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Guidance

# Coronavirus (COVID-19): implementing social distancing in education and childcare settings

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## Background

- Children are likely to become infected with coronavirus (COVID-19) at roughly the same rate as adults, but the infection is usually mild.
- The most common symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are a new, continuous cough or a high temperature (over 37.8 degrees).
- For the vast majority of children and staff, coronavirus (COVID-19) will not cause serious illness.

From 20 March 2020, schools, colleges, nurseries, childminders and other registered childcare settings in England will close for all but the most vulnerable children (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people>) and for children of critical workers (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>).

Vulnerable children in this context include children who have a social worker and those children and young people with education, health and care (EHC) plans. Those who have a social worker include children who have a child protection plan and those who are looked after by the local authority. A child may also be deemed to be vulnerable if they have been assessed as being in need or otherwise meet the definition in section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

Critical 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. Every child who can be safely cared for at home should be, to limit the chance of the virus spreading.

It was announced on 23 March that the UK would enter a stricter period of social 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.

This advice seeks to support staff working in schools, other education and childcare settings to deliver this approach in the safest way possible, focusing on measures they can put in place to help limit risk of the virus spreading within education and childcare settings. It should be read in conjunction with the advice (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>) on school closures (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-school-closures>), vulnerable children (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people>) and childcare (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures>). This advice will be updated as the situation evolves, while further guidance relating to special schools will be published as soon as possible.

## Which children can continue to attend education and childcare settings?

The Government has made provision for vulnerable children (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people>) and children of critical workers (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>) to continue attending education and childcare settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

### Children of critical workers

Critical workers' children can continue to attend an education or childcare setting unless they are in one of the most vulnerable health groups as set out in the guidance on shielding (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>). This means children can continue to attend if they have mild underlying health conditions, as specified in this guidance. The education or childcare setting should be informed of any health conditions so that any concerns can be addressed. The number of social interactions in the education or childcare environment will be reduced as there are fewer children attending, and classroom social distancing is being practised.

### Children with a social worker

There is an expectation that vulnerable children who have a social worker will continue to attend an education or childcare setting, so long as they do not have underlying health conditions that put them at severe risk. 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 social worker 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. The number of social interactions in the school or childcare environment will be reduced as there are fewer children attending, and classroom social distancing is being practised.

## Children and young people with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

Children and young people with an EHC plan often have complex needs that are best supported in an education or childcare setting. Education and childcare settings and local authorities will need to consider the needs of all children and young people with an EHC plan, working closely with their parents, and make a risk assessment for each child or young person. Children and young people with an EHC plan in all health categories, including the most vulnerable, may continue to attend education or a childcare setting as usual if their local authority risk assessment has determined this is appropriate, taking on board the views of their parents.

## Individuals in vulnerable health groups

We are strongly advising people, including education staff, with serious underlying health conditions which put them at very high risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19), to 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 guidance on shielding (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>).

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 social distancing guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>).

If a child in one of the categories above, or a member of staff lives with someone in a vulnerable health group, including those who are pregnant, they can attend their education or childcare setting as the number of social interactions in the education or childcare environment will be reduced, due to there being fewer children attending, and social distancing and good hand hygiene being practiced.

If a child in one of the categories outlined above lives in a household with someone who is in the most vulnerable health groups, as set out in the guidance on shielding (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>), they should only attend an education or childcare setting if stringent social distancing can be adhered to and the child is able to understand and follow those instructions, which may not be the possible for very young children and older children without the capacity to adhere to the instructions on social distancing. Settings should allow staff who live with someone in the most vulnerable health groups, to work from home where possible.

## How to implement social distancing

To help ensure that the risk of virus spread for both staff and children is as low as possible, education and childcare settings that remain open should:

- tell children, parents, carers or any visitors, such as suppliers, not to visit the education or childcare setting if they are displaying any symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19)
- consider how children arrive at the education or childcare setting and reduce any unnecessary travel on coaches, buses or public transport
- ensure class sizes reflect the numbers of teaching staff available and are kept as small as possible
- stagger lunch times, break times and the movement of pupils around the school to reduce large groups of children gathering
- discourage parents from gathering at school gates

- try to follow the social distancing guidelines (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>)

Social distancing within education and childcare settings with very young children will be harder to maintain. Staff should implement the above measures as far as they are able, whilst ensuring children are kept safe and well cared for within their settings.

We are asking you to:

- think about how the above can be implemented in your education or childcare setting
- make sure anyone who is feeling ill stays at home (for residential special schools and colleges, this means self-isolating as a school or college 'household' if a resident is ill). See the guidance on isolation for residential educational settings (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-isolation-for-residential-educational-settings/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-isolation-for-residential-educational-settings>)
- ensure all staff and children wash their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds frequently, and are encouraged not to touch their face, while using a tissue or elbow to cough or sneeze and using bins for tissue waste. If children or young people have trouble washing their hands, ensure help is available
- inform parents and communities about the measures that you are taking and get their help to implement them
- increase cleaning of surfaces in classrooms, including desks and handles, and within toilet blocks and changing rooms, adhering to guidance on cleaning of non-healthcare settings (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>)
- for children and young people with an EHC plan, work with the local authority as well as with parents to decide how best to continue supporting these children and young people to stay healthy

The DfE will work with schools, childcare settings and local authorities to ensure that adequate supplies of personal and domestic cleaning products are available to schools. We will issue further detailed guidance for settings regarding the supply of Personal Protective Equipment to settings that require it.

We know that education and childcare settings may face additional costs as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19). We will put in place a new process that allows us to reimburse schools for exceptional costs that they face as a result.

## What parents can do

- Talk to their children about coronavirus (COVID-19), social distancing and hand washing.
- Follow guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>).
- Do not gather at entrances or in playgrounds, and model social distancing so that their children learn good practice.