**Actions for Early Years update (provided by the Early Years Alliance 22/2/21)**

The Department for Education has updated the [Actions for early years and childcare providers during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak](https://earlyyearsalliance.cmail20.com/t/d-l-qxkic-yhmntls-y/) guidance.

The main changes are outlined below:

* **Updating guidance on face coverings:** The previous version of the guidance stated: "Settings have the discretion to recommend the use of face coverings for adults on site, for both staff and visitors".

This has now been strengthened to: "We recommend that face coverings should be worn by staff and adult visitors in situations where social distancing between adults is not possible."
* The guidance now includes references to the **responsibility of settings to support staff mental health**
* New guidance on **clinically extremely vulnerable staff**, which states: "Current DHSC guidance, informed by PHE, advises that CEV individuals should continue to shield even after they have been vaccinated. This may change as we get further data on the effects of vaccination."
* New guidance on **pregnant staff,**which states:"If you are notified that an employee is pregnant, breastfeeding, or has given birth within the last 6 months, you should check the workplace risk assessment to see if any new risks have arisen. An assessment may help identify any additional action that needs to be taken to mitigate risks. Any risks identified at that point, or later during the pregnancy, in the first 6 months after birth, or while the employee is still breastfeeding, must be included and managed as part of the general workplace risk assessment. You must take appropriate sensible action to reduce, remove or control the risks."
* New guidance on **external groups**, which states: "You can work with external coaches, clubs and organisations for curricular and extra-curricular activities. You must be satisfied that it is safe to do."
* New guidance on **volunteers**, which states that "Mixing of volunteers across groups should be kept to a minimum, and they adhere to the system of controls in place".
* New guidance on **students**, which states: "Students completing Level 2, Level 3 qualifications, including the T Level in Education and Childcare, and early years initial teacher training (EYITT) trainees, are included in the definition of critical workers. This means that students and trainees can continue to go into their early years setting on placement.”

The guidance also now highlights that the fact that "private, voluntary or independent settings which offer placements may be able to apply for a financial incentive worth £1,000 to help with the cost of the placement until 31 July 2021 (this does not include T level placements).”
* New guidance on **risk assessments,** including new information on fire safety.
* Additional guidance on **organised music and singing activities**, which states that if staff need to move between groups of children, they should try and keep their distance from other staff as much as they can, ideally 2 metres from other adults.

A new section on the **Absence of vulnerable children**has been added.