



Coronavirus
COVID-19
Public Health
Advice



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

School Age Services – Key Messages



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The [Infection and Prevention Control Guidance](#) for service operating during Covid-19, published by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC), applies to all early years services both preschool and school age. Similarly, all of the reopening guidance, support materials and resources available on the [First 5 page](#) apply to both preschool and school age services.

While the guidance and supports apply to all services, the following key messages may be of particular relevance to school age services.

Social distancing

Social distancing is not a requirement for children of any age in early learning and care or school age childcare settings. Play-pods are recommended as an alternative to social distancing. The purpose of 'play-pods' is to limit the number of people a child or adult has contact with, to facilitate contact tracing, and to support close, positive interactions between children and staff. Regulatory adult-child ratios remain unchanged.

When not engaged in childcare (e.g. on breaks or arriving for work) adults working in the service should maintain a distance of 2m from others in line with National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) recommendations.

Use of face coverings

The NPHE recommends the use of cloth face coverings in certain indoor settings. This [guidance](#) is applicable to adults in childcare settings where it does not pose a barrier to care. This includes situations where there is interaction between adults when not caring for children.

If a childcare worker wishes to use a face covering but this may pose a barrier to care, they may consider use of a visor. Visors should extend from above the eyes to below the chin and from ear to ear.

Mixing of play-pods

To the greatest extent possible children and adults should consistently be cared for /deliver care in the same play-pod. However, it is acknowledged that this will not always be possible.

Play-pods will need to be structured in a practical way that takes account of the specific context of the setting. For example, it may not be practical to group all children who attend the same school or class in the same play-pod in a childcare setting as there may be issues of compatibility, for instance, their age. However if a setting has 2 or more children from the same age group/play-pod/class in a school they should, where possible, be placed in the same play-pod together.

Play-pods may include a mix of pre-school and school age children even if they are not together

for the whole day. Even where a play-pod includes a mix of pre-school and school age children, those children should consistently attend the same play-pod, where possible. As noted above, adult-child ratios remain unchanged for both age-specific and mixed age range play-pods.

Services will need to examine, in the context of their own settings, how best to structure play-pods.

Transport

Services may continue to use service transport (car or bus) to collect or drop off children. As with any staff member, the driver or any adult/staff member accompanying them should not attend for work if they have symptoms of COVID-19 or have been identified as a close contact of someone with Covid-19.

The driver/staff member accompanying them should wear a cloth face covering/visor unless they are protected by a screen and so long as it does not pose a barrier to care. This is in line with the NPHEP recommendation on the use of face coverings on public transport.

Children should embark and disembark one at a time from the vehicle.

Supplies of hand sanitizer, tissues, gloves or wipes should be readily available. Hand hygiene should be performed by both the children and the driver/other staff assisting with transport.

Where possible, children from the same play-pods should travel together or be seated together. Where children from different play-pods are being transported together, as much distance as is practical should be maintained between them. This will be easier to arrange on a bus than in a car and so, in some cases, children from different play-pods may need to be seated together. A daily record should be kept of the children who were transported together to help with contact tracing, if required.

Contact surfaces within the vehicle should be cleaned with water and detergent at least daily and whenever there is visible contamination.

Note: Services are advised to engage closely with both parents and schools to ensure a smooth return to normal operations which takes account of the needs of the various parties.