

Guidance for education and childcare settings on implementing physical distancing and the use of Personal Protective Equipment during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak

1. Background

It was announced on 23 March that the UK would enter a stricter period of physical distancing, with people only allowed to leave home for very limited purposes. The UK-wide measures are intended to delay the spread of the virus – if the majority of the country are strictly self-isolating, this allows for some people to gather where that is necessary, whether it be in hospitals, food production facilities, or in schools or childcare settings.

2. Purpose

This guidance is intended to ensure provision made within education and childcare settings is as safe as possible for staff and children. Physical distancing, hygiene and self-isolation of those showing symptoms or living with someone showing symptoms will minimise the risk of transmission of infection. While staff may feel apprehensive about the risks, it is important to remember that with adherence to guidelines, provision can be made far safer.

3. Recommendations for the educational setting

From 20 March 2020, schools, colleges, nurseries, childminders and other registered childcare settings in Scotland closed for all but the most vulnerable children and for children of [key workers](#). The aim of this is to reduce spread of COVID-19. Every child who can be safely cared for at home should be, to limit the chance of the virus spreading. Where a child does attend the school setting then this should be for the minimum amount of time required. It is important to ensure that there is adequate provision for these children, if not then there is a potential risk to the child (if vulnerable) or potentially to other family members if elderly grandparents are asked to care for the children. Further information can be found at [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): school closure guidance for key workers](#).

4. Who is this advice for?

This advice is for organisations and their staff working in local authority, independent and grant-aided schools, other education and childcare settings who are providing care to those groups of children described in section 7.

The aim of this advice is to support implementation of measures to reduce spread of COVID-19 within the educational setting. These measures are described in detail in the HPS guidance for non-healthcare settings. Please always check the online guidance on the HPS website for further advice.

This advice will be updated as the situation evolves, further guidance for local authority, independent and grant-aided residential special schools will be published as soon as possible.

5. Typical signs and symptoms of COVID-19

Common symptoms include:

- new continuous cough

and/or

- high temperature

These symptoms can range from a mild-to-moderate illness to severe acute respiratory infection. For most people COVID-19 will be a mild infection. COVID-19 is more likely to cause severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with long-term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease. It is thought that children are more likely to have mild disease.

6. Measures to prevent spread of COVID-19 and protect people at increased risk of severe illness

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. The following measures are recommended to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 and to protect people at increased risk of severe illness:

Stay at home: guidance for households with possible coronavirus (COVID-19) infection measures should be followed by people with symptoms and their household contacts to reduce the community spread of COVID-19. This means that anyone who has symptoms of COVID-19 and anyone else living in the same household should follow 'stay at home' advice on [NHS Inform](#).

Physical distancing measures should be followed by everyone, including children, in line with the government advice to [stay at home](#). The aim of physical distancing measures is to reduce the transmission of COVID-19. Up to date information can be found on the [NHS Inform](#) website. Note that shielding advice should be followed by individuals at risk of severe infection (see below).

Shielding is a measure to protect people, including children, who are extremely vulnerable to severe illness from COVID-19 because of certain underlying health conditions. The aim of shielding is to minimise interaction between these individuals and others to protect them from coming into contact with COVID-19. People with these serious underlying health conditions are strongly advised to rigorously follow shielding measures in order to keep themselves safe. Further information, including the list of underlying health conditions that make people extremely vulnerable, is available on the [NHS Inform](#) website.

7. Which children can continue to attend education and childcare settings?

The Scottish Government has made provision for vulnerable children and children of key workers to continue attending education and childcare settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Local authorities will decide what learning and childcare arrangements for the children of key workers are most appropriate based on local circumstances.

7.1 Children of key workers

[Key workers](#) are defined as parents whose work is critical to the COVID-19 response, including those who work in health and social care and in other critical sectors. However, many parents working in these critical sectors will be able to ensure their child is kept at home.

Many key workers, such as those in the NHS, work shifts. Where possible the school or childcare provider should aim to support this by being as flexible as possible around the hours that they provide.

7.2 Vulnerable children

The aim of providing continued care to vulnerable children is to prioritise their continued safety and welfare which may rely on the support delivered within the educational setting.

