

Coronavirus briefing: safeguarding guidance and information

This briefing summarises the latest guidance for UK schools on safeguarding during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

06 April 2020

Introduction

With schools and businesses closing and social distancing measures in place, there are lots of questions about how schools should be working to keep children safe during the coronavirus pandemic. We have pulled together key safeguarding and child protection guidance from all 4 UK nations to help answer some frequently asked questions.

Across the UK, the governments are publishing a range of new guidance to support schools during the coronavirus pandemic. This briefing will be updated regularly.

Going to school

Who has to go to school?

Across the UK, schools are closed except to provide care and education to children who are vulnerable and children whose parents are key workers (Cabinet Office and

Department for Education (DfE), 2020; Department of Education, 2020b; Scottish Government, 2020a; Welsh Government, 2020f).

Who are vulnerable children?

In **England**, vulnerable children are those who have a social worker and those aged up to 25 with education, health and care (EHC) plans. This includes children who have a child protection plan or are looked after.

Children may also be deemed vulnerable if they have been assessed as being in need or meet the definition in **section 17 of the Children Act 1989** (Department for Education (DfE) and Public Health England (PHE), 2020).

In **Northern Ireland**, vulnerable children are those:

- receiving support from Health and Social Services including family support, child protection and looked after children services
- on the child protection register
- with statements of special education needs
- accessing education otherwise than at school (EOTAS), which is provision for children with social, emotional, behavioural, medical or other issues which mean they cannot otherwise access suitable education
- accessing education nurture units, which are an intervention for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties
- with emerging and diagnosed mental health needs
- who are homeless
- who are young carers
- subject to paramilitary threat
- whose parents have mental health problems
- whose parents have alcohol and drug addictions
- affected by domestic abuse (Department of Education, 2020b).

In **Scotland**, children may be vulnerable for a range of reasons including:

- being on the child protection register
- being looked after
- being on the edge of care
- being eligible for free school meals
- having complex additional support needs
- being affected by poverty and deprivation (Scottish Government, 2020a).

In **Wales**, vulnerable children include:

- those who have safeguarding needs
- those who are supported by social care

- children with care and support or support plans
- children on the child protection register
- looked after children
- young carers
- disabled children
- children with statements of special educational needs (SEN) (Welsh Government, 2020h).

Do all vulnerable children need to go to school?

In **England**, children with a social worker are expected to go to school, provided they don't have an underlying health condition that puts them at severe risk.

Schools and local authorities should make a risk assessment for children and young people with an education, health and care (EHC) plan, taking parents' and carers' views into account, to decide whether they need to be offered a place in school (DfE and PHE, 2020).

In **Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales** the guidance does not explicitly answer this question, but stresses that every child who can be safely cared for at home should be.

What if parents of vulnerable children don't want to send them to school?

In **England**, social workers and schools should work with parents of vulnerable children who don't want their children to go to school. Social workers and schools should explore the reasons for this and encourage parents to allow their children to attend (DfE and PHE, 2020).

In **Scotland**, the lead professional for managing a child's plan and schools should explore the reasons for parents not wanting children to attend school and help resolve any concerns or difficulties (Scottish Government, 2020b).

In **Northern Ireland and Wales** there is no specific guidance on what to do if parents don't want their children to attend school but professionals may want to follow the guidance for England and Scotland as examples of best practice.

Who are key workers?

In **England, Northern Ireland and Wales**, key workers are those whose work is critical to the COVID-19 response. This includes those working in the following sectors:

- **Health and social care** including doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, social workers, care workers and staff required to maintain the health and social care sector.
- **Education and childcare** including teachers, support staff, social workers and specialist education staff.
- **Local and national government** including only those administrative occupations essential to the delivery of the COVID-19 response or delivering essential public services.
- **Food and other necessary goods** including those involved in food production, processing, distribution, sale and delivery, and those involved in the provision of hygienic and veterinary medicines.
- **Public safety and national security** including police, support staff, contractor and armed forces personnel, fire and rescue service employees, those maintaining border security, prison and probation staff and other national security roles.
- **Transport** including those who will keep the air, water, road and rail passenger and freight transport modes operating and those working on transport systems through which supply chains pass.
- **Utilities, communication and financial services** including those working in banks and building societies, the oil, gas, water and electricity sectors, the information technology and data infrastructure sector, the civil nuclear, chemicals and telecommunications sectors, postal and delivery services, payment providers and waste disposal.
- Other workers essential to **key public services** (Cabinet Office and DfE, 2020; Department of Education, 2020b; Welsh Government, 2020c).

