

## **Common questions parents and carers want answers to:**

Parents and carers may have questions and concerns about sending their child to school, college, early years or childcare settings during this period.

The Q&A below covers some of the most common questions that parents/carers may have. The responses are based on what's in existing Government guidance: [Schools coronavirus \(COVID-19\) operational guidance](#) and [What parents and carers need to know about early years providers, schools and colleges - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

The Q&A is intended to support conversations between social workers and parents/carers around attendance.

If parents/carers are anxious about their child returning to school, you may also want to encourage them to discuss their concerns with the school/college who will be able to provide reassurance about the support and safety measures they will have in place.

### **1. Questions on why schools/colleges have fully 'reopened' / returned to full attendance when the pandemic is still ongoing**

Educational settings are the best place for children and young people to learn and get their studies back on track. We know that disruption and time out of school this year will have had and continue to have a big impact on learning and development.

Attendance at school is also really important for supporting the mental health, wellbeing and longer-term development of children and young people.

The government asked schools to limit attendance in January to reduce the number of social contacts in communities and not because schools and colleges had become significantly less safe. This was in the context of high prevalence of COVID-19. The latest data suggest that infection rates have fallen across all ages, including in children and young people and it is now possible for schools to welcome back pupils in all year groups.

### **2. Questions on attendance expectations**

From 8 March, school attendance will be mandatory for all pupils of compulsory school age and the usual rules on school attendance will apply again. This includes parents' duty to secure their child's regular attendance at school.

Schools and colleges will follow up attendance concerns where absences are not related to COVID, as they would routinely, including working with social workers, Virtual Schools Heads and other services as needed.

If a child is confirmed as clinically extremely vulnerable, they are advised not to attend school or college until further notice. Parents/carers can find out more

on [shielding and protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

### **3. Questions on whether it is safe to attend education settings**

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health has made clear that the overwhelming majority of children and young people still have no symptoms or very mild illness only.

To prepare for return to full attendance, schools are expected to update their risk assessment and ensure they are implementing the system of controls in order to minimise the risk of infection. The system of controls are the protective measures that have been in place since the start of the autumn term. These measures have been strengthened further to help decrease the disruption that the virus causes to education.

Implementing these protective measures creates a safer environment for pupils and staff where the risk of transmission of infection is substantially reduced.

Some of these protective measures include:

- Managing confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) in line with current public health guidance and minimising contact with anyone who is required to self isolate
- Ensuring that everyone cleans their hands thoroughly more often than usual e.g. when they arrive
- Enhanced cleaning and ventilation
- Promoting the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach, to ensure good respiratory hygiene
- Minimising contact and encourage maintaining distance as far as possible e.g. by asking children and young people to stay within specified groups (or bubbles).

If a child is confirmed as clinically extremely vulnerable, they are advised not to attend school or college until further notice. Parents/carers can find out more on [shielding and protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

### **4. Questions on testing**

Secondary school pupils (year 7 and above) should take part in [asymptomatic testing](#) upon their return in the week of 8 March.

Children with a social worker should continue to be able to attend school throughout this initial period of testing, unless they receive a positive test result.

Testing is voluntary and a child should not be tested unless they (if they are aged over 16) or the parent/carer have given informed consent. We strongly encourage

parent/carers and children to take part, to help break chains of transmission and manage the virus.

A child should not be stopped from returning to school or college if the parent/carer or they choose not to be tested or are not able to undertake a test, and should return to face-to-face education in line with their school or college's arrangements.

Pre-school children and primary aged pupils do not need to be regularly tested. However, staff should be taking part in the asymptomatic testing programme to help reduce transmission of the virus and keep everyone safe.

Further information for parents/carers can be found in the 'Asymptomatic testing' section of [this guidance](#).

## **5. Questions around support when a child is having to self-isolate or shield**

If a child or young person is unable to attend school or college because they are having to self-isolate or shield, the school or college should provide support with remote education and pastoral support.

The school or college should also notify a child's social worker and agree with the social worker the best way to maintain contact and offer support to the child.

The school or college should have in place procedures to check that the child or young person is able to access remote education support, to support them to access it (as far as possible) and to regularly check if they are doing so.

## **6. Questions around early years and childcare settings attendance**

It is the parent/carer's decision whether their child attends nursery, a childminder or another early years provider, but we do encourage parents/carers to take up a place for their child. Attending childcare is very important for the wellbeing and education of children, and supports families.

[Shielding advice](#) is currently in place and children who have been confirmed as clinically extremely vulnerable are advised not to attend education or childcare settings.

All parents/carers of 3 and 4 year olds are eligible for 15 hours free childcare a week, as well as disadvantaged 2 year olds. These entitlements could save parents up to £2,500 a year. Eligible working parents can also apply for 30 hours free childcare a week and Tax-Free Childcare to help with childcare costs. Parents/carers can check if their child is eligible for any these childcare entitlements on the [Childcare Choices](#) website.

## **7. Questions about withdrawing from the school roll/Elective Home Education**

We encourage parents/carers considering EHE to speak with their social worker and school to consider whether EHE is appropriate for their family and child before they decide whether to withdraw them from their school's roll.

If a parent/carer thinks that Elective Home Education might be in the best interests of their child, the Government expects their LA to coordinate a meeting with the parent/carer involving the child's school and social worker where appropriate.

Parents/carers should be aware that schools are not required to provide any support to parents who have withdrawn their child for EHE. It is for parents to be certain that home education is right for their child. Local authorities can provide support and guidance to families who elect to home educate but this is discretionary.

Further information for parents/carers on EHE can be found here: [All you need to know about home-schooling and elective home education \(EHE\) - Education in the media \(blog.gov.uk\)](#).