

Children Returning to Primary School and Nurseries

Health Information for Parents and Carers

This booklet was produced by
Camden and Islington Department of Public Health
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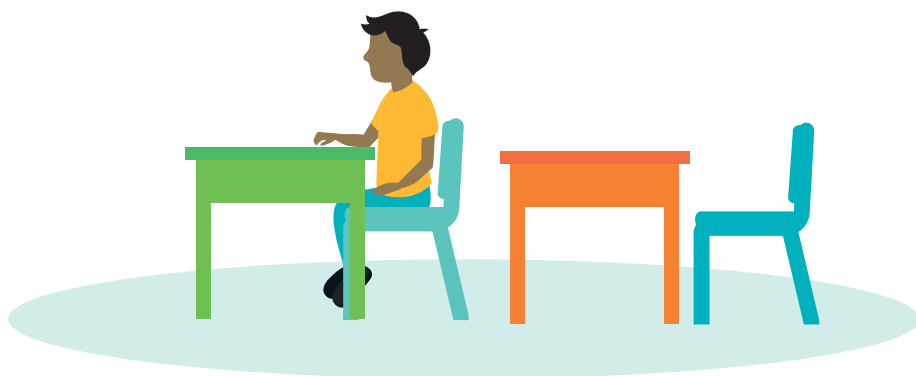
Public Health are keeping this guidance under constant review.

Schools and early years settings are opening more widely and the clear message from the Council is that the safety of our children, their families, and staff is paramount. Decisions have been based on national guidance but also local public health advice and risk assessment. Schools will need to be sure that they are able to put in place all the recommended protective measures, and can carry out a phased opening when ready to do so in a safe and sustainable way. The purpose of this booklet is to outline some of the Public Health thinking, and measures that have been put in place locally to protect children, staff and the wider community at this time.

Why are some children going back to schools and nurseries?

Social distancing measures have been effective, but lockdown has come at a cost to all our children. Missing school affects a child's mental wellbeing, their learning and their social and emotional development. That is why as the infection rate falls across the UK and locally, there is a plan for a phased return to school. Children of Key Workers, and vulnerable children, will also continue to attend school as before.

This gradual approach aims to limit the numbers within schools while ensuring that the children who can benefit most from attending are able to do so. The emphasis on younger year groups recognises how important early learning and social development are for our children, setting them up well for school and later life. Children who are finishing primary school need extra support from friends and teachers to get them ready for the key transfer to secondary school.



What steps will schools take to keep children safe?

The Council has been working closely with schools. Every school has been asked to complete a detailed individual risk assessment to help them with preparations. Because of this, schools will have customised timetables and procedures for a phased return. Your child's school will let you know exactly what their particular arrangements are.

The steps each school takes may look slightly different (depending on the school environment, staff availability and the needs of pupils), but they will all include these 5 key actions:

1. Frequent hand washing, good hygiene and cleaning
2. Ensuring pupils and staff only come to school if they are well
3. Clear procedures if a child or staff show symptoms at school
4. Protecting shielded and clinically vulnerable pupils, by following medical advice on who needs to stay at home
5. Limiting contact with others by keeping to small groups or protective bubbles who learn and play together
6. Keeping school children within the same group of children and staff in protective bubbles is similar to the social distancing we are used to within families. It limits the amount of social mixing, and so reduces the risk that the virus will spread.

“ There is good evidence that these measures will significantly reduce the risk of catching or spreading coronavirus in educational settings. This must also be balanced against the risk to a child's mental health and wellbeing of not being at school.”

Dr Oliver Anglin, GP and Clinical Lead for Children and Young People for North Central London CCG

With this in mind, everyday things – like the classroom the children are in, how many children are in their class, who is teaching them, what they're learning, and the timings of the school day – will be different from usual, as schools follow government advice on being COVID-safe. It might help to talk to your child about this, so that they are prepared for things to feel different. When schools have made their plans, they will let you know so that you are prepared and reassured about what to expect.

Should I be sending my child to school or nursery?

It is understandable that people are concerned about COVID-19. It is important to remember that for most people who do catch it - and especially children - the virus will be mild. The message to 'stay home' has not just been about directly protecting ourselves and our children but also to protect the NHS and those at higher risk of serious illness.

“ Children develop symptoms much less often than adults, making severe illness very uncommon. Most higher quality and more relevant studies seem to show that children probably play a smaller role in spreading coronavirus within communities than adults.”

Dr Jonathan Cohen, Consultant in Paediatric Infectious Diseases at University College London Hospital

The UK infection rate has been reduced not just by school closures, but also by widespread social distancing, good hygiene and household self-isolation. Given the low number of new COVID-19 cases in our two boroughs, and the range of social distancing measures that continue to be in place in the wider community, schools are now able to start welcoming priority groups of children back into school. The gradual return to schools depends on the community infection rate staying low. This will continue to be monitored closely. In addition, schools will put in place the safety steps that have been described. These will help protect children, staff and families and reduce the spread of the virus. They are based on guidance from the Government and advice from the Camden and Islington Public Health Team.

