

COVID-19 Guidance

The single most important action we can all take, in fighting coronavirus, is to stay at home in order to protect the NHS and save lives.

When we reduce our day-to-day contact with other people, we will reduce the spread of the infection. That is why the government has introduced three new measures.

1. Requiring people to stay at home, except for very limited purposes.
2. Closing certain businesses and venues.
3. Stopping all gatherings of more than two people in public.

Every person in the UK must comply with these new measures, which came into effect on Monday 23 March. The relevant authorities, including the police, have been given the powers to enforce them – including through fines and dispersing gatherings.

We have asked parents to keep their children at home, wherever possible, and for childcare providers (including nurseries, pre-schools, childminders and providers of childcare for school-age children), schools and colleges to remain closed, except for those children who absolutely need to attend.

All educational settings remain safe for children, but the fewer children making the journey to educational settings, and the fewer children in these settings, the lower the risk that the virus can spread and infect vulnerable individuals in wider society.

All childcare providers are therefore being asked to continue to provide care for a limited number of children - children who are vulnerable, and children whose parents are critical to the coronavirus (COVID-19) response and cannot be safely cared for at home.

While as many providers as possible should try to stay open for eligible children, this will not be possible for all settings and the local authority should coordinate pooling of resources so children are able to access provision elsewhere.

What are childcare providers responsible for?

Childcare providers are responsible for caring for vulnerable children, and the children of workers critical to the coronavirus (COVID-19) response. Providers should try to remain open to support these children. However, we understand that this may not be possible for all settings, for example, due to staff shortages or illness.

Why do we have to prioritise children?

The first aim of the partial closure measures set out by the Secretary of State for Education is to reduce the overall population of children and families moving around local areas as far as possible, in order to further reduce the number of social interactions and thus flatten the upward curve of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

The second aim is to continue to care for children who are vulnerable, or whose parents are critical to the coronavirus (COVID-19) response so that they can continue to work where alternative childcare arrangements cannot be made.

How are critical workers defined?

Children with a parent or carer who is listed on the government's [critical worker list](#) should be considered for a childcare place, so long as their job cannot be done from home.

Many parents working in these sectors will be able to ensure that their child is kept at home. Every child who can be safely cared for at home should be, to limit the chance of the virus spreading.

We will monitor closely the experience of schools and childcare providers identifying critical workers and their capacity to respond to the needs of critical workers.

We know you may need help to identify critical workers. Government is working this week with sector representatives and local authorities

to ensure you have the clarity you need in identifying critical workers. We will publish updates to this guidance if it is necessary to provide further clarification over the identification of critical workers.

If childcare providers are open for children of critical workers and vulnerable children, can they accept other children if they have enough staff and space?

No.

Care should be provided to children of critical workers and vulnerable children only in order to limit the spread of the virus. Other children should remain at home, in order to further reduce the number of social interactions and thus flatten the upward curve of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Many working parents who are critical workers may also be able to ensure their child is kept at home. Every child who can be safely cared for at home should be.

How are vulnerable children defined?

Vulnerable children include those who have a social worker and those children and young people up to the age of 25 with education, health and care (EHC) plans.

Those who have a social worker include children who have a child protection plan and those who are looked after by the local authority. Children may also be deemed vulnerable if they have been assessed as being in need or otherwise meet the definition in section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

Those with an EHC plan should be risk-assessed by settings in consultation with the local authority and parents, to decide whether they still need a childcare place, or whether they can safely have their needs met at home. This could include, if necessary, carers, therapists or clinicians visiting the home to provide any essential services.

Many children and young people with EHC plans can safely remain at home.

Eligibility for free school meals, the early years pupil premium, or the disadvantaged 2-year-old entitlement should not be determining factors in assessing vulnerability.

Is it compulsory for critical workers to take up a place?

No.

Many parents working in these critical sectors will be able to ensure their child is kept at home. Every child who can be safely cared for at home should be, to limit the chance of the virus spreading.

When making alternative arrangements, parents should not rely for childcare upon those who are advised to be in the [stringent social distancing category](#), such as grandparents, or friends or family members with underlying conditions.

How do we identify which children are the children of critical workers?

We know many childcare providers will have already spoken with parents/carers to identify who requires a place.

If it proves necessary, settings can ask for simple evidence that the parent in question is a critical worker, such as their work ID badge or payslip.

Childcare providers can take a decision not to provide a place where they are confident that a parent does not meet the government definition of a critical worker. If problems occur that cannot be resolved between the provider and parents, settings should speak to their local authority.

Should settings only offer places to children where both their parents are critical workers alongside children of single-parent critical workers?

Children with at least one parent/carer who is critical to the coronavirus (COVID-19) response can go to a setting if required.

However, many families with parents working in critical sectors will be able to ensure their child is kept at home. Every child who can be safely cared for at home should be, to limit the chance of the virus spreading.

Are childcare providers expected to stay open if only one vulnerable or critical worker child attends?

No. If providing suitable care for a child is not possible we ask that arrangements are made to merge provision with other settings, in consultation with the local authority.