

## **Additional Guidance on Managing Risks of Covid-19 for Early Years Teachers**

This advice should be read in conjunction with the [EIS Guidance](#) for Early Learning and Child Care Settings on Education Recovery: Curriculum and Pedagogy and the updated [EIS Advice](#) to School Reps and Members re [Revised Risk Assessments and Ventilation](#). It is designed to provide additional guidance to reflect the distinct nature of Early Learning and Childcare ('ELC') settings and ensure that school reps and Early Years teachers are aware of their entitlements under Health and Safety legislation and of the specific considerations which should be assessed in the context of ELC settings.

In terms of risk assessments, the Scottish Government advice is that they need to be conducted by employers in conjunction with trade unions and LNCTs.

Headteacher and Depute Headteacher members should find the guidance useful, also, in supporting their ongoing assessment of risk as it will probably fall to them to act on behalf of the employer in relevant ELC settings. The EIS recommends that Early Years teachers and practitioners, Headteacher and Depute Headteacher colleagues continue to work closely with School Reps, a strongly collegiate approach being the best way to protect the health and safety of all within the school and early years communities.

### **Additional Considerations for Health and Safety and Risk Assessments in ELC Settings**

The general advice to members on Health and Safety and Risk Assessments (referred to above) sets out the legal background to the employer's duty of care, risk assessments and consultation. It makes it clear that your employer is obliged to provide you with a safe place of work through the use of risk assessments. A risk assessment will facilitate the identification of hazards and risk factors that have the potential to cause harm.

The distinct nature of the provision in early years, when considered in conjunction with the age and stage of the children attending, means that consideration should be given to the implementation of an additional risk mitigation strategy for Early Years teachers and practitioners.

The Scottish Government [Guidance](#), 'Coronavirus (COVID-19):early learning and childcare (ELC) services states that 'it is not appropriate for young children to maintain physical distancing, either practically or in terms of child development'. It recommends that alternative, age appropriate public health measures should be put in place in these settings. In considering these measures, there are a number of potential hazards and risks which should be considered as part of the risk assessment process. If staff, children and their families/carers are to have confidence in the safe provision of ELC, the health and wellbeing of the children and the adults who work with them must be central to this process.

There should be bespoke risk assessments for vulnerable groups, e.g. older staff, disabled staff, pregnant women, new mothers, staff with underlying health conditions, staff who have been shielding and BAME staff, as well as individual children identified as at greater risk or with additional support needs.

**Risk assessments should be kept under regular review and should also reflect and be adapted to respond to local issues, such as local increases in cases of Covid-19, local outbreaks or the emergence of new variants of concern.**

Catering/cleaning and facilities management staff and any other contractors should be included in ELC setting risk assessments.

## **Covid Secure Workplace**

### **Checklist for Early Years Settings (February 2022)**

The following checklist should be used as a guide when considering Health and Safety issues relating to the control of Covid-19 within the workplace, specifically in the context of ELC settings. This list is not exhaustive and there may be specific issues relevant to individual settings which should also be considered as part of the risk assessment process.

#### **Cleaning and Hygiene Protocols**

- If the ELC setting is closed for many weeks or if parts of the building have been out of use for a long period, the local authority/early years setting should undertake a health and safety check of the building concerned, including water quality sampling for legionella and other bacteria. If relevant, has this occurred?
- In addition, has the setting's hot water system, lighting, electricity, etc. been checked? (You may wish to speak to other staff in the setting about this, including ensuring that risk assessments for that group of staff have been followed).
- Are there enhanced cleaning provisions in place in line with the Scottish Government [Guidance](#), 'Coronavirus (COVID-19):early learning and childcare (ELC) services'?
- Have arrangements been put in place to ensure that the ELC setting will be cleaned every night; between use by different groups of children or between sessions?
- Has clear use and cleaning guidance for toilets been issued to ensure they are kept clean and physical distancing between adults is achieved as much as possible?
- Has the cleaning of staff areas and toilets been included in the daily cleaning schedule for the setting?
- All cleaning should be carried out in accordance with COVID-19 [guidance](#) for non-healthcare settings and [Infection, Prevention and Control](#) in Childcare Settings. Has a cleaning strategy been agreed and adopted in line with the provisions contained in these documents?
- Does the cleaning strategy extend to more regular cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched objects and hard surfaces, such as table-tops, chairs, doors, handles, shared technology, light switches, banisters, keyboards, staff equipment and telephones? Are procedures in place to ensure that such objects are cleaned at least twice daily? Has provision been made for a more regular scheduled cleaning of sinks and toilets?
- In relation to the toys and equipment that children access, have arrangements been made to ensure that they will be cleaned on a daily basis and when groups of children change, e.g. between sessions, using

