

# **Opening schools and educational settings to more pupils from 1 June: guidance for parents and carers**

These are very challenging times for our country. Measures put in place to reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) have been hard for us all, but have kept people safe and saved lives. Keeping people safe continues to be the government's priority.

Since 23 March, in line with the scientific advice, nurseries, schools and colleges have remained open to a priority group of children and young people, children of critical workers and vulnerable children. We have been clear that we would review this arrangement in line with scientific advice. We are now past the peak of the virus and the Prime Minister has set out a recovery strategy, while also ensuring that safety remains our absolute priority. This means it is time to begin the phased return of children and young people to nurseries, schools and colleges in a way that is measured, reduces risks and is guided by science.

Why can more children now attend school and childcare settings?

We want to get all children back into education as soon as the scientific advice allows because it is the best place for them to learn, and because we know it is good for children's mental wellbeing to have social interactions with other children, carers and teachers.

As a result of the huge efforts everyone has made to adhere to strict social distancing measures, the transmission rate of coronavirus has decreased. We anticipate with further progress that we may be able, from the week commencing 1 June, to welcome back more children to early years, school and further education settings. We will only do this provided that the 5 key tests set by government justify the changes at the time, including that the rate of infection is decreasing and the enabling programmes set out in the recovery strategy are operating effectively. As a result, we are asking schools, colleges and childcare providers to plan on this basis, ahead of confirmation that these tests are met.

What does the latest scientific advice say?

We have been guided by scientific advice at every stage. The latest scientific advice to government is that:

there is high scientific confidence that children of all ages have less severe symptoms than adults if they contract coronavirus and there is moderately high scientific confidence that younger children are less likely to become unwell if infected with coronavirus

limiting the numbers of children going back to school and college initially then gradually increasing numbers, guided by scientific advice, reduces risk of increasing the rate of transmission

schools and other settings can make changes to how they are organised and put measures in place to reduce risks

We have provided advice to schools and other settings on the steps they should consider taking, this includes:

limiting the amount of contact between different groups of children (such as smaller class sizes with children and staff spread out more)

additional protective measures, such as increased cleaning and encouraging good hand and respiratory hygiene

Can my child return to school?

From the week commencing 1 June, we are asking:

nurseries and other early year providers, including childminders, to begin welcoming back all children

primary schools to welcome back children in nursery (where they have them), reception, year 1 and year 6

secondary schools, sixth form, and further education colleges to begin some face to face support with year 10 and 12 pupils, although we do not expect these pupils to return on a full-time basis at this stage

all schools and childcare providers to continue to offer places to the priority groups – vulnerable children and children of critical workers – they have been supporting since the end of March

special schools, special post-16 institutions and hospital schools to work towards a phased return of more children and young people without a focus on specific year groups and informed by risk assessments

alternative provision to welcome back children in reception, year 1 and year 6 and begin some face to face support with year 10 and 11 pupils (as they have no year 12)

This approach aims to limit numbers within schools and further education settings while ensuring that the children and young people who can benefit from attending most are able to do so.

What if my child is eligible but has siblings who are not?

We are asking that only these year groups return to childcare providers, schools and colleges from 1 June. This does not include siblings in different year groups unless those siblings are in a priority group, for example, the children of critical workers.

We hope that all primary school children can come back to school before the summer holidays, for a month if feasible, although this will be kept under review. Reducing the risks for children and staff is our utmost priority.

How will risks to children, teachers and families be managed?

We have provided guidance and support to schools, colleges and childcare settings on implementing protective measures in education and childcare settings to help them to reduce the risk of transmission as more children and young people return.

To prevent the spread of coronavirus, schools and other settings will use a range of protective measures to create safer environments in which the risk of spreading the virus is substantially reduced. Whilst such changes are likely to look different in each setting, as they will depend upon individual circumstances, they are all designed to minimise risks to children, staff and their families.

Schools and other settings should communicate their plans to parents once they have had a chance to work through them in detail. Approaches we are asking schools and other settings to take include:

carrying out a risk assessment before opening to more children and young people - the assessment should directly address risks associated with coronavirus so that sensible measures can be put in place to minimise those risks for children, young people and staff

making sure that children and young people do not attend if they or a member of their household has symptoms of coronavirus

promoting regular hand washing for 20 seconds with running water and soap or use of sanitiser and ensuring good respiratory hygiene by promoting the catch it, bin it, kill it approach

cleaning more frequently to get rid of the virus on frequently touched surfaces, such as door handles, handrails, tabletops, play equipment and toys

minimising contact through smaller classes or group sizes and altering the environment as much as possible, such as changing the layout of classrooms

reducing mixing between groups through timetable changes, such as staggered break times or by introducing staggered drop-off and collection times

If my child is eligible, is it compulsory for them to attend school?

We strongly encourage children and young people in the eligible year groups and priority groups (such as children of critical workers) to attend, as requested by their school or college, unless they are self-isolating or there are other reasons for absence (such as shielding due to health conditions).

You should notify your child's school or college as normal if your child is unable to attend so that staff are aware and can discuss with you.

Parents will not be fined for non-attendance at this time.

Do all vulnerable children and young people who are not currently attending have to go back to childcare settings, school or college now?

