

## **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 EIS Advice for Safety in Schools for EIS Representatives](#). 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.

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 continue to be central to the risk assessment process. In addition to the Healthy Workplace Checklist contained in the advice referred to above, the EIS would recommend that the following additional questions, contained in the checklist below, are used when considered Health and safety issues relating to the control of Covid-19 within the workplace, specifically in relation to ELC provision.

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 (April 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 high level 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 at least daily?
- 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?
- Does the cleaning strategy provide that surfaces in dining and snack areas are wiped down and disinfected between use by each group of children?
- 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; when visibly contaminated; and when groups of children change, e.g. between sessions, using standard detergent and disinfectant which is active against viruses and bacteria?

- 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) are cleaned regularly as part of the cleaning schedule?
- Where resources, such as water and playdough, are being used, we would recommend that provision is made to ensure that these are used only by one group of children and are replaced on a daily basis and between sessions. 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 can now bring transitional objects from home to the early years setting, what consideration has been given as to how this can be managed safely? Does the cleaning strategy provide that such objects should be cleaned if visibly contaminated or shared among other children?
- If resources from the setting (for example, story bags) are taken home by a child, has the importance of enhanced hand hygiene procedures been highlighted both to staff in the setting and to parents/carers?
- 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 this equipment is included in the cleaning regime and is it cleaned daily and if visibly contaminated or if groups of children change during the day, on a sessional basis?
- 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 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?
- Further information on ventilation in schools and ELC settings can be accessed in the [Advice on Safety in Schools for EIS Representatives \(March 2022\)](#). In addition, a summary on key ventilation information can be accessed [here](#) and an EIS Heating Checklist is available [here](#). These documents are 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 information can be used as a basis to investigate complaints about heating and ventilation in buildings. Has this information been used to inform the risk assessment in the ELC setting?

## **Hand and Respiratory Hygiene**

- Is there a hygiene protocol in place, providing for a good hand hygiene regime for adults and children in the ELC setting? Does this include handwashing (for 20 seconds) with warm water and soap on arrival at the setting, before and after eating or handling food, after toileting, after blowing their nose, coughing or sneezing, after contact with contaminated surfaces, 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.
- 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**

- Is the ELC setting following the Childsmile updated [guidance](#)?
- 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?

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

- Are physical distancing measures being implemented, where possible, between adults (including staff, parents/carers and any other adults accessing the premises) in the ELC setting, including at drop-off and collection times?
- 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 support physical distancing?
- Has consideration been given to staggered breaks if this is necessary to reduce the number of adults in these areas?
- Where staff cannot maintain physical distancing from other adults, has consideration been given to the need for other risk mitigation measures, such as the use of face coverings?
- Have staff been encouraged to wear face coverings 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?
- Is it recommended to parents/carers that they wear face coverings when dropping off and collecting their children?
- Where parents/carers are dropping off or collecting young children and it is not possible to maintain physical distancing between adults and staff, has consideration been given to whether additional risk mitigation measures are necessary.
- 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? 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.
- 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?

## **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?
- 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?

- Are additional control measures in place to reduce the risk of any visitors inadvertently bringing the Covid-19 virus into the ELC setting?
- Is there a contingency plan to deal with any situation where a number of staff have to leave the ELC setting and return home?
- 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 Professionals**

- Peripatetic staff and visiting professionals who are visiting ELC settings are required to be considered within all risk assessments and should act in accordance with the risk assessment for the establishment in which they are working.

### **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?

### **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?
- Management teams should involve union reps at the outset and consult staff as widely as possible and practicable. Has this happened, involving union workplace reps and health and safety reps?
- 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?
- Is the Management team reviewing 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?

### **Advice and Support**



If a teacher or Early Years practitioner, having due regard to the guidance, is concerned about the activities permitted or the mitigation measures which have been identified, and has concerns about their safety or the safety of anyone else in the setting, they should raise this with the management team or seek advice and support from their EIS representative or Local Association Secretary thereafter if necessary.