Vulnerable children in this context includes:

- Those on the child protection register, those who are looked after, and, those on the edge of care.
- Children in receipt of Free School Meals
- Children and young people who have complex additional support needs
- Children and young people affected by poverty and deprivation
- A child who has been assessed as being in need or otherwise meets the definition in section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

Those working with children and young people are best placed to identify those who would be considered as vulnerable and in need of support in order to secure their wellbeing, as a result of school closures. The relevant lead professional, who may be a social worker or a health or education professional, can advise regarding this. Many of these children will already have multi-agency child's plans, although it must be recognised that the current crisis is likely to mean that other groups of children will also become vulnerable as a result of changes to family circumstances including potential increased stresses.

Education and childcare settings and local authorities will need to consider the needs of these children, which should be informed by their plan, working closely with their parents, and make a risk assessment about meeting the needs for each child or young person.

In circumstances where a parent does not want to bring a child who is considered vulnerable to an education setting and/or where there are concerns regarding physical health conditions, the lead professional and education or childcare setting should explore the reasons for this, directly with the parent, and help to resolve any concerns or difficulties wherever possible and provide appropriate support.

The number of social interactions in the school or childcare environment will be reduced as there are fewer children attending, and physical distancing is being practised.

7.3 Children at increased or very high risk of severe illness from COVID-19

When considering the care requirements for children it is essential that their health status is taken into account. Children can usually continue to attend if they have mild underlying health conditions, as specified in the guidance on NHS inform.

Children who meet the criteria outlined in the [guidance on shielding](#) should not routinely attend the educational setting. Where a vulnerable child is identified as

being at increased risk of infection or its consequences, particularly if they fulfil the criteria in the [guidance on shielding](#), then an individual risk assessment must be conducted to ensure that appropriate placement of the child is determined. In some cases, particularly where social and health needs are complex, this may mean that alternative arrangements must be found to assure the safety and welfare of the child.

The education or childcare setting should be informed of any health conditions so that any concerns can be addressed. It is important to ensure that the physical distancing advice is followed to minimise risk for both these and other children.

7.4 Children and young people with complex additional support needs

Children and young people with complex additional support needs may benefit from continuing to attend education or childcare settings to secure continuity in their care and support. Education authorities, schools and childcare settings (including independent providers) have been asked to consider the needs of all children and young people with complex additional support needs as part of their plans for continued educational provision whilst schools are closed including arrangements for appropriate physical distancing. It is recognised that for children and young people with complex additional support needs arising from health factors, appropriate arrangements to protect their health and wellbeing, including physical distancing will be required. It is also recognised that some parents and carers of a child with complex additional support needs arising from health factors may not wish their child to continue to attend school, in order to protect their health and wellbeing.

8. Staff with health conditions or pregnancy

Staff with other conditions that mean they are at increased risk of serious illness as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19) should work from home where possible, and education and childcare settings should endeavour to support this. More advice on this is included in the [physical distancing guidance](#).

Education and other staff within the setting, with serious underlying health conditions which put them at very high risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19), should rigorously follow shielding measures in order to keep themselves safe. Staff in this position must not attend work. More advice on this can be found in the NHS Inform [guidance on shielding](#).

9. Staff who have household members who are at very high risk of severe illness (requiring “shielding”)

Staff who are living with someone who is pregnant or with a known health condition can attend work providing the household contact is not in the most vulnerable health group as set out in the NHS Inform [guidance on shielding](#).

Staff who live with someone in the most vulnerable health groups, should work from home.

10. Children who have household members who are at very high risk of severe illness (requiring “shielding”)

Children who are living with someone who is pregnant or with a known health condition can attend critical provision in education and childcare settings providing

the household contact is not in the most vulnerable health group as set out in the [guidance on shielding](#).

Children who have household members who are at very high risk of severe illness (requiring “shielding”) should have an individual risk assessment conducted before the most appropriate place of care is determined. This will need to take into account the need for continued attendance at the educational setting, the risk posed by non-attendance, the alternative care provision available and the risk to the person in the household posed by the child continuing to attend.

11. Implementing physical distancing in the childcare setting

It is recognised that it is not possible to fully social-distance within education and childcare settings with very young children and with children who have complex needs or disabilities. Staff should implement the measures outlined in the [non-healthcare settings guidance](#), whilst ensuring children are kept safe and well cared for within their settings.