Educational settings should continue to offer places to priority groups. In particular, as per the existing guidance on supporting vulnerable children and young people during the coronavirus outbreak, vulnerable children of all year groups continue to be expected and encouraged to attend educational provision where it is appropriate for them to do so.

For children who have a social worker, attendance is expected unless their social worker decides that they are at less risk at home or in their placement.

For children who have an education health and care (EHC) plan, attendance is expected where it is determined, following a risk assessment, that their needs can be as safely or more safely met in the educational environment.

For children who are deemed otherwise vulnerable, at the school, college or local authority discretion, attendance is expected where this is appropriate.

Should I keep my child at home if they have an underlying health condition or live with someone in a clinically vulnerable group?

Children and young people who are considered extremely clinically vulnerable and shielding should continue to shield and should not be expected to attend.

Clinically vulnerable (but not clinically extremely vulnerable) people are those considered to be at a higher risk of severe illness from coronavirus. A minority of children will fall into this category, and parents should follow medical advice if their child is in this category.

Children and young people who live in a household with someone who is extremely clinically vulnerable and shielding should only attend if stringent social distancing can be adhered to and the child or young person is able to understand and follow those instructions.

Children and young people who live with someone who is clinically vulnerable (but not extremely clinically vulnerable) as defined in the social distancing guidance and including those who are pregnant, can attend.

Can children be tested for the virus?

Once settings open to more children and young people, staff and pupils in all settings will be eligible for testing if they become ill with coronavirus symptoms, as will members of their household. This will enable children and young people to get back to childcare or education, and their parents or carers to get back to work, if the test proves to be negative.

A positive test will ensure rapid action to protect their classmates and staff in their setting.

What happens if there is a confirmed case of coronavirus in my child's school, college or childcare setting?

When a child, young person or staff member develops symptoms compatible with coronavirus, they should be sent home and advised to self-isolate for 7 days. Their fellow household members should self-isolate for 14 days. All staff and students who are attending an education or childcare setting will have access to a test if they display symptoms of coronavirus.

Where the child, young person or staff member tests positive, the rest of their class/group within their childcare or education setting should be sent home and advised to self-isolate for 14 days. The other household members of that wider class/group do not need to self-isolate unless the child, young person or staff member they live with in that group subsequently develops symptoms.

As part of the national test and trace programme, if other cases are detected within the child or young person's cohort or in the wider education or childcare setting, Public Health England's local Health Protection Teams will conduct a rapid investigation and will advise schools and other settings on the most appropriate action to take. In some cases, a larger number of other children and young people may be asked to self-isolate at home as a precautionary measure - perhaps the whole class, site or year group.

Where settings are observing guidance on infection prevention and control, which will reduce risk of transmission, closure of the whole setting will not generally be necessary.

Will education be provided as normal to children and young people who are attending?

Education settings still have the flexibility to provide support and education to children and young people attending school in the way they see fit during this time.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) sets the standards that schools and childcare settings must meet for the learning, development and care of children from birth to 5 years old. Early years settings should use their best endeavours to deliver the learning and development requirements as far as possible in the current circumstances.

Schools and colleges continue to be best placed to make decisions about how to support and educate their pupils during this period. This will include:

consideration of pupils' mental health and wellbeing

assessment of where pupils are in their learning in order to make any necessary adjustments to their curriculum over the coming weeks

prioritisation of high needs groups and support for those in transition years

Schools and colleges should use their best endeavours to support pupils attending as well as those remaining at home, making use of the available remote education support.

For pupils in year 10 and 12, we are asking schools and colleges to supplement remote education with some face to face support for these year groups from 1 June. We do not expect these pupils to return to school or college on a full-time basis at this stage, and so we do not expect a full timetable to be offered as schools and colleges look to minimise the number of pupils in school or college each day. Schools and colleges should consider how to best use additional year 10 and 12 time to support those pupils who are starting their final year of study for GCSEs, A levels and other qualifications next academic year.

How should my child travel to and from their childcare, school or college?

Children, young people and parents are encouraged to walk or cycle where possible and avoid public transport at peak times. The government will shortly publish guidance on how to travel safely, which schools, parents and young people can refer to when planning their travel, particularly if public transport is required.

Home to school transport provided or organised by schools, trusts or local authorities varies widely. Schools, trusts and local authorities should work together and with relevant transport providers to put in place arrangements which fit the local circumstances, including the measures being put in place to reduce contact. Further guidance is available on implementing protective measures in education and childcare settings.

Will school meals be available for children and young people who are in school?

Schools should provide meal options for all children who are in school, and meals should be available free of charge where pupils meet the free school meal eligibility criteria. To ensure food is available for pupils who attend, educational settings are expected to reopen their kitchens if they have closed and ensure staff are able to work safely.

We are also continuing to ask schools and colleges to work with their food providers to offer meals or food parcels for benefits-related free school meal pupils not attending school. Now that schools are opening more widely, school catering teams will be better placed to do this. The provision of food vouchers for those eligible under the benefits criteria will also continue to be available where needed for those not attending.

Will childcare, schools and colleges keep their usual opening hours?

It is possible that some settings will make changes to their start and finish times or introduce processes for drop-off and collection times to keep children and families safe.

Start and finish times will be clearly communicated to parents and carers alongside any other new arrangements.