

FAQS IN RELATION TO COVID-19 RESPONSE

PARENTS

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1. Supervised Learning Environments

Q: Why are schools in NI expected to provide supervised learning for children of key/critical workers and vulnerable children when schools across Europe have completely closed?

A: The most recent scientific advice on how to further limit spread of the Covid-19 virus is that children who can stay safely at home, should, to limit the chance of the virus spreading. This is different from other counties and jurisdictions but is based on sound scientific advice, so that we can both maintain key/critical services and reduce the spread of the virus.

The issue of vulnerable children has changed since we started dealing with Covid-19. The numbers of vulnerable children attending is low and this could mean that some may be potentially more at risk from non-attendance.

If attendance is deemed in the child's best interest then they should have access to school settings, either in their normal setting or a suitable alternative.

Q: Which schools and educational settings are closed?

A: All schools and educational settings are closed to pupils for normal lessons. This includes all pre-school education settings participating in the Pre-School Education Programme, Primary and Secondary schools and further education settings.

Q: Are special schools to open?

A: Yes –

Separate guidance has been issued in relation to special schools and can be found at <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/guidance-vulnerable-children-and-young-people-10-april-2020>

Q: What is ‘supervised learning’?

A: Supervised learning is about providing a facility in schools and pre-schools for vulnerable children and those of key/critical workers to allow parents to continue with their vital jobs. By providing the facility for supervised learning, school and pre-school education staff will play a vital role in ensuring key/critical services, including the health service, can continue to operate. Children attending school or pre-school settings will not experience a continuation of their usual classroom based teacher led education routine, although they will be able to access appropriate learning opportunities they would otherwise have accessed at home.

Q: How will schools and pre-school settings resource the supervised learning of children during this time?

A: Teaching and non-teaching staff who are not ill, self-isolating or at risk (as defined by PHA guidance) should be available to support the supervised learning of vulnerable children and those of key/critical workers over the period of the Covid-19 pandemic. Depending on the number of staff available, consideration may be given to developing a rota for staff in each educational setting, based on staff working a reduced number of hours per day/days per week or alternate weeks without any loss in pay.

Q: Is it mandatory for all schools to remain open?

We are asking schools to remain open for the children of key workers and vulnerable children where they can. However, some may be unable to open, for example, if they are experiencing staff shortages.

Q: What hours is the setting expected to open?

A: Schools and pre-schools should open for their normal hours at present and ideally from 8.00am to 6.00pm to best facilitate key/critical workers. Further guidance will issue on part-time and full-time pre-school provision.

Q: What if too many parents wish to send their children into school?

A: Parents of vulnerable children and parents who are key/critical workers should only avail of this service if they have no other option. This group may choose to avail of the facility, but they do not have to and the Department's strong advice is that they do not send their children to school if they have alternative childcare options.

Q: Can schools and pre-schools group together to provide 'clusters where one setting caters for pupils from a number of settings'?

A: This may be a suitable solution for some settings when staffing and child numbers become known. While informal clusters exist, those wishing to register should do so with the Department – more information can be found at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/guidance-schools-cluster-arrangements>

Q: What age groups will schools and educational settings provide emergency care for?

A: The changes cover children from pre-school through to pupils in Year 10 and vulnerable children regardless of age. Emergency care in schools should only be accessed when there is no other alternative care available for a vulnerable child or a child of a key/critical worker. Children should only attend when necessary – they are not required to attend or to attend every day. The parent / carer will make this decision.

The Department of Health has confirmed that it is intending to keep registered day-care and childminding going, primarily to meet the childcare needs of key workers with younger children and vulnerable children.

2. Key / Critical Workers

Q: Who are 'key/critical workers'?

A: The list is not prescriptive. However, to give some guidance the following outlines the broad categories of what would be defined as a key/critical worker:

- Health and Social Care. This includes doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, social workers, home carers and staff required to maintain our health and social care sector;
- Education and childcare. This includes pre-school and teaching staff, social workers and those specialist education professionals who will remain active during the Covid-19 response;
- Public safety and national security. This includes civilians and officers in the police (including key contractors), Fire and Rescue Service, prison service and other national security roles;
- Transport. This will include those keeping air, water, road and rail transport modes operating during the Covid-19 response;
- Utilities, and Communication. This includes staff needed for oil, gas, electricity and water (including sewage) and primary industry supplies to continue during the Covid-19 response, as well as key staff in telecommunications, post and delivery, banking and waste disposal;
- Financial Services - This includes staff needed for essential financial services provision (including but not limited to workers in banks, building societies and financial market infrastructure)
- Food and other necessary goods. This includes those involved in food production, processing, distribution and sale, as well as those essential to the provision of other key goods (e.g. hygiene, medical, etc.);
- Other workers essential to delivering key public services such as the National Crime Agency;
- Key national and local government including those administrative occupations essential to the effective delivery of the Covid-19 response.

Q: Will the 'key/critical workers' list be changed in future?

