

COVID-19 - talking to children and families about returning to school: guiding principles

[Health Policy team](#)

Following the announcement on 10 May 2020 that schools and other educational settings may reopen at the earliest on 1 June, paediatricians may receive many queries from families to understand whether their child should return to school. We provide a summary of the current policy and other guidance in the four nations.

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Introduction

The UK Government has [advice on determining who is clinically extremely vulnerable](#). This definition applies to a small number of children, and they will most certainly be known to specialist children's services. These children will be advised **not** to return to school.

There are a number of children who are known to specialist services (in secondary and tertiary care) where it will be important to have a discussion to determine the right course of action. This discussion will be informed by the nature of their condition, its severity and intensity of treatment, for example, level of immunosuppression.

[Evidence from the UK and internationally](#) tells us that COVID-19 is generally milder in children than in adults: most infected children present with mild symptoms or are asymptomatic, and very few develop severe or life threatening disease.

It is also important to consider that schools play a key role in promoting children's health, social and mental wellbeing. They also provide the setting from which children can access health surveillance, support and advice as well as individual and group therapeutic programmes.

A conversation with parents will need to weigh up the clinical risk for that child on balance with the consequences of the child missing out on attending school. The vast majority of children who don't require shielding will benefit from returning to school. This includes children who are ordinarily under the care of their GP.

We are aware that families are understandably worried and confused in light of school re-opening. The College will continue to update current evidence on COVID-19 and children, and members are encouraged to use this when advising families.

England

Advice about returning to school in England:

1. Clinically extremely vulnerable children to remain shielded and not to return to school, even if their year group has.
2. Clinically vulnerable children who are only under the care of primary care are overwhelmingly likely to benefit from returning to school when their year group does.
3. Clinically vulnerable children, who are under secondary or specialist care for an underlying health condition are, on the balance of probabilities, more likely to benefit from returning to school when their year group does so. These families may need a conversation with their treating teams to balance the potential risks and any familial anxiety.
4. All other children should attend school when their year group returns.

Other guidance in England (Department for Education)

- [Opening schools and educational settings to more pupils from 1 June: guidance for parents and carers](#)
- [Implementing protective measures in education and childcare setting](#)
- [What parents and carers need to know about schools and other education settings during the coronavirus outbreak](#)

Scotland

In Scotland, the children of key workers and vulnerable children have access to critical childcare and learning provision, this provision will continue over the summer. Children in transitional years will have access where possible. Teachers will return in June to prepare to open schools on 11th August teaching in a blended way; part time at home and in school.

Other guidance from Scottish Government:

- [Physical distancing in education and childcare settings](#)
- [Strategic framework for reopening schools, early learning and childcare provision](#)

Wales

In Wales, it remains the situation that only the children of key workers and vulnerable children have access to schools. This is not expected to change as early as 1 June 2020; however, no alternative timescale has been provided to date.

The Welsh Government has published some of the principles guiding these decisions, and further guidance:

- [How schools will work during COVID-19](#)
- [Guidance for hubs and schools around provision for children of key workers and for vulnerable children](#)
- [Education Minister's key principles for school return](#)

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, it remains the situation that only the children of key workers and vulnerable children have access to critical childcare and learning provision. It is not expected that schools will re-open before September in Northern Ireland.

Other guidance in Northern Ireland:

- [Northern Ireland recovery strategy \(PDF\) \(Northern Ireland Executive\)](#)
- [COVID-19: guidance - vulnerable children and young people \(Northern Ireland Executive\)](#)
- [Implementing social distancing in education settings in Northern Ireland \(Department of Education\)](#)

Latest updates on this page

Updates in this version (22 May 2020)

- Updated information about school provision and related guidance in Scotland