



E: ELCPartnershipForum@gov.scot

Friday 29 May 2020

A NOTE FOR ALL CHILDCARE PROVIDERS (Please note this replaces the notice issued on Thursday 28 May 2020)

To all registered childcare providers,

We have received helpful feedback that the notice we issued on Thursday 28 May wasn't as clear as it could have been. We are sorry about this and grateful to those who have pointed out areas where further clarity is required. We are therefore reissuing the notice today and would be grateful if you can refer to this version from now onwards.

Phase 1 – Easing of Lockdown in Scotland

On Thursday 28 May the First Minister announced that Scotland will begin to cautiously ease out of lockdown and move in to Phase 1 of the [routemap](#). The Scottish Government published new guidance explaining the rules in place for [Phase 1](#).

Our priority is the safety of every individual in Scotland. The easing of lockdown is an indication that Scotland is now in a position to slowly and cautiously begin to move forward and out of the Covid-19 crisis. 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 coronavirus. More information can be found at [NHS Inform](#).

Physical Distancing Guidance

Alongside the announcement on 28 May that we are entering Phase 1 of our gradual easing out of lockdown, the Scottish Government has published physical distancing guidance for the reopening of schools. This guidance can be found [here](#). This guidance applies specifically to the reopening of schools and does not apply to early learning and childcare or school-age childcare settings.

We will issue physical distancing guidance for the ELC and childcare sector on 15 June 2020. This guidance will reflect the approach outlined in our Strategic Framework which acknowledged that physical distancing between young children and their keyworker would not be feasible or desirable, but physical distancing between adults remains an important protective measure.

This physical distancing guidance for schools does not apply to out of school care providers even if they operate from school premises. It is specifically for schools and



not for 'school aged childcare'. We will issue guidance for OSC settings as part of the ELC and childcare guidance which is currently under development.

What does all this mean for the childcare sector?

We want to explain what is and isn't changing for childcare as we move into Phase 1.

Critical childcare for keyworkers and vulnerable children

If you are providing childcare to key worker children and vulnerable families then you should continue to do so. During Phase 1 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 as part of a coordinated local authority plan.

We expect a gradual transition process as we move away from a majority 'childcare hub' model to more childcare settings re-opening to provide critical childcare for children key workers and vulnerable families. This will be a local decision for local authorities to make and you will hear from your authority about reopening to provide critical childcare.

Childminding services and fully outdoor childcare provision

From Wednesday 3 June 2020 all childminders and fully outdoor childcare provision can reopen if they wish to do so. In allocating their spaces, continued critical childcare for keyworkers and vulnerable children should be the first priority. Beyond that, childminders and fully outdoor settings can use their discretion to allocate places to families. Further guidance to support the reopening of both types of service will be published on Monday 1 June 2020.

Wednesday 3 June is the earliest reopening date for these services and reopening is at the discretion of individual providers. There is no requirement for all childminding and fully outdoor services to reopen immediately or during Phase 1. It is important that each provider takes the time they need to prepare to reopen if they wish to do so, based on their own business and personal circumstances.

Childminding services

Some -restrictions on the number of households for whom childminders can care at any one time will continue to be in place to reduce the risk of transmission. The current two household limit is being reviewed. The guidance published on Monday 1 June will confirm the restrictions for services operating during Phase 1.

There will be no change to the current Care Inspectorate arrangements for registration of services and the number of children a service can care for as detailed on the certificate of registration.

Fully outdoor childcare provision

Only fully outdoor childcare services are being opened up at this time. This means that only services who are registered with Care Inspectorate as fully outdoor and meet the definition set out below are able to reopen during Phase 1. We know that many of you have excellent outdoor space and may be able to fully utilise it with some adaptations or provide satellite provision but in line with other aspects of Phase 1 of the routemap, at this stage only fully outdoor childcare provision will be able to reopen from 3 June.

The Care Inspectorate's definition of fully outdoor childcare provision is – *This model of setting has developed over recent years and can sometimes be referred to as a forest nursery or kindergarten. In these settings children are outdoors all of the time except in extreme weather conditions. Children and staff will have access to a sheltered area - this could be a permanent or temporary structure. There may also be a meeting point, premises or a base camp used for the drop off and collection of children. These settings will have a comprehensive contingency plan which has been articulated and agreed with parents in the rare occasion where severe weather conditions prevent children from being outside.*

This should not be confused with settings which currently provide outdoor experiences as part of their provision of early learning and childcare or school age childcare. According to current Care Inspectorate registrations there are **22 registered fully outdoor nurseries and 1 fully outdoor out of school care setting** operating in Scotland.

All other early learning and childcare (ELC) and school aged childcare provision
As explained above, childcare providers can remain open or re-open for the provision of critical childcare to key workers' children and for vulnerable families only, in line with the latest [Health Protection Scotland guidance](#). If providers choose to open or re-open to provide critical childcare, unless there is an explicit agreement with the local authority, then providers should agree fee arrangements privately with parents.

The Scottish Government's routemap confirms that wider reopening of childcare services **can take place in Phase 3**. The Scottish Government and the Care Inspectorate will notify all providers of the earliest possible date for the wider reopening of childcare services. 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. Term-time childcare settings would reopen in line with agreed term dates – there is no requirement or expectation that they will open earlier in Phase 3.

We are currently working collaboratively with the Care Inspectorate, COSLA, local authorities, childcare sector stakeholders and the unions to create guidance for the safe reopening of early learning and childcare and out of school care settings. We will issue guidance for the safe reopening and operating of early learning and

childcare and school aged childcare provision by the 15 June 2020 in preparation for reopening. As we set out in our [Strategic Framework](#), we do not consider physical distancing to be appropriate or desirable for children in early learning and childcare settings. The safe reopening of settings will involve

- 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 at drop-off and pick-up times.

It is really important that we learn from settings who are currently providing childcare during Covid-19. We are working with these providers to also help us inform the guidance which will issue in mid-June.

Return of staff

ELC and OSC staff working in local authority settings will hear from your local authority about plans for returning to work in June in line with teachers and other school staff.

We do not expect staff working in the private and voluntary childcare sector (other than those required to provide critical childcare) to return to their settings next week. Guidance to be published on the 15 June 2020 will explain the steps settings need to take to reopen safely during Phase 3, and providers will then be able to consider appropriate plans to prepare for reopening, taking account of the arrangements for staff who are furloughed through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme

Financial and business support

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:

- [Childcare providers: closure information](#)
- [Childminders: financial support](#)
- [Private and third sector providers: financial support](#)

What can we tell parents?

Understandably parents/carers have a lot of questions and want to know what yesterday's announcement means for them and their family and also want to be absolutely sure that it is safe for their child to go back to ELC. Parent Club is a fantastic resource with lots of information and advice for parents and carers. They have recently created a new page which has FAQs for parents about the reopening of ELC and schools - <https://www.parentclub.scot/articles/reopening-schools-faqs>

Thank you for bearing with us during this time and thank you for everything you do for children, families and Scotland.