In **England** and **Wales**, “workers essential to key public services” includes:

- those essential to the running of the justice system
 - religious staff
 - charities and workers delivering key frontline services
 - those responsible for the management of the deceased
 - journalists and broadcasters
- (Cabinet Office and DfE, 2020; Welsh Government, 2020c).

In **Scotland**, decisions as to who is a key worker will be taken at a local level. However, key workers are broadly split into three categories.

- **Category 1** includes health and care workers directly supporting the COVID-19 response or supporting life threatening emergency work, energy suppliers and staff providing childcare and learning for other category 1 workers.
- **Category 2** includes all other health and care workers, fire, police, prison and social workers and those supporting Scotland’s Critical National Infrastructure.

- **Category 3** includes all workers without whom there could be a significant impact on Scotland but the COVID-19 response or ability to perform essential tasks to keep the country running would not be severely compromised (Scottish Government, 2020a).

What if one parent is a key worker but another is not?

Guidance in all nations states that wherever possible, children should be cared for at home.

In **England** and **Northern Ireland**, children can go to school if only one parent is a key worker. But if children can be cared for at home they should be (DfE, 2020f; Department of Education, 2020a).

In **Scotland** and **Wales**, if one parent is a key worker and another is not, the non-key worker parent should care for children (Scottish Government, 2020a; Welsh Government, 2020a).

If a child is at a residential special school do they need to go home?

In **England**, residential special schools should conduct risk assessments for the whole setting and individual students to make decisions about individual placements and how self-isolation measures should be followed (DfE and PHE, 2020).

In **Northern Ireland**, **Scotland** and **Wales** special schools and residential special schools should remain open wherever possible to care for the children who attend them (Department of Education, 2020a; Scottish Government, 2020a; Welsh Government, 2020f).

Are nurseries and other childcare settings open?

Across the UK nurseries, pre-schools and other childcare settings should remain open for children who are vulnerable and children whose parents are key workers (DfE, 2020b; Department of Education, 2020a; Scottish Government, 2020a; Welsh Government, 2020b).

Should schools stay open over the Easter holiday?

Across the UK, schools and childcare settings should stay open over the Easter holidays where possible, for children who are vulnerable and whose parents are key workers (DfE, 2020e; Department of Education, 2020a; Scottish Government, 2020a; Welsh Government, 2020f).

Safeguarding and child protection

What changes should be made to schools' safeguarding policies and procedures?

In **England**, schools and colleges should continue to follow the statutory guidance, Keeping children safe in education (KCSIE) (DfE, 2020g). Schools and colleges should review their child protection policy and revise it in line with current circumstances. A COVID-19 annexe or addendum may be more appropriate than re-writing the whole policy. Staff and volunteers should be made aware of the new policy and kept up to date if it is revised. The policy should also be made available publicly (DfE, 2020e).

In **Scotland**, professionals should be aware that the vulnerability of some children may increase as a result of the pandemic. There may be increased incidence of domestic abuse and children may be exposed to more risks online or be at greater risk of sexual exploitation (Scottish Government, 2020d).

In **Northern Ireland** and **Wales** there is no additional guidance on safeguarding and child protection policies during the pandemic. However, schools may wish to follow advice from England and Scotland as examples of best practice.

What happens if nominated child protection leads need to self-isolate or become ill?

In **England**, where it is not possible for a designated safeguarding lead (DSL) or deputy to be on site, a trained DSL should be contactable via phone or online video. This could be the school's own DSL if they are working from home or a shared DSL or deputy from another school. If a trained DSL or deputy is not on site, a senior leader should take responsibility for co-ordinating safeguarding on site (DfE, 2020e).

In **Scotland**, local authorities will need to consider how best to continue to provide key points of contact (named persons) during the school closure period (Scottish Government, 2020a).

Northern Ireland and **Wales** have not provided guidance on nominated child protection leads, but professionals may want to follow the guidance in England as best practice. All staff and volunteers working with children should follow school procedures on how to report concerns if the nominated child protection lead is unavailable.

How should attendance be monitored?

In **England**, schools do not need to take an attendance register. However they should submit a daily attendance form which will enable them to keep track of attendance for safeguarding purposes and to allow the DfE to track capacity (DfE, 2020a). Schools

and colleges should follow up on any child they were expecting to attend school who does not. Social workers should be notified of any vulnerable children who do not attend school (DfE, 2020e).