standard detergent and disinfectant which is active against viruses and bacteria?

- Has provision been made to minimise the sharing of resources between groups of children? What cleaning arrangements have been put in place to ensure that resources are cleaned before being used by a different group of children?
- If the ELC setting has a sensory room or soft play area, what arrangements have been made to ensure appropriate cleaning and safe use?
- Has provision been made to ensure that soft furnishings (such as throws and where children sleep or nap in the setting, bedding) is cleaned regularly as part of the cleaning schedule?
- Where resources, such as water and playdough, are being used, provision should be made to ensure that these are used only by one group of children and are replaced on a daily basis and when groups of children change. Has this been incorporated into the risk assessment?
- Have enhanced hand hygiene arrangements been put in place to ensure that children wash their hands prior to and following use of the sandpit? Is sand changed in line with agreed cleaning and changing protocols or earlier, in the event of any visual contamination of the sandpit or its contents?
- Although children should be discouraged from bringing transitional objects from home to the early years setting, where this is deemed necessary to support transition, what consideration has been given as to how this can be managed safely? Has provision been made for such circumstances in the risk assessment?
- If resources from the setting (for example, story bags) are taken home by a child, have enhanced hand hygiene procedures been adopted to reduce the risk of fomite transmission? Does the risk assessment review procedure ensure that risk assessments will be updated in the event of a positive case in the home or an outbreak in the setting, and arrangements made to immediately stop the sharing of resources between the setting and home?
- Where there is access to an outdoor area or garden, is this space being used to its full potential?
- If outdoor equipment is being used, has provision been made to ensure that multiple groups of children do not use this at the same time? Has this equipment been included in the cleaning regime and is it cleaned between groups of children using it?
- Has provision been made to ensure that suitable clothing, footwear and head coverings are available to protect children from the elements when outdoors? If clothing, footwear or a head covering have been provided to a child, have arrangements been put in place to ensure that the item is not shared with any other child and is cleaned after use?

- Has provision been made to ensure that dining or snack areas are cleaned and disinfected in between use by each group of children?
- Has provision been made to ensure that all crockery and equipment used in the provision of meals and snacks for children is cleaned with general-purpose detergent and dried thoroughly before being stored for re-use?
- Has provision been made for staff to have access to disposable gloves and aprons for the purposes of cleaning toys and equipment?
- Have additional staff been employed, such as cleaners and other facilities management staff, to implement enhanced environmental cleaning regimes, to support the safe provision of ELC within the setting?
- Is personal protective equipment ('PPE') required in any area? Is it adequately provided to staff?

## **Heating and Ventilation**

- Is there adequate ventilation in the rooms within the ELC setting to minimise the spread of Covid-19 through droplet or air-borne transmission?
- Where centralised or local mechanical ventilation is present, have re-circulatory systems been adjusted to full fresh air? Where this is not possible, are systems operating normally?
- Where ventilation units have filters present, are enhanced precautions being taken to ensure the safe changing of filters?
- Have ventilation systems been checked or adjusted to ensure that they do not automatically reduce/increase ventilation levels due to differing occupancy levels?
- Have windows and doors been checked to ensure that as many as possible are able to be opened to improve natural ventilation, where it is practical, safe and secure to do so, whilst maintaining appropriate internal temperatures?
- Does the ELC setting have access to CO2 monitoring and have arrangements been made to ensure that this is being used to assess the level of ventilation within the setting at regular intervals and to ensure that the CO2 concentration is no greater than 1, 500 ppm?
- An EIS Heating and Ventilation Checklist is available [here](#). It is intended for use as a guide for EIS reps to check that the arrangements detailed in guidance on health and ventilation are being implemented in schools and ELC settings. The checklist can be used as a basis to investigate complaints about heating and ventilation in buildings. Has this guide been used to inform the risk assessment in the ELC setting?

