

## **Early years step 4 Q&A**

### ***Contact tracing***

From Monday 19 July early years settings will no longer carry out routine contact tracing. From this point onwards, close contacts will be identified and contacted by NHS Test and Trace. We have produced guidance, some frequently asked questions and answers and a template letter for settings to send to parents on changes to contact tracing of close contacts. These can all be found on the document sharing platforms for [primary and early years](#).

### ***Social distancing / self-isolation / testing***

#### **Can settings stop minimising contact between groups?**

Yes, at Step 4 it will no longer be necessary to keep groups of children apart as much as possible.

#### **Can settings retain small, consistent groups and other control measures if they want to?**

Yes, though any decision to continue keeping groups apart should take account of the detrimental impact this can have on the delivery of education and childcare.

From Step 4, a more proportionate set of control measures will apply in early years settings. The control measures are set out in [Actions for early years and childcare providers during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

You should make sure your outbreak management plans cover the possibility that in some local areas it may become necessary to reintroduce keeping groups apart for a temporary period.

#### **Can a child attend more than one setting?**

Yes, from Step 4 the number of settings a child attends does not need to be minimised.

#### **Will early years staff need to continue testing?**

Yes - asymptomatic testing remains important in reducing the risk of transmission of infection within settings. That is why, whilst some measures are relaxed, others will remain and if necessary, in response to the latest epidemiological data, we all need to be prepared to step measures up or down in future depending on local circumstances.

Over the summer, staff should continue to test regularly if they are attending settings that remain open. Regular testing will then pause in settings over the summer if they are closed. However, testing will still be widely available over

the summer and kits can be collected either from your local pharmacy or ordered online.

Early years staff should undertake twice weekly home tests whenever they are on site until the end of September, when this will also be reviewed.

### **I'm self-isolating as a close contact of someone who has COVID-19. Can I stop self-isolating on 19 July?**

No. Current self-isolation policy remains in effect until 16th August. Therefore, if identified as a close contact of a person with covid-19, you are required to self-isolate for 10 days from the last contact you had with the person who tested positive and should take a PCR test.

### **What will count as an outbreak at a setting, and what will providers be advised to do in instances of an outbreak?**

You should have outbreak management plans outlining how you would operate if there were an outbreak in your setting or local area. Given the detrimental impact that restrictions on education can have on children, any measures in settings should only ever be considered as a last resort, kept to the minimum number of settings or groups possible, and for the shortest amount of time possible.

Central government may offer local areas of particular concern an enhanced response package to help limit increases in transmission.

If you have several confirmed cases within 14 days, you may have an outbreak.

You should call the dedicated advice service who will escalate the issue to your local health protection team where necessary and advise if any additional action is required, such as implementing elements of your outbreak management plan. You can reach them by calling the [DfE helpline on 0800 046 8687](tel:08000468687) and selecting [option 1](#) for advice on the action to take in response to a positive case.

The [contingency framework](#) describes the principles of managing local outbreaks of COVID-19 in education and childcare settings. Local authorities, directors of public health (DsPH) and PHE health protection teams (HPTs) can recommend measures described in the contingency framework in individual education and childcare settings – or a small cluster of settings – as part of their outbreak management responsibilities.

## **Will the government decide to reimpose measures at a later date?**

The government has made it a national priority that education and childcare settings should continue to operate as normally as possible during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Measures affecting education and childcare may be necessary in some circumstances, for example:

- to help manage a COVID-19 outbreak within a setting
- if there is extremely high prevalence of COVID-19 in the community and other measures have failed to reduce transmission
- as part of a package of measures responding to a Variant of Concern (VoC)

All education and childcare settings should have outbreak management plans (sometimes called contingency plans) outlining how they would operate if any of the measures described in this document were recommended for their setting or area. This includes how they would ensure every child, pupil or student receives the quantity and quality of education and care to which they are normally entitled.

Further information can be found in [Contingency framework: education and childcare settings - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/contingency-framework-education-and-childcare-settings)

## **Will parents be allowed to go into nurseries at drop off and pick up?**

There won't be any national restrictions that say parents and carers can't enter early years settings at drop off and pick up – although we know many settings prefer parents and carers to pick children up without coming inside regardless of covid.

## **What are the rules on visits to settings?**

Visits to the setting can take place as normal.

## **Can early years providers take children on educational visits?**

Yes. Early Years settings can take groups of children on visits to indoor and outdoor places.

Settings must continue as is routine to complete a full and thorough risk assessment for educational visits and other trips taken outside of the setting. As part of this risk assessment, settings should take note of the [latest guidance](#), including what restrictions are in force on the day of the visit and COVID-19 control measures on transport and at the destination.

## **Will pregnant staff still be allowed to work from home from 28 weeks?**

Pregnant women are considered clinically vulnerable therefore should follow the [guidance for pregnant employees](#). In some cases pregnant women may also have other health conditions that mean they are considered clinically extremely vulnerable, where the [guidance on shielding and protecting clinically extremely vulnerable persons](#) will apply.

Pregnant staff and their employers should follow the advice in the [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): advice for pregnant employees](#). Further advice for pregnant staff is available at [guidance and advice on coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and pregnancy from the Royal College of Gynaecologists](#)

## ***Face Coverings***

### **Will face coverings need to continue to be worn in communal areas?**

From Step 4, face coverings will no longer be recommended for staff and visitors in corridors and communal areas.

