

Early Years January Q&A

The Prime Minister announced on 4 January 2021 that early years settings remain open for all children during the national lockdown. Details can be found here:

[National lockdown: Stay at Home - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/national-lockdown-stay-at-home)

Published early years national lockdown guidance can be found [here](#).

Early years provision should continue to remain open and should continue to allow all children to attend full time or their usual timetable hours. This includes early years registered nurseries and childminders, maintained nursery schools, as well as nursery classes in schools and other pre-reception provision on school sites. Only vulnerable children and children of critical workers should attend on-site reception classes. For school-aged children, childminders and wraparound care remain open for vulnerable children and critical worker children.

Q: Why is EY remaining open to all when primaries are being restricted? Is it safe for EY settings to remain open?

A: The reason schools have been restricted is not that they are unsafe but because additional measures are needed to contain the spread of the virus. The wider significant restrictions in place as part of the national lockdown to contain the spread of the virus in the community enable us to continue prioritising keeping nurseries and childminders open, supporting parents and delivering the crucial care and education needed for our youngest children.

Early years settings remain low risk environments for children and staff. Current evidence suggests that pre-school children (0<5 years) are less susceptible to infection and are unlikely to be playing a driving role in transmission. There is no evidence the new strain of the virus causes more serious illness in either children or adults and there is no evidence that the new variant of coronavirus (COVID-19) disproportionately affects young children.

PHE advice remains that the risk of transmission and infection is low if early years settings follow the system of controls, which reduce risks and create inherently safer environments.

Early years settings have been open to all children since 1 June 2020 and there is no evidence that the early years sector has contributed to a significant rise in virus cases within the community. Early modelling evidence from SAGE showed that early years provision had a smaller relative impact on transmission rate when modelled with both primary schools and secondary schools.

Early years childcare providers were one of the first sectors to have restrictions lifted last summer, in recognition of the key role they play in society. Childminders and nursery staff across the country have worked hard to keep settings open through the pandemic so that young children can be educated, and parents can work. The earliest years are the most crucial point of child development and attending early education lays the foundation for lifelong learning and supports children's social and emotional development. We continue to prioritise keeping early years settings open in full because of the clear benefits to children's education and wellbeing and to support working parents. Caring for the youngest age group is not something that can be done remotely.

Q: Should school-based nurseries remain open to all children? And what about Maintained Nursery Schools?

A: Early years provision should continue to remain open and should continue to allow all children to attend full time or their usual timetable hours. This includes early years registered nurseries and childminders, maintained nursery schools, as well as nursery classes in schools and other pre-reception provision on school sites. Only vulnerable children and children of critical workers should attend on-site reception classes. This is the default position for all areas irrespective of national lockdown restrictions.

Q: Can PVI early years providers still operate on school sites?

A: Yes, early years settings can remain open as normal and PVI providers should have access to their usual settings for this purpose.

Q: Can wraparound childcare continue?

A: Wraparound childcare for school aged children can continue to open for vulnerable children and children of critical workers. Vulnerable children can continue to access wraparound childcare as normal; and children of critical workers can continue to access these settings where it is reasonably necessary to enable their parents / carers to work, search for work, to undertake training or education, or to attend a medical appointment or address a medical need.

Q: Can childminders continue to operate?

A: Yes. Childminders can look after all early years children and those school-age children (from reception onwards) who are vulnerable or children of critical workers together.

Q: What is the position for Reception classes?

A: Reception year is included within the arrangements for primary schools and during national lockdown should only be open for vulnerable children and children of critical workers.

Q Can children continue to attend multiple settings?

A: Children can continue to attend multiple early years settings, although our guidance states that parents and carers should be encouraged to limit the number of settings their child attends, ideally ensuring their child only attends the same setting consistently.

For children of school age, only vulnerable children or children of critical workers should attend wraparound care.

Q: Can a child who is eligible for on-site education provision in school (eg the child of a critical worker) be cared for by a childminder instead of attending school?'

Schools are expected to allow and strongly encourage vulnerable children and young people to attend, and parents/carers of vulnerable children and young people are strongly encouraged to take up the place.