A: The definition of 'key/critical worker' will be flexible and dependent on the circumstance and requirements over the course of this critical period. There will be flexibility shown on the definition of key/critical workers to ensure all those who need support receive it. You will be updated of any change to the definition.

Q: Do both parents of a child need to be key/critical workers to be able to attend school?

A: No. The purpose of opening schools is to ensure that key/critical workers can still attend their place of work and provide vital services.

Q: Are parents required to provide proof of their keyworker status?

A: At this stage there is no requirement for documentary proof of occupation as we expect only genuine key/critical workers to avail of this service. This will be kept under review in the event that numbers become large and social distancing is deemed to be at risk. Decisions should be based on trust.

3. Vulnerable Children and Young People

4. Arrangements for Special Schools

5. Arrangements for Pre-school / Childcare

Q: What if my setting or class normally provides part-time pre-school provision?

A: Children should attend as usual.

Q: Does this cover nursery schools and nursery units in primary schools?

A: Yes

Q: Does this cover non-statutory pre-schools settings?

A: Yes. Non-statutory pre-school education providers will continue to be funded by the Education Authority and will not lose funding as a result of the closure arrangements. Non-statutory pre-school education providers should continue to submit monthly claims to the Education Authority in the usual way. Pre-school education provision in non-statutory community and voluntary settings is provided on a part-time basis, for a minimum of 2.5 hours per day, five days per week.

Q: Can children attend a pre-school setting for part of the day, as well as attending another childcare setting?

A: Parents of vulnerable children and parents who are key workers should only avail of this service if they have no other option. The Department's strong advice is that parents do not send their children to school if they have alternative childcare options. If childcare provision is available in another setting, children should not attend a pre-school or school.

6. External Providers

Q: What is the position with childcare provision outside of school?

A: The Department of Health has issued guidance to the child care sector and indicated further guidance will be prepared to provide clarity for the sector.

https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/HM%20Letter%20to%20Childcare%20Sector_0.pdf

The Ministers for Health and Education issued a joint announcement on support for the childcare sector on 9 April. All the relevant information in relation to Covid-19 and childcare, including the joint Ministerial Statement, is available at the link below. This includes advice for parents, childcare providers who remain open for the children of key workers, and those which have closed, and information on the Approved Home Childcare Scheme. It also provides information on the financial assistance available to the sector and a FAQs section.

<https://www.familysupportni.gov.uk/Support/91/covid19-childcare-options-and-associated-guidance>

Q: What arrangements are in place for families who cannot access provision in education settings for vulnerable children and those of key/critical workers?

A: The Department of Health has confirmed that it is intending to keep registered day-care and childminding going primarily to meet the childcare needs of key workers with younger children and vulnerable children. While registered day-care settings remain open, the number of children attending each setting must comply with the recent guidance issued by the Department of Health.

<https://www.familysupportni.gov.uk/Support/91/covid19-latest-advice-for-childcare-providers>

If you are a key worker and are struggling to access childcare, please: Check the Family Support NI website:

<https://www.familysupportni.gov.uk/Support/91/covid19-childcare-options-and-associated-guidance>

for information on available spaces; and If you cannot find a suitable option please call Parentline on 0808 8020 400.

7. Health and Wellbeing Including School Counselling

Q: How will First Aid be covered if no First Aiders volunteer?

A: All schools are advised to have at least one trained first-aider on the premises at all times during school hours. Further guidance can be found at:

<https://www.eani.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-10/First-aid.docx>

Q: Can staff administer medicine to children or take temperatures?

A: Existing guidance to schools on supporting pupils with medication needs continues to apply. The guidance can be accessed at:

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/support-pupils-medication-needs>

Schools should exercise judgement when accepting pupils from other schools and be fully informed by parents of pre-existing conditions and medication needs to determine if a safe environment can be provided.

Q: Will a nurse or a medical professional be available/contactable?

A: Not all schools will have a nurse or medical professional. Schools should seek medical advice from the PHA if necessary.

Q: How will the medical needs and allergies of children be known if schools are providing meals for children from other schools?

A: Schools should exercise judgement when accepting pupils from other schools and be fully informed by parents of pre-existing conditions, medication needs and

allergies and carry out a risk assessment to determine if they can provide a safe environment for those children.

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/support-pupils-medication-needs>

Counselling Provision

Q: Will counselling continue to be available through the Independent Counselling Service for Schools (ICSS) for post-primary pupils?

A: Yes, will be provided to existing and new young people via telephone or secure online video calling. Counsellors will be made available on the same day each week as they would normally have been in the young person's school. Referrals will be made through the school's Key Contact as normal who will then liaise with the school counsellor as appropriate. The Key Contact will provide the counsellor with the young person's contact details to facilitate the session(s). The Education Authority, schools ICSS providers will communicate the interim arrangements to pupils and their parents.

8. Services – Transport and Free School Meals

Q: Will there be school transport?