In **Northern Ireland**, schools and pre-schools have been asked to complete a survey each day to establish the number of children attending school (Department of Education, 2020e).

In **Scotland** and **Wales** there is no guidance on monitoring attendance but professionals may want to follow the guidance in England and Northern Ireland as best practice.

Can children who aren't defined as vulnerable but who may be at risk go to school?

In **England**, the guidance states that leaders of educational settings and designated safeguarding leads will know who their most vulnerable children are. Schools have the flexibility to offer places to children who are "on the edge" of receiving support from children's social care (DfE and PHE, 2020).

In **Northern Ireland** the Department of Education will support headteachers to support children facing social difficulties who are not included in the definition of vulnerable children (Department of Education, 2020b).

In **Scotland**, those who work directly with children and young people are best placed to identify children and young people who need support. The lead professional for managing a child's plan should advise on whether vulnerable children need to attend school (Scottish Government, 2020a).

In **Wales**, the guidance states that only particularly vulnerable children and children of key workers should be attending school at this time (Welsh Government, 2020h). It does not mention children who are not defined as vulnerable.

What information should be shared if children need to attend a different school to normal?

In **England**, the guidance states that some schools may not be able to remain open due to staff shortages and children will need to attend a different setting (DfE, 2020f). For looked after children, any change in setting should be managed by the virtual school head (VSH) with responsibility for the child (DfE, 2020e).

Schools should provide relevant child protection and welfare information to the alternative setting, before the child arrives or as soon as possible afterwards. Information should be shared between designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) and special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) as relevant. If this is not possible, senior leaders should take responsibility (DfE, 2020e).

In **Northern Ireland** groups of schools may come together to form a COVID-19 (C-19) cluster. Schools should pass on relevant safeguarding, special educational needs (SEN) and medical information to the leader in charge of the cluster. If this is not possible due to staff absence, parents should provide relevant information (Department of Education, 2020c).

In **Scotland** and **Wales**, guidance does not mention children attending different schools as a result of the pandemic, but professionals may want to refer to the guidance from England and Northern Ireland as examples of best practice.

Do staff moving between schools need a safeguarding induction?

In **England**, staff may be moving between schools and colleges to ensure appropriate staff levels during the pandemic. Schools receiving existing staff from other schools should assess on a case-by-case basis the level of safeguarding induction needed. (DfE, 2020e).

In **Northern Ireland**, **Scotland** and **Wales** guidance does not specify what schools should do about staff moving between settings. Schools may want to follow guidance from England as an example of best practice.

Staffing and recruitment

Do schools still need to follow safer recruitment practices?

In **England**, schools and colleges should continue to follow safer recruitment practices set out in statutory guidance when they are recruiting new staff and volunteers. Staff and volunteers who have not undergone safer recruitment checks must not be left unsupervised or allowed to work in regulated activity (DfE, 2020e).

In **England** and **Wales**, the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) has updated their guidance on ID checking to minimise the need for face-to-face contact. (DBS, 2020)

In **Northern Ireland**, **Scotland** and **Wales** guidance does not specify what schools should do about recruitment during the coronavirus pandemic. Schools may want to follow guidance from England as an example of best practice.

Do staff and volunteers moving between schools need new vetting and barring checks?

In **England**, staff and volunteers moving between schools who have already undergone the appropriate Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks do not need a

new DBS check. This also applies for staff moving between different types of settings, for example childcare staff working in schools (DfE, 2020e).

In **Northern Ireland, Scotland** and **Wales** guidance does not specify what checks should be carried out on staff moving between settings. Schools may want to follow guidance from England as an example of best practice.

Child welfare

How should schools and childcare settings implement social distancing measures?

In **England** the Department for Education (DfE) has published guidance on social distancing for schools and childcare settings. This sets out measures schools should take to minimise the risk of transmission of coronavirus whilst ensuring children are being well cared for (DfE, 2020d).

In **Scotland**, the Scottish Government has published advice for schools and childcare settings who are providing care to children during the pandemic. This includes guidance on how to implement social distancing measures with children (Scottish Government, 2020b).

In **Wales**, the Welsh Government has published guidance on social distancing for education and childcare settings. This sets out measures schools should take to minimise the risk of transmission of coronavirus whilst ensuring children are well cared for (Welsh Government, 2020d).

Northern Ireland has not provided specific guidance on how schools and childcare settings should implement social distancing measures but staff may wish to follow guidance from other nations as examples of best practice.

