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Guidance

Critical workers and vulnerable children who can access schools or educational settings

Updated 31 December 2020

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This guidance has been updated to include information about the return to school and college in January, and includes the addition of those whose work is critical to EU Transition to the list of critical workers.

Schools and colleges welcomed back all children and young people from the start of the autumn term.

It is vital that children and young people remain in school and college for their:

- educational progress
- wellbeing
- wider development

Return in January

To support public health efforts during the return to school and college in January, secondary schools and colleges will prepare for a phased return to face-to-face provision at the start of term. Secondary schools and colleges will have access to additional coronavirus (COVID-19) testing for the start of January. This will help to keep as many pupils and students in school and college as possible beyond the start of the new term, and minimise the spread of the virus.

Nurseries, childminders and primary schools

You can continue to access childcare as normal from nurseries and childminders (though some school-based nurseries may restrict access in line with primary schools in areas with exceptional rates of incidence or transmission).

The majority of primary schools will open as planned from their advertised first day of term and allow all pupils to attend. A small number of primary schools in areas with exceptional rates of incidence or transmission of the virus have been asked to restrict access to children of critical workers and vulnerable children and young people at the start of this term. More information about the areas affected is available (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-contingency-framework-for-education-and-childcare-settings>).

Secondary schools and colleges

Secondary schools and colleges will prepare for a phased return to face-to-face provision ahead of a full return of all pupils to face-to-face education from 18 January.

In advance of 18 January, secondary schools and colleges will ensure:

- vulnerable children and young people and the children of critical workers, can attend for face-to-face teaching from the advertised first day of term
- remote education is prioritised for pupils in exam year groups (primarily years 11 and 13 or those preparing for upcoming assessments or exams) during the week commencing 4 January and full-time on-site provision for these groups from 11 January
- all other pupils or students will be provided with remote education while testing is underway until the 18 January, when they should return to school or college. Whilst they will be encouraged to do so, pupils and students will not need to have had a test to return to school or college on 18 January

All pupils in alternative provision schools are expected to attend from the week commencing 4 January. Special schools and colleges have some flexibility on face-to-face attendance of pupils and students in the first week of term to enable them to appropriately mobilise the testing programme.

If you are a critical worker, or your child is vulnerable, we expect you to send them to school from the first day of term.

Wraparound childcare and out-of-school settings

Out-of-school settings and wraparound childcare can continue to operate for face-to-face provision between 4 and 18 January 2021 for children who eligible to attend school for full-time on-site provision.

Children who are home educated can also continue to attend wraparound childcare and out-of-school settings.

Pupils who are not eligible for on-site education provision in January 2021 should not attend:

- out-of-school settings (such as extracurricular clubs or supplementary schools)
- wraparound childcare (before and after-school clubs)

Local restrictions

The government has made clear its commitment that education and childcare settings should be prioritised to remain open during coronavirus (COVID-19). This remains the default position for all areas in all local restriction tiers.

Any restrictions on education would only be as a last resort and would only be initiated by central government. In all circumstances, in all settings, vulnerable children and young people and the children of critical workers should have access to full-time provision. Where circumstances relate to local restrictions, this is clearly set out in the Coronavirus (COVID-19) contingency framework for education and childcare settings

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-contingency-framework-for-education-and-childcare-settings>).

In line with this, the government has asked a small number of primary schools in areas with exceptional rates of incidence or transmission of the virus to restrict access to children of critical workers and vulnerable children at the start of this term.

The definition of vulnerable children and young people and critical workers is in the following section.

Vulnerable children and young people

Vulnerable children and young people include those who:

- are assessed as being in need under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, including children and young people who have a child in need plan, a child protection plan or who are a looked-after child
- have an education, health and care (EHC) plan
- have been identified as otherwise vulnerable by educational providers or local authorities (including children's social care services), and who could therefore benefit from continued full-time attendance, this might include:
 - children and young people on the edge of receiving support from children's social care services or in the process of being referred to children's services
 - adopted children or children on a special guardianship order
 - those at risk of becoming NEET ('not in employment, education or training')
 - those living in temporary accommodation
 - those who are young carers
 - those who may have difficulty engaging with remote education at home (for example due to a lack of devices or quiet space to study)
 - care leavers
 - others at the provider and local authority's discretion including pupils and students who need to attend to receive support or manage risks to their mental health

Critical workers

Parents whose work is critical to the coronavirus (COVID-19) and EU transition response include those who work in health and social care and in other key sectors outlined in the following sections.

Health and social care

This includes, but is not limited to, doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, social workers, care workers, and other frontline health and social care staff including volunteers; the support and specialist staff required to maintain the UK's health and social care sector; those working as part of the health and social care supply chain, including producers and distributors of medicines and medical and personal protective equipment.

Education and childcare

This includes:

- childcare
- support and teaching staff
- social workers
- specialist education professionals who must remain active during the coronavirus (COVID-19) response to deliver this approach

Key public services

This includes:

- those essential to the running of the justice system
- religious staff
- charities and workers delivering key frontline services
- those responsible for the management of the deceased
- journalists and broadcasters who are providing public service broadcasting

Local and national government

This only includes those administrative occupations essential to the effective delivery of:

- the coronavirus (COVID-19) response, and the delivery of and response to EU transition
- essential public services, such as the payment of benefits and the certification or checking of goods for import and export (including animal products, animals, plants and food), including in government agencies and arms length bodies

Food and other necessary goods

This includes those involved in food:

- production
- processing
- distribution
- sale and delivery
- as well as those essential to the provision of other key goods (for example hygienic and veterinary medicines)

Public safety and national security

This includes:

- police and support staff
- Ministry of Defence civilians
- contractor and armed forces personnel (those critical to the delivery of key defence and national security outputs and essential to the response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak and EU transition)
- fire and rescue service employees (including support staff)
- National Crime Agency staff
- those maintaining border security, prison and probation staff and other national security roles, including those overseas

Transport and border

This includes those who will keep the air, water, road and rail passenger and freight transport modes operating during the coronavirus (COVID-19) response and EU transition, including those working on transport systems through which supply chains pass and those constructing or supporting the operation of critical transport and border infrastructure through which supply chains pass.

Utilities, communication and 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)
- the oil, gas, electricity and water sectors (including sewerage)
- information technology and data infrastructure sector and primary industry supplies to continue during the coronavirus (COVID-19) response
- key staff working in the civil nuclear, chemicals, telecommunications (including but not limited to network operations, field engineering, call centre staff, IT and data infrastructure, 999 and 111 critical services)
- postal services and delivery
- payments providers
- waste disposal sectors

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