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Each family will need to make their own balanced judgement in deciding whether it is safe for their child to return depending on the individual circumstances and whether anyone at home is shielding or clinically vulnerable. It is your decision. Because school is the best place to learn and is beneficial to health, children are encouraged to attend, but if you have any concerns, you may of course discuss them with your school and your GP.



The local advice on clinically vulnerable children and their families is summarised below:

If your child is shielded/ clinically extremely vulnerable

They should not attend school.

If your child lives with someone who is shielded

We would advise that children living with someone who is shielding are not included in the first wave of students going back to school. As more children return to school in a phased way over time, children living in a household with someone who is shielding should only attend if stringent social distancing can be adhered to and the child or young person is able to understand and follow those instructions. Some children – for instance younger children and those with special educational needs – might find this difficult. You are recommended to discuss this with your GP and the school.

If your child is clinically vulnerable but not shielded

You are recommended to discuss this with your GP and the school. Your child can attend, if you decide that they can.

If your child lives with someone who is clinically vulnerable but not shielded

The government guidance says that your child is allowed to attend. Because some children (e.g. younger children) find social distancing rules difficult to follow, we advise you to make this decision based on your own family circumstances and the arrangements in place in the school. Discuss this with your school and GP.

What more can I do?



Keeping the school community safe is a team effort. There is a vital role for families to play so that children can learn as safely as possible.”

Julie Billett, Director of Public Health for Camden and Islington

Check your child is well before they go to school and keep them home if they are ill

Look out for any COVID-like symptoms, and act quickly if a child or other member of your household develops a temperature, a new continuous cough, or loss of/change to their sense of taste or smell. Please let your school know, and keep your child and the rest of your household at home.

Hygiene

Handwashing is vital. Wash hands for 20 seconds, with soap and running water (before drying thoroughly), e.g. before and after school, before and after eating, and after using a tissue or the toilet. Good respiratory hygiene (Catch it, Bin it, Kill it) is also essential. Encouraging these habits at home as well will reduce risk and support teachers when they reinforce these messages in school.

Managing the school run

One parent/ carer should do the school run, and should avoid mingling at the school gates. The safest and healthiest way to travel is outdoors: on foot, by bike or scooter. When travelling and dropping off/picking up, try to keep 2m away from other people. Everyone should consider all other forms of transport before using public transport. If public transport is unavoidable, as well as keeping your hands and face as clean as possible you might choose to wear a non-medical face covering (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-wear-and-make-a-cloth-face-covering/how-to-wear-and-make-a-cloth-face-covering>). If your child usually gets school transport, please stay in touch with the school, who will let you know the arrangements.



Social distancing outside of school

Social distancing outside of school remains important, to balance out the increase in person-to-person contact that happens as some children start to return to school and some adults return to work. It is therefore important to keep following these restrictions: staying home as much as possible, limiting social contact, and keeping 2m apart from others when going out.

My child is feeling anxious about going back to school, what should I do?

You and your child may have a whole mixture of feelings about returning to school. Schools will do everything they can to help children feel safe and happy. Most children will adapt quickly and well to a different way of being in school and the school will provide support to those who need more help.

If your child is worried, try and stay positive about seeing friends, teachers and staff again, and explain how everyone

can help to prevent the virus spreading again. You can help your child to feel ready by explaining how things will be different in school, getting into a routine of getting up and dressed in time for school, and practising your journey to school if it is going to be different. You can also practise good hand hygiene and using and throwing away tissues so that they feel ready for school.

When your child starts school, particularly if they are very young, they may miss some of the hugs with teachers and friends, high fives or hand holding that they are used to. Make time to talk about how school is different when they are home and give them extra time and cuddles with you.



What happens if someone has symptoms of COVID-19 in school, at nursery or at home?

1. If your child or any member of your household has a temperature or a new, continuous cough, or loss of/change to their sense of taste or smell, please let your school know, and keep your child and the rest of your household at home.
2. If a child or member of staff gets these symptoms in school, they will be sent home with advice about what to do.
3. Anyone with symptoms needs to stay at home for 7 days, or longer if they are still unwell. Members of their household also need to stay home, for 14 days. If these other family members become ill, they need to begin a 7-day self-isolation period from the day their symptoms start.
4. Pupils, staff and household members should be tested for COVID-19, if they develop symptoms. The test should be arranged as soon as possible. See www.nhs.uk/coronavirus for advice on testing.
5. If the test is negative, the child and their household can leave self-isolation and return to school.
6. If a child or member of staff tests positive, only then will the rest of their small class group need to be sent home to self-isolate for 14 days. The households of these other children do not need to isolate, unless their child also develops symptoms.

How else can I prepare for my child's return to school?

We must not forget about the risks of other infectious diseases while we are all focused on COVID-19. We are lucky that we now rarely see cases of diseases like measles or polio; this is because we have safe and very effective vaccines that prevent epidemics.

Please make sure that your child, and all other young children in your household are up to date with their routine vaccinations. You can see the schedule at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/nhs-vaccinations-and-when-to-have-them/> and arrange these through your GP surgery. Vaccinations for teenage children are given in school and these are likely to start again in the autumn.