How should schools look after children's mental health and wellbeing?

In **England**, teachers should be mindful of the current circumstances and how they are affecting children and families when they are setting expectations of children's work at home. Existing provision for mental health support for children and young people may be delivered through different means, for example over the phone (DfE, 2020e).

In **Wales**, there should be added focus on pastoral care and activities to support the mental wellbeing of staff and children. This should include recognition of the importance of strong relationships to wellbeing. Local authorities should ensure that counselling provision continues to be available, including online counselling where

appropriate. Schools should take a zero tolerance approach to bullying, including racially aggravated behaviour that may occur as a result of the pandemic (Welsh Government, 2020d).

In **Scotland** and **Northern Ireland** there is no specific guidance on looking after children's wellbeing. However, professionals may want to follow guidance from England and Wales as examples of best practice.

Will children face stigma if they attend school because they're vulnerable?

In **England**, guidance states that the majority of children attending school at the moment will be there because their parents are key workers. This means vulnerable children should not be easily identifiable by their peers (DfE and PHE, 2020).

In **Northern Ireland**, **Scotland** and **Wales** the guidance does not mention children facing stigma by attending school but professionals may want to refer to the England guidance as an example of best practice.

What should schools do about free school meals?

In **England**, schools should continue to provide free school meals to all eligible children through either meals or food parcels from their usual catering team or supermarket vouchers through the new national scheme (DfE, 2020c).

In **Northern Ireland**, eligible families will receive fortnightly direct payments (Department of Education, 2020d).

In **Scotland**, local authorities, early learning settings and schools should continue to provide free school meals to eligible children through cash payments, supermarket vouchers or food parcels (Scottish Government, 2020a).

In **Wales**, schools should provide food parcels or vouchers for children eligible for free school meals. Schools should continue to provide free school meals throughout the Easter holidays (Welsh Government, 2020e).

Can children still see both parents if their parents are separated?

Across the UK, people must comply with social distancing guidelines. However the guidelines state that where parents do not live in the same household, children under 18 can move between their parents' homes (Cabinet Office, 2020; Scottish Government, 2020c; Welsh Government, 2020g).

In **England**, Cafcass has published guidance on co-parenting and contact arrangements. This states that children should maintain their usual routine of spending time with each of their parents unless doing so would put the child, parents or others at risk (Cafcass, 2020).

In **England and Wales**, guidance from the Courts and Tribunals Judiciary states that separated parents should communicate with each other and decide what would be a good, practical solution to maintaining the conditions of child arrangement orders during the pandemic. If one parent is sufficiently concerned that complying with child arrangement orders would be against current public health advice, they may change the arrangement to one they feel is safe. If a child does not get to spend time with one of their parents as set out in the child arrangement order, alternative arrangements should be made to maintain regular contact. This could be through video call or telephone (Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, 2020).

References

Cabinet Office (2020) **Staying at home and away from others (social distancing)**. [Accessed 26/03/2020].

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others>>

Cabinet Office and Department for Education (DfE) (2020) **Guidance for schools, childcare providers, colleges and local authorities in England on maintaining educational provision**. [Accessed 26/03/2020].

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>>

Cafcass (2020) **Co-parenting and child arrangements in a global pandemic – advice for families**. [Accessed 26/03/2020].

<<https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/grown-ups/parents-and-carers/covid-19-guidance-for-children-and-families/>>

Courts and Tribunals Judiciary (2020) **Coronavirus Crisis: Guidance on Compliance with Family Court Child Arrangement Orders**. [Accessed 26/03/2020].

<<https://www.judiciary.uk/announcements/coronavirus-crisis-guidance-on-compliance-with-family-court-child-arrangement-orders/>>

Department for Education (2020a) **Coronavirus (COVID-19): attendance recording for educational settings**. [Accessed 03/04/2020].

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-attendance-recording-for-educational-settings>>

Department for Education (DfE) (2020b) **Coronavirus (COVID-19): early years and childcare closures**. [Accessed 26/03/2020].

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures>>

Department for Education (DfE) (2020c) **Coronavirus (COVID-19): free school meals guidance for schools**. [Accessed 31/03/2020].

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance-for-schools>>

Department for Education (2020d) **Coronavirus (COVID-19): implementing social distancing in education and childcare settings**. [Accessed 02/04/2020].

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings>>

Department for Education (2020e) **Coronavirus (COVID-19): safeguarding in schools, colleges and other providers**. [Accessed 30/03/2020].

