have their own toilet?

No, providers should put measures in place to satisfy themselves that children can safely travel to a toilet without close contact with another group. Toilets should be cleaned regularly throughout the day. Children over the age of 12 should now wear a face covering when in communal corridors and toilets for example.

Consideration should be given to the cleaning strategy to be adopted in the setting once it reopens. All cleaning should be carried out in accordance with [COVID-19 – guidance for non-healthcare settings](#) and [Infection Prevention and Control in Childcare Settings](#) guidance.

Can children sleep in buggies to better manage the space? Can we have children sleeping in our outdoor classroom to help us manage space better? Do children need their own sleep mat?

It is important that best practice is followed for the children attending and that their comfort and safety is not lessened to enable a service to care for more children. Buggies indoors may increase the risk of infection (bringing dirt in on the wheels). You should try to keep the sleeping procedures similar to how they were before the outbreak. This helps children feel secure with a familiar routine. As usual, children should have their own bed sheet and covers which are laundered regularly. It is important that children sleep in a safe and comfortable position, in an environment which is ventilated and a comfortable temperature. More information can be found [here](#).

## Groups

Will there be physical distancing in ELC?

Contacts should be limited by caring for children within groups. Consistency of groups is beneficial, and efforts should be made to keep children within the same groups. More than one group can use a large space, but children should not mix freely with children in other groups, including in open plan and outdoors. The management of groups should reflect the circumstances of the setting. Physical distancing between adults remains a fundamental protective measure that should always apply.

### Is there a limit on group size?

Yes, children should be cared for in groups of no more than 33. The appropriate size of groups will depend on the age and overall number of children, and the layout of the setting. The general approach should be to minimise the size of groups where possible. The adult to child ratios in the national care standards must continue to apply. Large groupings should be avoided.

### Do groups of children have to stay the same all the time? For example, days where a group may vary slightly with differing children on different days?

Current public health advice states it is still important to reduce contact between people as much as possible. Consistency of groups is beneficial, and efforts should be made to keep children within the same groups. More than one group can use a large space, but children should not mix freely with children in other groups, including in open plan settings and outdoors. The management of groups should reflect the circumstances of the setting. Settings should apply proportionate, risk-based approaches to limiting contacts.

Update January 2021 - It has been agreed with clinicians that, during this exceptional period (26 December 2020 to 31 January 2021), settings may exceptionally re-group vulnerable children and children of key workers (i.e. move them into different groups to those they were in prior to the festive break). This should be kept to the minimum necessary to ensure effective, safe learning and play arrangements are in place. It should be done in a way which meets children's needs and enables them to engage in learning which is age and stage appropriate. More information can be found [here](#).

### Do children need to start at the same time as the staff for their group and finish at the same time too?

No, staff may arrive before children, for example to set up the play resources. Children may have staggered arrival times to help reduce groups of parents gathering in the car park or entrance areas.

### Children under 11 no longer need to physically distance indoors as well as outdoors. Does that mean we no longer need groups of children in ELC settings?

As above children should be cared for in consistent groups. It is still important to limit children's contacts. However, a maximum number per group is stated as 33 children (in line with school guidance). This will reduce likelihood of direct transmission, to allow for more effective contact tracing through Test and Protect and reduce the overall number who need to isolate in the event of a child becoming ill with COVID-19.

Children under 11 years do not need to physically distance indoors and outdoors. Do older children in OOSC need to physically distance?

Day care of children's services may include children up to the age of 16. Contacts should be limited by managing children within groups. Consistency of groups is beneficial, and efforts should be made to keep children within the same groups for the duration of the day or session, where possible. More than one group can use a large space, but children should not mix freely with children in other groups, including in open plan settings and outdoors. The management of groups should reflect the circumstances of the setting.

**School aged children** – A face covering should be worn where adults and children **over** the age of 12 are moving about the setting in corridors and confined communal areas (including toilets) where physical distancing is particularly difficult to maintain. In school age childcare settings this would only apply where groups of children age over 12 are moving about in close contact. Children do not need to wear masks when within the main play area/hall.

### Staffing

Can staff work between different groups of children over the course of a week?

Staff members should work with the same groups of children where possible over the course of a week. Reducing the contacts each staff member has with children throughout the course of the week is important. Consistency of staff is beneficial, particularly in relation to Test and Protect and settings being able to demonstrate contacts for each child and staff member. If staff need to work with other groups (for instance if the children attending changes on different days), this should be risk assessed. Staff should ensure strict hygiene practices are carried out if they are caring for different groups.

Can the same member of staff cover staff lunches/breaks for more than one cohort/group of children?

Staff members should work with the same groups where possible throughout the day, and a number of key workers may work together. If cover is required for breaks, toileting etc., this should be managed within the staff working with a particular group. If staff need to work with other groups, this should be for limited periods. Staff should ensure strict hygiene practices are carried out if they are caring for different groups. Adults should maintain 2 metre physical distancing at all times.

We have many peripatetic managers registered in services. Are they able to move between their services to fulfil their management and leadership responsibilities where possible, without being part of any groups?

Yes, it is important that managers are able to fulfill their role to support services. They must not work with groups at this time due the nature of their role which requires them to move around services. Their visits to the service should be considered as part of the cleaning schedule. Offices/workspaces must be fully disinfected before and after use. Physical distancing must be adhered to and frequent hygienic practices, e.g. hand washing.

What would you advise about bringing college/university students into the setting for placements, this will increase adults for a prolonged period unlike visiting staff?

In the 2020-21 academic year, we expect that students will begin to be accommodated within settings for placements from the end of the October break onwards, although timescales for commencement may vary across colleges. SQA is developing guidance for the HNC Childhood Practice, to support providers with the potential challenges of delivering the placement element of the qualification in the current academic year.

To ensure that maximum flexibility is maintained, this guidance will highlight to providers that they should develop contingency plans to allow students to undertake some of their practice through the use of remote learning, where appropriate, in the event that placements are interrupted or cut short due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

More information can be found [here](#).

What kind of risk assessments do we have to carry out?

Generally, a risk assessment would have to cover the risk presented to the children and staff from COVID 19. Staff should be reducing risks by following the guidance around COVID-19. The Scottish Government has [produced guidance](#) to support workplaces with this.

This is relevant to those staff members who are returning to work after shielding, those who are returning to normal duties after COVID-19 related restrictions, those who are returning to the workplace after working from home or anyone who has a concern about a personal vulnerability to COVID-19.

The tool can be used to assess the risk and enable employers to support staff by introducing suitable controls. The assessment tool allows the employee to complete an individual risk assessment with their manager using the [COVID-19 occupational risk assessment tool](#). This will support staff and managers to agree a course of action on working duties.