It is essential that a holistic approach is maintained in caring for children and that care providers are alert to the stress that many of the children that are attending the care setting may be experiencing. For vulnerable children difficult home situations may be exacerbated. For children of key workers, there may be anxieties related to their parent’s welfare and health while at work.

This means that it is important where possible to ensure that children’s emotional needs are anticipated in considering what the requirements are for staffing. This will also be an anxious time for many of the staff too and it is essential that their health and wellbeing is considered. There may be additional challenges helping these groups of children navigate this difficult time.

For children and young people with the most complex additional support needs ensure that you involve lead professionals and parents to decide how best to continue supporting them. It is important to tailor the care situation to the child where possible.

12. Staffing

- Consider how you need to support staff who are working in your setting
- Ensure that the facilities for staff allow for physical distancing
- Ensure that the staff attending are aware of the most up to date Covid-19 information on the NHS inform website.
- Ensure that you have the right staff to support the physical and emotional needs of children and staff
- Ensure staff to child ratios are tailored to the requirements due to physical distancing (i.e. fewer children in a room) and changing pupil mix and support requirements

13. Implementing physical distancing measures

Consider the following

- Consider how you can implement physical distancing in your setting
 - Evaluate what additional support you need to implement physical distancing measures in your setting

- Ensure class or group sizes reflect the numbers of staff available and are kept small enough to allow for [physical distancing](#)
- Ensure sufficient staff numbers to keep group sizes small
- Ensure sufficient equipment available for each room/ group space
- Discourage parents and carers from gathering at school gates
- Discourage unnecessary entry of parents and others to the setting
- Consider how children travel and arrive at the education and childcare setting
 - Consider how children arrive to facilitate for physical distancing
 - Reduce any unnecessary travel on coaches, buses or public transport
- Consider how you structure the care environment to allow for physical distancing
 - Number of rooms and size of space
 - Desk or play equipment spacing
 - Toileting and handwashing facilities
 - Snack and lunch provision
 - Outdoor play space
- Consider how you structure your learning
 - Individual working (for older children)
 - Group work using technology
 - Alternative approaches that allow for physical distancing (for example during games and activities)
- Consider the content of your teaching and support
 - Tailor key messages and information to the children in your care
 - Careful and considered communication about risks and behaviours
 - Hygiene
 - Personal resilience
 - Mental health
 - Staying healthy
 - Staying fit
- Consider how you structure the routine
 - Staggered arrival and departure times
 - Stagger lunch times, break times and the movement of pupils around the school to reduce large groups of children gathering
- Enhanced cleaning routines
 - Increased frequency
- Review catering provision
 - Limit or avoid shared foods
- Develop a clear procedure for what staff should do if a pupil starts to display symptoms of Covid-19 when at school including guidance on the appropriate use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) adhering to HPS non-healthcare settings guidance

14. What staff can encourage parents to do

- Inform parents and communities about the measures that you are taking and get their help to implement them
- Talk to their children about coronavirus (COVID-19), physical distancing and hand washing.
- Follow [guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection](#).

- Do not gather at entrances or in playgrounds, and model physical distancing so that their children learn good practice.
- Consult the [Parent Club website](#) for useful information on how to cope with changes and how to protect themselves and others

15. Hygiene measures including the use of PPE

The aim of physical distancing measures is to slow the transmission of COVID-19. This is one part of a range of measures that are recommended to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 and to protect people at increased risk of severe illness. As set out earlier the other measures are: stay at home and shielding. In addition, National Guidance on COVID-19 sets out that general infection prevention and control measures should also be followed. These are: hand hygiene; catch coughs and sneezes in tissues or cover mouth and nose with sleeve or elbow (not hands), and dispose of the tissue into a bin and wash hands immediately.

It is recognised that for some key frontline workers outwith the NHS – such as staff working in education and childcare settings - delivering essential public services can mean that physical distancing is not always practical and that there may be circumstances where there is a need for PPE for close contact (within 2 metres).

Where the use of [PPE](#) is being considered within an education and childcare setting the specific conditions of each individual setting must be taken into consideration and comply with all applicable legislation, including the [Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974](#), Personal Protective Equipment Regulations 1992 and the Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1999 which outlines the process of, and legal requirements for, risk assessment. Local authority guidance on the use of PPE (which will include guidance on how to order stock) should also be followed.