## **Enhanced Hand and Respiratory Hygiene**

- Is there a hygiene protocol in place, providing for an enhanced hand hygiene regime for adults and children in the ELC setting? Does this include handwashing (for 20 seconds) with hot water and soap on arrival at the setting, before and after eating, after toileting, at regular intervals throughout the day and when moving between different areas of the setting?
- Is there access to enough sinks with hot water and soap for the number of staff and children in the ELC setting? Will the handwashing provisions in place allow for the maintenance of physical distancing measures between adults in the setting? Antibacterial hand gel is not recommended for children when hot water and soap is available.
- Have arrangements been made to supervise the children when washing and drying their hands?
- Has provision been made for the use of disposable paper towels or kitchen roll to dry hands?
- In circumstances where a member of staff is required to provide assistance to a child when washing or drying their hands, what consideration has been given to any additional risk mitigation measures?
- Have tissues been provided within the setting to encourage good respiratory and cough hygiene practices when children are coughing or sneezing?
- Have lidded foot pedal bins with double bagging been provided to ensure the safe disposal of used tissues?
- Does the ELC setting have appropriate signage alerting all to the need for high standards of hygiene?

### **Tooth Brushing**

- Where tooth brushing is continuing within the setting, have arrangements been put in place to ensure that only one child is cleaning their teeth at the sink at any one time?
- Have arrangements been put in place to ensure that sinks are cleaned after use?
- Has provision been made to ensure that the toothbrushes are stored separately and in closed containers, after use?
- Is the ELC setting following the Childsmile updated [guidance](#)?

### **Physical Distancing between Adults in the ELC Setting**

- Are physical distancing measures being strictly implemented between adults (including staff, parents/carers and any other adults accessing the premises) in the ELC setting? Current public health guidance demands that

physical distancing measures require each adult staying at least 1m apart. Where there is no impact on capacity, the Scottish Government guidance makes it clear that ELC settings can retain 2m physical distancing arrangements. With the prevalence of Omicron, the EIS strongly recommends strict adherence to 2m physical distancing between all adults in ELC settings, irrespective of whether the individual has been double vaccinated or received a booster jab. Vaccination does not change the need to continue to comply with all COVID-19 mitigation measures.

- Are rooms within the setting labelled to identify the maximum number of people to ensure physical distancing requirements can be respected?
- In relation to offices, staff rooms, staff bases and rest areas within the setting, have the number of chairs been minimised to maintain the 2m rule?
- Has consideration been given to staggered breaks if this is necessary to reduce the number of adults in these areas?
- In exceptional circumstances where staff cannot maintain 2m distance from other adults, has provision been made to ensure that face coverings (or where deemed appropriate, PPE) are worn?
- Has provision been made to ensure that face coverings are worn by staff when they are not working directly with children but are in office and admin areas, canteens (except when dining), staff rooms and other confined communal areas (including staff toilets)?
- Are staff being supported to wear face coverings more generally, should they wish to do so?
- Has clear guidance for staff been developed on how to put on, remove, store and dispose of face coverings to avoid inadvertently increasing the risk of transmission in the setting?
- What arrangements have been put in place to ensure that physical distancing between staff and other adults in the setting can be adhered to at all times, including at drop off and collection times?
- Parents/carers should not enter buildings of ELC settings unless this has been agreed in advance with the permission of the head teacher or manager of the setting. Is this reflected in the arrangements for dropping off and collecting children from the setting?
- Do arrangements for dropping off and collecting children include the requirement for parents/carers to wear face coverings in the grounds of the ELC setting?
- Are arrangements in place for parents/carers to drop off and collect children which ensure that large gatherings of people are avoided and physical distancing between adults and children of different groupings is maintained?
- Is there a one-way system in place in the ELC setting (ingress and egress)?