Children with at least one parent or carer who is a critical worker can go to school and childcare, if required. Parents and carers who are critical workers should keep their school-aged children at home if they can.

Q: Will EY now be prioritised for testing?

All essential workers continue to have access to priority testing via the online booking portal. This includes all education and childcare workers, including support and teaching staff, social workers and specialist education professionals.

We are working with Local Authorities to test approaches to mass testing in Early Years settings via community mass testing approaches.

Q: How should any outbreaks in early years settings be dealt with?

A: By following the system of controls, settings will effectively reduce risks in their setting and create an inherently safer environment. To contain any outbreak, in some cases local health protection teams may recommend that a whole-site or group self-isolate as a precautionary measure. Whole setting closure based on cases within a setting will not generally be necessary and should not be considered except on the advice of health protection teams.

Q: Why is PPE not required for EY staff and how they can remain safe now that transmission may be higher between younger children?

A: PHE have advised no change is needed to the EY system of controls including the use of PPE and face coverings.

0-5 year olds continue to have the lowest confirmed rates of coronavirus of all age groups, and there is no evidence that the new variant of coronavirus disproportionately affects young children.

Our guidance remains for early years settings that by following the system of controls settings reduce risks and create inherently safer environments.

Q: Will Early Years staff now be prioritised for the vaccinations?

A: Under the priority groups for the first phase of vaccine rollout, those over 50 years of age, and all those 16 years of age and over in a risk group, are eligible for vaccination within the first phase of the programme. This will include some staff in the early years sector.

Regarding the next phase of vaccine rollout, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) have asked that the Department of Health and Social Care consider occupational vaccination in collaboration with other Government departments. The Department for Education is inputting into this cross governmental exercise.

Q: What is the position on funding?

We are funding nurseries as usual and all children are able to attend their early years setting in all parts of England. Where nurseries do see a drop in income from either

parent-paid fees or income from DfE, they are able to use the furlough scheme. More detail on the furlough scheme is [here](#).

We do stay in regular contact with the early years sector, including on the subject of funding. We will be closely monitoring both parental take-up of places and the capacity and responses of providers, and will keep under constant review whether further action is needed.

Working parents on coronavirus support schemes will remain eligible for childcare support even if their income levels fall below the minimum requirement.

Information on the self-employment income support scheme can be found [here](#).

Q Are there any recent figures to show the infection rates among young people - how nursery aged children compare with primary and secondary aged?

A: Children under 5 continue to have the lowest rates of coronavirus of all age groups. Evidence shows that pre-school children are less susceptible to infection and are not playing a driving role in transmission.

PHE release a weekly [Flu and COVID 19 Surveillance Report](#), which includes breakdowns of lab-confirmed COVID-19 cases. The most recent figures show confirmed cases per 100,000 among under 5s are slightly lower than among primary school ages, and a lot lower than secondary school ages. Case rates over time for under 5s do not rise before other parts of the community, so there is no evidence that under 5s drive transmission.

Q: What is the advice on Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) children and staff?

A: The clinically extremely vulnerable are asked to resume shielding across England. The CEV should stay at home as much as possible, and leave only for exercise, health appointments or if it is essential. They should not attend the workplace or educational settings. Therefore CEV children should not attend educational settings and CEV staff should not attend their workplace.

Staff should talk to their employers about how they will be supported, including to work from home where possible.

Q: Can early years provision continue to run in locations such as places of worship, village halls, community centres?

Yes. Regulations enable registered early years provision to operate in community settings and places of worship.

Q: Support groups for parents and children

Support groups, such as for breastfeeding, postnatal, and baby and toddler groups, for the provision of support for parents and their children, that are necessary to deliver in person, can continue with up to 15 participants (children

under five are not counted in the number) where formally organised to provide mutual aid, therapy or any other form of support. This includes where parents and carers meet other parents and carers with or without their young children. This would not typically permit parent-and-child groups focused on social or development activities, such as singalong groups or art classes.

Q: How will the census collection work this year?

A: We issued guidance on the census collection before Christmas and will issue further information as soon as possible.