

Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Guidance for Early Years Providers

The DfE has issued detailed guidance to assist schools and early years settings including childminders in providing advice for staff and parents around the issues relating to Coronavirus. The guidance below is intended to supplement the DfE guidance. The latest guidance from PHE is available on the [Gov.uk website](#).

What are the symptoms of Coronavirus?

The main symptoms of the virus can include a fever, a cough and difficulty breathing. The symptoms of coronavirus can be similar to those of other types of viral infections, such as colds and the seasonal flu.

There have been a number of deaths and severe cases in some countries although it is reported that symptoms are mild in the majority of cases and the deaths occurred where the person had a pre-existing illness or condition.

Who is at risk of COVID-19?

Most people who catch the virus will experience only mild systems, however there are some people who are vulnerable to much more severe symptoms because of their age or underlying health conditions.

Public Health currently advise that the risk factors are the same as those for flu vaccinations. So employees who are entitled to or encouraged to have a flu vaccination because of their age or a health issue may be more at risk from the impact of the virus.

Here, taken from the NHS Website, are the relevant details.

- anyone aged 65 and over
- pregnant women
- anyone with an underlying health condition
 - Chronic (long terms) respiratory diseases, such as asthma (that requires an inhaled or tablet steroid treatment, or has led to hospital admission in the past), chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or bronchitis
 - Chronic heart disease, such as heart failure
 - Chronic kidney disease
 - Chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis
 - Chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis, a learning disability or cerebral palsy
 - Diabetes
 - Problems with your spleen – for example, sickle cell disease or if you have had your spleen removed
 - A weakened immune system as a result of conditions such as HIV and AIDS, or medicines such as steroid tablets or chemotherapy
 - Being seriously overweight (a BMI of 40 or above)

Managers are advised to identify those working within the setting with these conditions and undertake a risk assessment, in terms of the individual's role, and take action to protect them as needed.

Preventing the spread of the virus

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19 so the best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to the virus. The general principles everyone can follow to help prevent the spread are:

- washing hands often with soap and water, or use alcohol sanitiser (containing at least 60% alcohol) if hand-washing facilities are not available, particularly after taking public transport.
- covering your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throwing the tissue in a bin.
- Staff should wash their hands:
 - before leaving home and on arrival at work
 - after using the toilet
 - after breaks and sporting activities
 - before food preparation
 - before eating any food, including snacks
 - before leaving work and on arrival at home
- avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces

What if employees start to experience symptoms?

If an employee has either:

- *a high temperature (above 37.8 degrees)*
- *a new, continuous cough*

The employee should stay at home for 7 days if they have these symptoms and employees should be directed **not** to go to their GP or other medical center until they have taken advice from NHS 111.

Employees should remain at home until 7 days after the onset of their symptoms. After 7 days, if they feel better and no longer have a high temperature, they can return to their normal working routine. If they have not had any signs of improvement and have not already sought medical advice, they should contact NHS 111.

Are employees required to get a medical certificate if they are ill with Coronavirus?

Employees are usually required to provide a medical certificate if they are absent for a period exceeding 7 calendar days. However, staff may not be able to get a sick note if they have been told to self-isolate and not to attend their GP. In such cases, they will be asked to self-certify their whole period of absence on their return to work.

What other management actions should the school take?

Leaders/managers also have a role in reassuring staff at work that the risk of contracting the virus is currently low. However, staff should also be regularly reminded of observing good personal hygiene practices, including regular, thorough hand-washing and using tissues when sneezing or coughing and throwing them away in a bin.

What if an employee wishes to wear a facemask at work?

Staff are not recommended to wear facemasks (also known as surgical masks or respirators) to protect against the virus. Facemasks are only recommended to be worn by symptomatic individuals (advised by a healthcare worker) to reduce the risk of transmitting the infection to other people. PHE recommends that the best way to reduce any risk of infection is good hygiene and avoiding direct or close contact (closer than 2 metres) with any potentially infected person.

What are the arrangements for employees who are caring for dependants who have coronavirus?

People who have been in contact are not considered cases and if they are well they are very unlikely to spread the infection to others. If the employee does not have symptoms they can carry on attending work as normal even if they live in the same house as someone with coronavirus. If they develop symptoms they should follow the advice above for isolation.

What actions should be taken if someone with COVID-19 has recently been in the setting or if someone has had contact with a case of COVID-19?

Testing for COVID-19 will now only happen if an individual is admitted to hospital therefore there will potentially be very few confirmed cases. If staff do not have symptoms they can carry on as normal even if they live in the same house as people who are possible/confirmed cases.

If a member of staff with COVID19 has recently been in the setting, leaders may wish to consider additional cleaning and/or measures to help to mitigate the spread. People who have been in contact are not considered cases and if they are well they are very unlikely to spread the infection to others.

What is the advice if a member of staff is in work and displaying symptoms (coughing and/or feverish) and has not self-isolated?

Managers/leaders are advised to discuss this with the employee and make a judgement based on the circumstances.

What actions should be taken if a member of staff does not want to carry out their normal duties due to concerns over exposure to the virus and/or the impact on their health?

Firstly, leaders should discuss this with the member of staff and address their concerns as far as possible and provide reassurance. If the individual is in a vulnerable group as described above, a risk assessment should be undertaken.

If having done this, the assessment is that they are able to continue with their duties, then the employee should be instructed to do so. Further refusal to undertake duties will be considered refusal to follow a reasonable management instruction and may result in action being taken under the disciplinary procedure.

What if a member of staff or employee does not want to undertake their duties due to concerns about the exposure and the impact on those they live with or care for who are vulnerable?

Firstly, leaders should discuss this with the member of staff and address their concerns as far as possible and provide reassurance. Unfortunately, whilst acknowledging their concerns, the majority of employees will have contact with vulnerable people/family members outside of work. Therefore, if having taken the steps above, the setting considers that the employee is able to continue with their duties, then they should be instructed to do so.

What actions should be taken if a child develops symptoms:-

If a child develops a new, continuous cough or a high temperature (over 37.8 degrees) they must be collected and the child will be required to stay away from the setting for 7 full days.

Confirmed cases in your setting

If Covid 19 is confirmed in your setting, you will be contacted by PHE to discuss the case, identify people who have been in contact with them and advised on any actions or precautions to be taken. An assessment of the provision will be undertaken by the Health Protection Team and advice given about cleaning etc.

You must notify Ofsted if you have a case confirmed by PHE in your setting.

Further information is also available on:-

NDNA website at <https://www.ndna.org.uk/>

Early Years Alliance website at <https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/>

PACEY website at <https://www.pacey.org.uk/>