### **Can we still wear face coverings if we want to?**

Adults are free to wear a face covering in communal areas where social distancing is difficult to maintain if they wish to.

Settings should make sure their outbreak management plans cover the possibility that it is advised that face coverings should temporarily be worn more widely in settings in their area.

## ***Data Collections***

### **Will you still be collecting data on early years and childcare provision?**

The Department for Education has been collecting LA-level data on early years childcare provision since April 2020 on a weekly, and more recently fortnightly, basis. This data has been crucial to the Department during the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure it holds timely data on the use of childcare, and we are incredibly grateful to LAs and providers for taking the time to send it to us during this time. Having reviewed the need for this collection for internal decision-making in the context of other data sources around the early years, as well as acting on feedback from the sector, we are considering ending this data collection at the end of the summer term. This means that unless there are significant changes to guidance around attendance at early years settings in relation to Covid-19, we are considering not resuming the collection in the autumn term. This will reduce some of the time and resource pressures on

LAs and providers. If you have any feedback on this proposal, then please contact [earlyyears.entitlements@education.gov.uk](mailto:earlyyears.entitlements@education.gov.uk) with your views.

### **Will settings still be expected to report cases to Ofsted?**

Yes. Settings must notify Ofsted, or the childminder agency with which they are registered, of any confirmed cases in the setting (either child or staff member).

Settings should also tell Ofsted if you have to close the setting as a result. Cases must be reported as soon as possible, and in any case within 14 days.

### ***Other***

### **Will settings need to continue to undertake risk assessments?**

Settings must comply with health and safety law and put in place proportionate control measures. Settings must regularly review and update risk assessments - treating them as 'living documents' - as the circumstances in your setting and the public health advice changes. This includes having active arrangements in place to monitor that the controls are effective and working as planned.

### **What are the restrictions on messy play?**

There are no longer any restrictions on the use of malleable materials (often referred to as messy play) but settings should put in place and maintain an appropriate cleaning schedule.

### **What are the restrictions for parent and child groups?**

From Step 4, parent and child groups can operate as normal / without restrictions on attendance.

You should follow the control measures in [Actions for early years and childcare providers during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) which will help towards mitigating the risks of COVID-19 for all children and adults.

### **What are the restrictions on singing in parent and child groups?**

When we move to Step 4, there will be no limits on the number of people who can sing indoors or outdoors. Some activities, however, can increase the risk of catching or passing on COVID-19. This happens where people are doing activities which generate more droplets as they breathe heavily, such as singing, dancing, exercising or raising their voices. The risk is greatest where these factors overlap, for example in crowded indoor spaces where people are raising their voices. In situations where there is a higher risk of catching or passing on COVID-19, you should be particularly careful to follow the

guidance on [keeping yourself and others safe](#).

### **Why has the guidance been shortened so much?**

From Step 4, most COVID-19 restrictions in wider society and in education and childcare settings are being eased. We have therefore retained and updated only the COVID-19 specific guidance that continues to apply to early years settings.

We will continue to update the guidance in line with public health advice.

### **My child has one of the covid-19 symptoms but the test is negative? When can they return to the setting?**

You do not usually need to self-isolate if you get a negative PCR test result. The attached guidance provides information on when you do need to keep self-isolating despite a negative PCR test result: [Negative test result for coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)

Rapid lateral flow tests are only for people who do not have symptoms. Early years children are not included in the rapid testing programme. PHE has advised there are limited public health benefits attached to testing early years children with rapid lateral flow tests.

If anyone (children or staff) in your setting develops symptoms of COVID-19, however mild, you should send them home to self-isolate and book a PCR test. They should follow public health advice.

If the child or staff member tested positive for COVID-19, they can return to their normal routine and stop self-isolating if they meet the following conditions:

- they have finished their isolation period and their [symptoms](#) have gone
- they continue to have only a residual cough or anosmia (loss of taste and smell). This is because a cough or anosmia can last for several weeks once the infection has gone

The child or staff member should not return if they still have a high temperature after 10 days or are otherwise unwell, they are advised to stay at home and seek medical advice.

In most cases, parents and carers will agree that a child with symptoms should not attend the setting, given the potential risk to others. If a parent or carer insists on a child attending your setting, you can take the decision to refuse the child if, in your reasonable judgement, it is necessary to protect other children and staff from possible infection with COVID-19. Your decision would need to be carefully considered in light of all the circumstances and current public health advice.

### **What about younger staff who have only had one or no vaccinations?**

From 16 August 2021, those who are fully vaccinated or under 18 will no longer need to self isolate. 18 year olds will be treated in the same way as children until 4 months after their 18th birthday to allow them the opportunity to get fully vaccinated. At that point, they will be subject to the same rules as adults and so if they choose not to get vaccinated, they will need to self-isolate if identified as a close contact.

### **Can I furlough staff who are sick or self-isolating?**

Short term illness or self-isolation should not be a consideration in deciding whether to furlough an employee. If, however, employers want to furlough employees for business reasons and they are currently off sick, they are eligible to do so, as with other employees. In these cases, the employee should no longer receive sick pay and would be classified as a furloughed employee. HM Revenue and Customs has published guidance for you to [check which employees you can put on furlough to use the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme](#).