A: Home to school transport is not operating in its usual capacity but the EA will review requests for transport assistance for vulnerable children on a case by case basis.

To request transport assistance for vulnerable children send an email entitled '**Request for Transport Assistance**' to HomeToSchool.Transport@eani.org.uk with the following information:

- i. **Pupil details** - name, DOB, address
- ii. **Details of the transport required** - days/dates, times, pickup & drop of points, any special transport requirements e.g. escort required, wheelchair, behavioural support, assistance to board/disembark etc.
- iii. **Details of the person making the referral** - name, phone number & email
- iv. **Details for the pupil's parent/carer** - name, email, telephone number

Please note that we cannot guarantee transport for children who cannot travel independently (e.g. pupils who require an escort, assistance to board/disembark, secure seatbelts etc.). If we receive a request of this nature we will contact the pupil's school/educational setting to discuss in more detail before approving.

We aim to put in place approved requests within a maximum of 3 working days or sooner wherever possible.

Q. Will free school meals be available?

A: Separate Guidance on Free School Meals is available at:

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/free-school-meals-payment-scheme>

9. Social Distancing Arrangements

Q: Is there guidance on what constitutes 'social distancing' in schools?

A: Northern Ireland's Public Health Agency are using 2m as a simple message the public can understand for social distancing. It is a 'rule of thumb' and therefore principals are expected to take account of general NI guidance on social distancing in education settings which can found here and will be continuously updated in line with PHA guidance:- <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/implementing-social-distancing-education-settings-ni-coronavirus-covid-19>

To help ensure the risk of virus spread for both staff and children is as low as possible, settings should:-

- Tell children, parents and others not to visit the education setting if they are displaying any symptoms of COVID-19;
- Consider how children arrive and reduce any unnecessary travel on buses or public transport;
- Ensure class sizes reflect the number of teaching staff available and are kept as low as possible; and
- Discourage parents from gathering at the school gates.

Q: How many children should be permitted in one room?

A: Room sizes in schools vary considerably and principals should exercise their judgement focusing on the safety of both staff and children and taking into account

PHA advice on social distancing, recognising that no class arrangement, including composite classes, should exceed 33 pupils or 20 in practical classes where practical lessons take place. In extremis, a teacher may volunteer to cover over these numbers for a short period of time. There will be no relaxation of class sizes for special schools and units.

Q: Do schools and childcare settings need Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)?

The scientific advice indicates that educational staff do not require personal protective equipment – this is needed by medical and care professionals providing specific close contact care or procedures that create airborne risk– such as suctioning and physiotherapy for anyone who has coronavirus (Covid-19) and is displaying symptoms. If you are not providing this care to someone with the virus and displaying symptoms, PPE is not needed

The virus that causes Covid-19 is mainly transmitted through droplets generated when an infected person coughs, sneezes or speaks. These droplets are too heavy to hang in the air. They quickly fall on floors or surfaces. The advice for schools, colleges and childcare settings is to follow steps on [social distancing, handwashing and other hygiene measures](#) and [cleaning](#) of surfaces.

Some children and young people with special educational needs may be unable to follow social distancing guidelines or require personal care support. In these circumstances, staff need to increase their level of self-protection, such as minimising close contact (where appropriate), cleaning frequently touched surfaces and carrying out more frequent handwashing. We will shortly publish additional advice for settings managing children and young people with complex needs.

10. Young People Displaying Symptoms of Covid-19

Q: What should I do if a child displays symptoms of Covid-19 whilst in school or pre-school education setting?

A: If anyone becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature in an educational setting they should be sent home and advised to follow the home isolation advice on the PHA website

If a child is awaiting collection, they should be moved, if possible, to a room where they can be isolated behind a closed door. Ideally, a window should be opened for ventilation. If it is not possible to isolate them, move them to an area which is at least two metres away from other people.

If they need to go to the bathroom while waiting to be collected, they should use a separate bathroom if possible. The bathroom should be cleaned and disinfected using standard cleaning products before being used by anyone else.

If a member of staff has helped someone who was taken unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, they do not need to go home unless they develop symptoms themselves. They should wash their hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds after any contact with someone who is unwell.

Q: What does the school do if a parent contacts them to advise that a child who recently attended the school has been diagnosed with Covid-19?

A: Maintain hygiene within the school environment and ensure all staff and children wash their hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds. General interventions may include increased cleaning activity to reduce risk of retention of virus on hard surfaces, and keeping property properly ventilated by opening windows whenever safe and appropriate. Advice on cleaning is available at: - [guidance on cleaning of non-healthcare settings](#)

Q: What does the school do if a parent contacts them to advise that the family has moved to self-isolate because a close contact of a child who has been in attendance at the school has been diagnosed with Covid-19?

A: Maintain hygiene within the school environment and ensure all staff and children wash their hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds. General interventions may include increased cleaning activity to reduce risk of retention of virus on hard surfaces, and keeping property properly ventilated by opening windows whenever safe and appropriate.