- In exceptional circumstances, where parents/carers are dropping off young children and it is not possible to maintain physical distancing between adults, staff and children, consideration should be given to what additional risk mitigation measures should be put in place and to ensure that the period in which the distance is breached is kept to a minimum. Face coverings should be worn by staff and parents/carers in these circumstances. Has this been factored into risk mitigation measures? Has provision been made to ensure that both the staff member and the child wash their hands, after the child is safely in the setting?
- If a child is distressed at being dropped off or during the settling in period, what arrangements have been made to provide space for the parent to comfort the child without coming into contact with other children and staff indoors?
- Have arrangements been considered for fire alarms, including for undertaking fire test drills or procedures in situations in which the provider is sharing premises and the school or other occupants of the premises are evacuating at the same time? ELC settings, schools and local authorities should consider muster points and whether these need to be altered to ensure a greater degree of separation and that physical distancing measures can be implemented between groups. Have arrangements been made to ensure that children with complex needs or disabilities can be evacuated safely in these circumstances? Note the Fire Safety Assessment should always be reviewed before any internal doors are held open.

### **Groups of Children and Engagement with Staff**

- In establishing groups of children who will work together, has provision been made to minimise the size of each group?
- In line with the scientific evidence, and to reduce the risk of transmission, have sufficient efforts been made to reduce the number of interactions which children and staff have and to limit contact by organising children within consistent groupings? Groupings should be in line with the Scottish Government [Guidance](#), 'Coronavirus (COVID-19):early learning and childcare (ELC) services and the ELC [staffing ratios](#) .
- Have arrangements been made to ensure that the same staff members will work with the same groups of children when they attend the ELC setting?
- Have sufficient efforts been made to keep groups apart from other groups of children, when indoors? For example, in open plan settings with large numbers of children, has consideration been given to ensuring clear demarcation and separation between the areas in which different groups are playing and learning?
- Given that the Scottish Government Guidance, 'Coronavirus (COVID-19):early learning and childcare (ELC) services (referred to above) indicates that 'children are not required to physically distance from each other, or from adults', consideration should be given to what additional risk mitigation measures should be put in place, particularly in situations where



there is an increased potential of droplet or air-borne transmission of Covid-19. Has consideration been given to a greater emphasis been placed on ventilation?

- Has consideration been given to what additional risk mitigation measures should be put in place in situations where a member of staff requires to comfort a child or engage in direct physical contact for the protection of that child? Is it clear to staff that the level of physical contact should be kept to the minimum necessary to achieve the objective? Has consideration been given to the use of additional risk mitigation measures or where identified in a risk assessment, PPE?
- Has clear guidance been given in relation to the use of personal protective equipment ('PPE'), such as single-use disposable gloves, single-use disposable aprons and face coverings, when there is the potential for staff to come into contact with blood or other bodily fluids?
- Where staff are working with children with additional support needs and where those children require close physical contact, individual risk assessments should be conducted to ensure that any additional risk mitigation measures are identified and in place. What consideration has been given to the use of PPE in these circumstances?
- Have fire evacuation arrangements for children with complex needs or disabilities been reviewed in light of any changes to the setting?
- In exceptional circumstances, another staff member may have to provide cover for children from another group for a limited period of time. Has consideration been given to what additional risk mitigation measures should be adopted in these circumstances? Strict hygiene practices should be adopted.
- What arrangements have been made to allow groups to transition between different areas of the setting whilst minimising contact between groups? Is a one-way system appropriate? Can external areas be used to help facilitate movement around the building?
- In implementing current public health measures, settings may require to take action which may have an impact on capacity. In these circumstances, what consideration has been given to alternative delivery models and to what extent will it be necessary to restrict the size of the cohort of children accessing the setting at any one time? How will the setting effectively minimise contact between cohorts?

## **Blended Placements**

- Scottish Government advice continues to emphasise the importance of minimising the number of contacts and the risk of transmission when assessing the use of blended placements. In these circumstances, what consideration has been given to assessing whether the blended placement is necessary or whether attendance could be consolidated in one setting?

