

Covid-19: Information for private and third sector providers about closures and emergency childcare



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This applies to providers of childcare who are registered with the Care Inspectorate, including after-school services, holiday provision and breakfast clubs. A separate factsheet for childminders will be available soon.

Overview

On 19 March 2020, the Deputy First Minister announced that most local authority schools and nurseries in Scotland would be closing from the end of the school day on Friday 20 March 2020, as part of the Scottish Government's response to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

In his statement, the Deputy First Minister also made clear that provision for children within school and childcare settings would continue to be required for the following priority groups:

- **Vulnerable children** who often rely on childcare settings and school life for hot meals or for a safe and comforting space.
- The children of **key workers** who will require continuing access to appropriate learning and childcare that allows their parents or carers to participate in the national response to Covid-19.

This means that:

- Local authority nurseries will be closed from the end of the day on March 20 2020, unless they are involved in the provision of emergency childcare for key workers or in supporting vulnerable children.
- Private, third sector and independent childcare providers, including nurseries and out of school care services, are being advised to close from the end of the day on 20 March 2020, unless they are involved in the provision of emergency childcare for key workers and vulnerable children.
- Local authorities will coordinate and fund the provision of emergency childcare services and have been asked to give priority to private and third sector childcare providers in the delivery of this.
- To support this, the Care Inspectorate has produced new operational guidelines for childcare settings continuing to operate to provide emergency childcare for key workers and vulnerable children.
- The Scottish Government is looking carefully at measures which can support the childcare sector through this challenging time, recognising that it is a varied sector with a large number of small businesses, social enterprises, third sector organisations and self-employed workers.
- Childminders can continue to operate but must have reference to new public health guidance which will issue shortly.

Emergency measures

Who will be eligible for emergency childcare?

- Those parents and carers who are fulfilling key worker roles will be eligible for emergency childcare.
- Provision for the children and young people who most need our support, including children with additional support needs, will also be prioritised.

Who is a key worker?

Key workers are those in posts which ensure that essential services can be delivered and cover tasks within the local community which support the vulnerable and aid community resilience. This may be slightly different in each community to allow the country to address local priorities. Whilst decisions will be taken at the local level, we would expect this to include consideration of:

- **Category 1** – Health and Care workers directly supporting Covid-19 response, and associated staff; Health and Care workers supporting life threatening emergency work, as well as critical primary and community care provision; Energy suppliers.
- **Category 2** – All other Health and Care workers, and wider public sector workers providing emergency/critical welfare services (e.g Fire, Police, Prisons, Social Workers, etc) without whom serious damage to the welfare of the people of Scotland could be caused.
- **Category 3** – All workers without whom there could be a significant impact on Scotland (but where the response to Covid-19, or the ability to perform essential tasks to keep the country running, would not be severely compromised).

How will services get involved in emergency childcare provision?

- Registered childcare services, including early learning and childcare providers, out of school care and holiday club providers, should contact their local authority.
- In the case of services which are currently unable to operate due to staff sickness or self-isolation measures, there may be flexibility to use wider staff pools or for existing staff to work in new locations.

How will services be funded to provide emergency childcare?

- Local authorities will provide funding for emergency childcare services.
- Local authorities have been asked to give particular weight to using existing childcare provision and expertise including private and third sector providers across Scotland.

When will emergency childcare need to be available and for how long?

- Emergency childcare will be implemented as soon as is possible following school and childcare closures. Local authorities have been asked to implement this by next Friday where possible.
- Emergency childcare will be required for as long as schools and childcare settings remain closed to enable key workers to continue to fulfil their roles.

How much emergency childcare will be available for each child and what will it look like?

- Emergency childcare will need to be tailored as far as possible to meet the requirements of key workers who will no longer be able to rely on normal arrangements for childcare. This will be based on local need and implemented by the local authority.
- Emergency childcare services will be required to operate flexibly, supporting families who may have children of different ages and needs.
- The Care Inspectorate have produced operational guidelines which will enable delivery of emergency childcare services while continuing to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children.

What does this mean for childminders?

- Childminders will not be required to cease operations at this time, although it is recognised that some may choose to do so. Childminders should continue to have reference to public health guidance. This is because the impact of transmission is more limited in smaller settings. Through the Care Inspectorate, the Scottish Government will write to all registered childminders to advise them of this position.
- We are currently working with the Chief Medical Officer on further guidance for childminders and will produce similar guidance like this for childminders and share this directly with childminders, the SCMA, Care Inspectorate and through our communication channels.

Support for childcare providers during closure period

Settings delivering funded ELC

The ongoing sustainability of the childcare sector is of paramount importance to the Scottish Government. We are working with local authorities to ensure that funded providers continue to be paid for the statutory ELC hours they were contracted to provide during this period of disruption, even where these hours cannot be used.

Support for childcare businesses

Over the last few days a series of announcements have been made by both the UK and Scottish Governments regarding support for businesses of all sizes facing disruption. The Scottish Government is looking carefully at which of these measures are relevant to the childcare sector, recognising that it is a varied sector with a large number of small businesses, social enterprises, third sector organisations and self-employed workers. We are in close contact with the sector representative bodies and will continue working together to identify what further support may be required.

The Scottish Government continues to work closely with the UK Government to ensure any support benefits all businesses, including Scottish businesses, and complements existing Scottish Government interventions.

With the other devolved administrations and the UK Government, we launched COVID-19 helplines to support businesses on 13 March:

<https://www.gov.uk/business-support-helpline>

This augments the Scottish Government's Business Support website, which is the best way for business to find the information they need (24/7):

<https://findbusinesssupport.gov.scot/>

We are aware of a number of concerns about the coverage of COVID-19 in standard insurance policies. Insurance policies differ significantly, so businesses are encouraged to check the terms and conditions of their specific policy and contact their providers. Most businesses are unlikely to be covered for business interruption, as standard business interruption insurance policies are dependent on damage to property and will exclude pandemics.

We are working closely with the UK Government to establish a clearer position on insurance and will provide further information soon.

What's next for childcare providers in Scotland?

The Scottish Government cannot confirm at this stage how long the closure of schools and nurseries will be in place for. It should not be assumed that they will open again after the Easter holidays. However, officials from the Scottish Government's Early Learning and Childcare Directorate will maintain an ongoing dialogue with private and third sector representative bodies throughout the closure period, to ensure the sector is sighted on all developments and further sources of support and information.

We recognise that this is a very uncertain and unsettling time for all those working within the education and childcare sector. The Covid-19 pandemic represents an unprecedented challenge for public services in Scotland, and close co-operation and partnership working will be essential if we are to ensure we meet the needs of children and families, particularly those in the greatest need. We would like to thank all providers for your patience while we work with local authorities to develop more detailed plans for ensuring continuity of learning and care for those children and families who need it most.

This document is available from our website at www.gov.scot