



An Roinn Leanaí
agus Gnóthaí Óige
Department of Children
and Youth Affairs

FAQs for Providers on Reopening of Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare settings



FAQs for Providers

1. Should we conduct regular temperature checks for staff and/or children?

No, the public health advice is that routine temperature checking for staff and/or children is not required.

2. Should staff/children be tested for COVID-19 prior to the service reopening?

No, public health advice is that staff/children do not need to be tested for COVID-19 unless they are displaying symptoms such as fever (high temperature), cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing. You should advise staff and parents that they should not attend the service if they or the children are displaying symptoms. They should stay home and contact their GP.

3. Will staff/children who are displaying symptoms be prioritised for testing?

Current public health advice is that childcare practitioners/children do not need to be prioritised for testing. You should advise staff and parents that they should not attend the service if they or the children are displaying symptoms. They should self-isolate as quickly as possible and telephone their doctor. Their doctor will arrange testing for them if they need a test.

4. Do I need to shut my service if a staff member or child is suspected to have COVID-19?

If a child/staff member in your setting is displaying symptoms of COVID-19 they should leave or be collected from the service immediately. They or their parents/guardians should be advised to contact their doctor.

If testing is arranged for them, the childcare setting will be contacted by local public health staff to discuss the case, identify people who have been in contact with them and advise on any actions or precautions that should be taken.

It is not necessary to take any action in relation to closing your service, partially or in full, until you have been contacted by and discussed the case with local public health staff.

You should follow the advice set out in the HPSC's "[Infection Prevention and Control guidance for settings providing childcare during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)" in relation to cleaning rooms/settings where there was a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19. If a room is closed temporarily for cleaning and no other room is available, the staff/children using that room may have to leave the setting until the room is available again.

5. What is a play-pod?

The "play pod" model is a safe and playful approach to restricting interactions between closed groups of children and adults **as an alternative to social distancing**, which is not possible with young children. The purpose of 'play-pods' is to limit the number of people a child has contact with, to facilitate contact tracing, and to support close, positive interactions between children

and their adult caregivers, like in a key-worker system, which is characteristic of many childcare settings. This system will also reduce the amount of contact adults have with each other.

6. Is there a maximum play-pod size?

The public health advice from the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) is that while there is no evidence base on which to define a maximum play-pod size, play-pods should be kept as small as is likely to be reasonably practical in the specific childcare context.

The maximum adult-child ratios required by the Early Years Services Regulations, 2016 will remain unchanged and so services must continue to operate within them. Where possible, there should be two adults in a 'play-pod'. Therefore, pod size (with two adults) will be limited by those ratios. It is also acceptable to have one adult in a play-pod, provided the play-pod is within the maximum adult-child ratio and, staff breaks are managed in such a way as to minimise risk of infection (more information below). For example, a play-pod that involves 3-6 year olds in full day care may have a maximum size of either nine (one adult and eight children) or 18 (two adults and 16 children). For children under 1 in full day care the maximum pod size can be either four (one adult and three children) or eight (two adults and six children). For 1-2 year olds maximum pod sizes may be six (one adult and five children) or 12 (two adults and ten children).

It is important to remember that risk of infection in a service will already be reduced by:

- (a) Ensuring that people with symptoms do not enter the setting at any time and,
- (b) Taking practical precautions to reduce the chance of spread of virus, especially between play-pods, just in case an infectious person with no symptoms is in the childcare setting.

7. How many play-pods can I have in one room?

It is possible to have just one play-pod in a room or, if space permits, there may be more than one play-pod in a room. For example in a baby room (<1yr old) there might be two pods: one pod of two adults and six babies and another pod of one adult and three babies.

Where there is more than one play-pod in a room, play-pods should be separated from each other by light and/or transparent partitions of sufficient height to limit children interacting with each other. There is no requirement for solid partitions from floor to ceiling. In partitioning rooms you should consider access points (shared or separate), access to handwashing and toilet facilities and fire safety. You should also ensure that the pod complies with the Early Years Services Regulations, 2016 in relation to clear floor space.

8. Can children from different play-pods use the same sleep room?

Yes. However, sleeping cots/beds should be arranged so that there is physical distance of 2 metres between groups of cots for children from different pods.

There is no requirement to arrange sleeping cots/beds for children within the same pod differently. In line with the Early Years Services Regulations, 2016 these should be arranged as normal so that there is a physical distance of 50cm between cots.

9. How should I manage drop offs and collections?

Arrangements for dropping off and picking up children from childcare should be organised to maintain physical distance between adults. Public health advice is that this can be done by staggering arrival and collection times, having demarcated waiting areas outside the entrance to the setting or by asking parents to wait with their children in their car until a childcare practitioner comes to collect them.

The last option (collection from car) may not be appropriate in many settings or for younger children and may cause anxiety among children and parents. Collection from cars may work best for school-age children. Service providers should consider what works best in the context of their own setting, the outside space available, the age range of their children and the needs of parents. **Whatever approach is used, providers should ensure that, wherever possible, physical distance is maintained between adults and between children from different play-pods.**

10. A parent has applied to register their child with my service for the first time. Can I register them?

Yes, if you have capacity within your setting you may register new families. Where possible it is proposed that children should be enabled to return to the childcare service they attended pre-COVID-19. The criteria for eligibility for access to childcare has been widened. Subject to local capacity, from 29 June services are encouraged to support:

- children of health and social care workers, other frontline workers, childcare practitioners and parents who need access to childcare in order to return to work;
- vulnerable children sponsored under the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) (for example, children whose families are homeless and Tusla referrals) and children funded through legacy childcare schemes who are experiencing poverty, disadvantage or child welfare issues;
- children with disabilities who previously attended part or full-time early learning and care, including those preparing to start school in September; and
- children previously registered in childcare services on March 12, whose parents continue to need childcare for employment or training purposes and who were assured that they would retain their place through conditions attached to the Temporary Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme (TWSCS).

If your capacity is limited, you should initially seek to support frontline workers.

11. Can I only offer places to frontline workers?

No, as mentioned previously, the criteria for eligibility for access to childcare has been widened. Subject to local capacity, from 29 June services are encouraged to support:

- children of health and social care workers, other frontline workers, childcare practitioners and parents who need access to childcare in order to return to work;
- vulnerable children sponsored under the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) (for example, children whose families are homeless and Tusla referrals) and children funded through legacy childcare schemes who are experiencing poverty, disadvantage or child welfare issues;
- children with disabilities who previously attended part or full-time early learning and care, including those preparing to start school in September; and
- children previously registered in childcare services on March 12, whose parents continue to need childcare for employment or training purposes and who were assured that they would retain their place through conditions attached to the Department's Temporary Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme (TWSCS).

Where possible it is proposed that children should be enabled to return to the childcare service they attended pre-COVID-19. If your capacity is limited, you should initially seek to support children of frontline workers.

12. What should I do if all of my places are full but I have enquiries from parents looking for places?

If you are already at capacity and are still receiving enquiries you should direct those enquiries to your local CCC as there may be places available in another setting in your area. You may also wish to maintain a waiting list of families in case capacity becomes available at a future date. Management of waiting lists is a matter for the service provider; however, you are encouraged to prioritise frontline workers in such instances.