- In circumstances where children are attending multiple settings, has a joint risk assessment been conducted, in collaboration with parents, all providers involved in the care of the child and trade unions? If so, what risk mitigation measures have been implemented?
- What measures have been put in place to ensure good hygiene practices (e.g. washing hands, not sharing resources etc.) when moving between settings?
- What measures are being adopted to manage the contacts of children, attending multiple settings, with other groups of children?
- Where a child attends more than one setting, have arrangements been put in place to keep records of the other setting(s) attended, to assist with any Test and Protect processes?
- What arrangements have been adopted to review the joint risk assessment and to ensure that account is taken of any changes in circumstance, particularly where there is an outbreak in one of the settings involved?

## **Communication**

- Where revised arrangements are in place in an ELC setting to mitigate the risk of transmission of Covid-19, have arrangements been made to ensure that the changes have been communicated to all those accessing the setting in an accessible and user-friendly format?

## **Health**

- Has the head teacher or manager of the ELC setting been trained in COVID specific Health and Safety matters and risk assessment? If not, what provision is being made for such training?
- Is there a designated person with responsibility for keeping up to date with any changes to NHS, Health Protection Scotland or Scottish Government guidance?
- Does the head teacher or manager of the ELC setting know the medical conditions (physical and mental) of individuals attending the setting during this Covid-19 crisis period?
- Is there a designated person in the ELC setting, responsible for ensuring that everyone in the setting is aware of up to date symptoms of Covid-19?
- Is there a protocol for what to do where an individual (staff or child) develops Covid-19 symptoms during the day? Is there provision of an isolation area where anyone, showing symptoms, can be directed/settled within until they are able to leave the setting?
- Is there a [protocol](#) for ensuring the testing of staff who have symptoms?

- Are additional control measures in place to reduce the risk of any essential visitors inadvertently bringing the Covid-19 virus into the ELC setting?
- Are there contingencies for dealing with self-isolation of staff under the Test and Trace protocols?
- Is there a contingency plan to deal with any situation where a number of staff have to leave the ELC setting and return home?
- Is personal protective equipment (PPE) required? Is it adequately provided to Early Years staff? Are Early Years staff being supported/allowed to wear face coverings should they wish, given the nature of the provision and the restrictions on the operation of physical distancing when working with groups of young children?
- Have individualised risk assessments, for staff members who have particular vulnerabilities or who are pregnant, been reviewed to ensure all necessary risk mitigation measures are in place, including arrangements to support remote working where appropriate?

### **Peripatetic Staff/Visiting Specialists**

- The Scottish Government guidance provides that where possible, efforts should be made to minimise staff movement across settings. For peripatetic teaching staff, what consideration has been given to consolidating delivery in one setting or to alternative methods of engagement, such as remote provision?
- Where staff are employed by more than one childcare provider, has an additional joint risk assessment been conducted by the providers to reduce the number of children and other staff that staff members work with across settings? Have appropriate risk mitigation measures been adopted in each setting?
- What provision has been made to minimise the movement of agency and bank staff (where in use) across settings?
- Where it is concluded after collegiate discussion that staff providing essential services key to the delivery of children's care or educational plans (for example, visiting teachers, educational psychologists, nurses, social workers, youth workers and those providing therapeutic support) are required to visit ELC settings, then risk assessments should be conducted and appropriate mitigations identified to prevent transmission of the virus in and between settings. Have risk assessments been extended to cover such situations and to review arrangements regularly, with the involvement of trade unions?

## **Travel**

- What consideration has been given to transportation difficulties for those staff who usually use public transport, with safeguarding being paramount, along with logistical issues?
- Are car parking spaces clearly set out?
- Has consideration been given to the arrangements for parents/carers of children with additional support needs who may normally drop their children off with the ELC setting?

## **Consultation**

- Have Early Years teachers, practitioners and other staff been consulted and involved in the risk assessment process and the implementation of safeguards and mitigations?
- Have union reps, health and safety reps and staff been consulted as widely as possible and practicable?
- Does the ELC setting have an updated written Covid-19 risk assessment register?
- Is there a formal process for reviewing the updated risk assessments and implementing revised control measures where appropriate and necessary?
- Does the ELC setting plan to review updated risk assessments and protocols at regular intervals and when circumstances change, in consultation with staff and union representatives?
- If control measures cannot be maintained within the ELC setting, what is the plan? Are staff aware of the plan?