The use of individual and organisational risk assessments at a local level must be used to inform PPE. Risk assessments should include droplet and contact infection risks. The use of PPE by staff within education and childcare settings must be based on a clear assessment of risk and need for an individual child or young person. Such as personal care where staff come into contact with blood and body fluids. Schools and local authorities already have set risk assessment processes for the use of PPE. Following any risk assessment (individual or organisational), where the need for PPE has been identified it should be readily available and provided (<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg174.pdf>).

Where the use of PPE is risk assessed as being required, all staff should be trained in how to put on and take off PPE (as required by Health and Safety Regulations) and to ensure staff limit the spread of COVID-19.

Risk assessments should already exist for children and young people with more complex needs, including those with emotional and behavioural needs. These risk assessments will require to be updated as a matter of priority in light of changes to provision such as environment and staffing, whilst also remaining mindful of the additional distress young people may be experiencing due to COVID-19. If risk

assessments are not in place, then they must be undertaken swiftly in accordance with this guidance and local risk assessment guidance.

HPS [non-healthcare settings guidance](#) makes clear that staff should continue to use PPE in line with current health and safety policies and risk assessments. Staff should only wear PPE when it is appropriate to the task they are undertaking. The exception is where, following an individual or organisational risk assessment it is found that a higher level of contamination, such as respiratory secretions, may be present or the risk assessment identifies that there is an identified need for PPE then it should be readily available and provided in line with Health and Safety guidance <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg174.pdf>

All staff, including children and young people, must inform a member of staff or responsible person if they begin to feel unwell. If the affected person has respiratory symptoms they should go home as soon as possible and self-isolate. There should be clear guidance for staff to follow implementing the measures outlined in the [non-healthcare settings guidance](#).

16. Provision of intimate care

Some children and young people, may require the provision of intimate care, which can encompass personal care and may also apply to certain invasive medical procedures, such as assisted feeding.

In the circumstances described above, staff need to increase their level of self-protection, such as considering whether it is possible to complete duties differently to minimise close contact and increasing cleaning of frequently touched surfaces, and carrying out more frequent handwashing. Handwashing should always be practiced before and after the use of PPE.

Staff carrying out intimate care should wear what they have always [worn](#) – that is, an apron and gloves; and no mask unless a risk assessment has identified that additional PPE must be used.

Staff who are supporting children and young people with complex needs will need to follow HPS guidance <https://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/web-resources-container/covid-19-information-and-guidance-for-social-or-community-care-residential-settings/> This guidance provides details about the use of additional PPE required if undertaking an Aerosol Generating Procedure (AGP) such as suctioning.

Staff should have access to disposable single use gloves for spillage of blood or other body fluids and disposing of dressings or equipment. Local infection control procedures that outline safety and protocols should be stringently followed. This includes procedures for the disposal of soiled items; laundering of any clothes, towels or linen; and cleaning equipment for children and young people, such as hoists and wheelchairs.

Before and after all contact with the child or young person, before putting on PPE, after removal of PPE and after cleaning equipment and the environment hand hygiene is essential. Hands should be washed with soap and water following.

Alcohol-based hand rub can be used if hands are not visibly dirty or soiled. Alcohol based hand rub stocks should not be stock-piled. Washing effectively with soap and water is sufficient.

17. Face Coverings

On 28th April Scottish Government published guidance on the use of textile face coverings by members of the public for situations where physical distancing is not possible.

The guidance relates to use of face coverings by members of the public in specific circumstances (for short periods of time in crowded public situations). This precautionary guidance for the public should not be conflated with the PPE guidance for the workplace. The face coverings advice is not intended as an infection prevention and control measure for the workplace where there are other health and safety considerations and measures in place such as physical distancing and hygiene controls, such as hand washing with soap and water or using alcohol based hand rub. In the case of the childcare hubs this includes a risk-based assessment of the need for PPE (as set out in section 15 above).

Physical distancing, hand washing and respiratory hygiene, remain scientifically proven to be the most important and effective measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

Where to go for further help

[Parent Club Website](#) (advice for parents)

[Care Inspectorate](#) guidance (advice for childcare settings)

[Education Scotland](#) guidance (advice for practitioners)

If there is additional advice that you feel is not covered by the current guidance please contact SGCoronavirusEducation@gov.scot for further advice.