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-safeguarding-in-schools-colleges-and-other-providers/coronavirus-covid-19-safeguarding-in-schools-colleges-and-other-providers>>

Department for Education (DfE) (2020f) **Guidance for schools about temporarily closing**. [Accessed 26/03/2020].

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-school-closures/guidance-for-schools-about-temporarily-closing>>

Department for Education (DfE) (2020g) **Keeping children safe in education**. [Accessed 03/04/2020].

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>>

Department for Education (DfE) and Public Health England (PHE) (2020) **Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance on vulnerable children and young people**. [Accessed 26/03/2020]

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people>>

Department of Education [2020a] **FAQs for schools opening for children of key workers – 24 March 2020**. [Accessed 26/03/2020].

<<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/faqs-schools-opening-children-key-workers-24-march-2020>>

Department of Education [2020b] **General guidance on COVID-19 for schools**. [Accessed 26/03/2020].

<<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/general-guidance-covid-19-schools>>

Department of Education [2020c] **Guidance to schools on cluster arrangements.** [Accessed 02/04/2020].

<<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/guidance-schools-cluster-arrangements>>

Department of Education (2020d) **Ministers take action in relation to free school meals payment.** [Accessed 26/03/2020].

<<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/ministers-take-action-relation-free-school-meals-payment-0>>

Department of Education (2020e) **Update on school closures from Education Ministers.** [Accessed 27/03/2020].

<<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/update-school-closures-education-minister>>

Disclosure and Barring Service (2020) **COVID-19: Changes to DBS ID checking guidelines.** [Accessed 03/04/2020].

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/covid-19-changes-to-dbs-id-checking-guidelines>>

Scottish Government (2020a) **Coronavirus (COVID-19): school and early learning closures - guidance about key workers and vulnerable children.** [Accessed 26/03/2020].

<<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus---school-and-elc-closures-guidance-on-critical-childcare-provision-for-key-workers/>>

Scottish Government (2020b) **Coronavirus (COVID-19): social distancing in education and childcare settings.** [Accessed 02/04/2020].

<<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings/pages/education-provision/>>

Scottish Government (2020c) **Coronavirus (COVID-19): staying at home and away from others (social distancing).** [Accessed 31/03/2020].

<<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others-social-distancing/pages/staying-at-home/>>

Scottish Government (2020d) **Coronavirus (COVID-19) supplementary national child protection guidance.** [Accessed 03/04/2020].

<<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-supplementary-national-child-protection-guidance/>>

Welsh Government (2020a) **5 things you need to know before sending your children to school or childcare (coronavirus).** [Accessed 26/03/2020].

<<https://gov.wales/5-things-you-need-know-sending-your-children-school-or-childcare-coronavirus>>

Welsh Government (2020b) **Coronavirus and childcare provision**. [Accessed 26/03/2020].

<<https://gov.wales/coronavirus-and-childcare-provision>>

Welsh Government (2020c) **Coronavirus key (critical) workers**. [Accessed 30/03/2020].

<<https://gov.wales/coronavirus-key-critical-workers>>

Welsh Government (2020d) **Health and well-being for school staff and learners: coronavirus**. [Accessed 03/04/2020].

<<https://gov.wales/health-and-well-being-school-staff-and-learners-coronavirus>>

Welsh Government (2020e) **Free school meals: coronavirus guidance for schools**. [Accessed 31/03/2020].

<<https://gov.wales/free-school-meals-coronavirus-guidance-schools>>

Welsh Government (2020f) **School opening times and services: coronavirus**. [Accessed 03/04/2020].

<<https://gov.wales/how-schools-will-work-during-coronavirus-pandemic>>

Welsh Government (2020g) **Staying at home and away from others guidance**. [Accessed 03/04/2020].

<<https://gov.wales/staying-home-and-away-others-guidance>>

Welsh Government (2020h) **Written Statement: Eligibility for ongoing provision for children who are vulnerable, or whose parents are critical to the COVID-19 response**. [Accessed 26/03/2020].

<<https://gov.wales/written-statement-eligibility-ongoing-provision-children-who-are-vulnerable-or-whose-parents-are>>

+ More ways to help you protect children



Sign up to CASPAR to stay up-to-date with the latest safeguarding legislation and guidance.
nspcc.org.uk/caspar



Visit [NSPCC Learning](#) for more information about safeguarding during the coronavirus pandemic.



Visit [Childline](#) for advice and resources for children about the coronavirus pandemic.

