

What parents and carers need to know about schools and education during the coronavirus outbreak

Updated 23 April 2020

1. Closures of schools, childcare and other educational settings
2. Exams
3. Transport
4. Free school meals
5. Vulnerable children
6. Critical workers
7. Resources and support

1. Closures of schools, childcare and other educational settings

1.1 What age groups does this cover?

The changes cover children at registered childcare providers (including nurseries and childminders), primary and secondary schools and [further education](#) colleges. This is for both state-funded and independent schools.

1.2 Will it be mandatory for all schools, colleges and registered childcare providers to remain open in some form?

We are asking schools, colleges, nurseries, childminders and other registered childcare settings to remain open for children of critical workers and vulnerable children where they can.

We understand that some may be unable to do so especially if they are experiencing severe staff shortages. We will work with local areas to use neighbouring schools, colleges and childcare providers to continue to support vulnerable children and children of critical workers.

1.3 How long will childcare settings, schools and colleges be closed for?

Due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, schools, colleges and childcare providers will remain closed until further notice, except for children of critical workers and vulnerable children. We will only re-open schools when the scientific advice indicates it is safe to do so, and will engage closely with the sector on our approach.

1.4 Will this apply to independent schools and boarding schools and residential further education providers?

Yes. We are asking independent schools and boarding schools and residential further education providers to do the same as state schools and remain open for critical workers and vulnerable children.

1.5 I am a critical worker or have a vulnerable child - can you guarantee that my child will attend their usual educational setting school or childcare provider?

We are expecting the majority of settings to stay open for the children of critical workers and vulnerable children so they can continue to attend their usual provider, but we acknowledge this will be impossible for some - such as small rural schools.

Where a setting is unable to stay open, we will work with local authorities, regional school commissioners and neighbouring providers to find an alternative setting for their pupils.

1.6 I am a critical worker or have a vulnerable child but my child's educational setting has closed. What should I do?

Arrangements will be made in your local area to ensure that your child can still attend an educational setting. If your setting has not already informed you about those arrangements, please contact your local authority. They will be working with regional school commissioners and neighbouring providers to make alternative arrangements. You can [find out your local authority](#) by entering your postcode.

1.7 What if I have to leave my children at home unattended?

Read the government advice on [the law on leaving children unattended](#).

There is no law about when you can leave your child on their own but it is an offence to leave them alone if it places them at risk. As parents, you should use your judgement on how mature your child is before you decide to leave them at home.

It is important to be aware that you can be prosecuted if you leave a child alone 'in a manner likely to cause unnecessary suffering or injury to health'. If you are at all unsure, the NSPCC recommends that children under 12 are rarely mature enough to be left alone for a long period of time, children under 16 should not be left alone overnight and babies, toddlers and very young children should never be left alone.

1.8 Does this affect universities and other higher education institutions?

Universities and other higher education providers should make their own judgements based on [latest guidance for educational settings](#). Vice chancellors are well placed to make decisions about their own institution, and many have already moved all their teaching online. The government is supporting them with these decisions.

Advice continues to be that [all student accommodation should remain open](#) unless advised otherwise by Public Health England. Many universities provide homes to

international students, estranged students and care leavers who might not have anywhere else to go.

The Department for Education is working with the Home Office to avoid individuals and institutions being penalised if online provision inadvertently leads to [non-compliance with Tier 4 visa rules](#).

1.9 Does this apply to special schools?

We recognise that children and young people with special educational needs and disability (SEND) and their parents and carers are facing numerous challenges as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19). Residential special schools and other special settings should be supported to remain open, wherever possible.

Special schools, colleges and local authorities are advised to make case by case assessments of the health and safeguarding considerations of pupils and students on an education, health and care (EHC) plan. For some, they will be safer in an education setting. For others, they will be safer at home. We trust leaders and parents to make these decisions and will support them as required.

1.10 Why is my childcare provider telling me that they will continue to charge me during coronavirus (COVID-19) related closures?

The government acknowledges that in many cases, the insurance that early years providers have will not cover them for income lost during coronavirus (COVID-19) related closures.

That is why the government has set out a range of support for businesses to reduce the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on them, including for early years providers. This includes a business rate holiday for all private childcare providers for one year from 1 April.

We urge all childcare settings to be reasonable and balanced in their dealings with parents, given the great uncertainty they will also be facing.

2. Exams

2.1 What will happen to exams?

Primary assessments, including SATs, and exams, including GCSEs, AS levels and A levels, will not go ahead this summer.

The exam regulator, Ofqual, and exam boards will work with teachers and other educational staff to provide grades to students whose exams have been cancelled this summer. Further information is available for schools and colleges, students and parents on [how qualifications will be awarded in summer 2020](#).

3. Transport

3.1 My child is still attending school, and usually gets free transport. Will they still get this?

Yes. Local authorities remain under a statutory duty to provide free home to school transport for eligible children, where those children are still attending school.

3.2 If children are attending an alternative setting, will transport be provided?

We will work closely with local authorities to put the necessary arrangements in place to support children.

4. Free school meals

4.1 If my child is eligible for free school meals, will they still receive a meal or food voucher while the school is closed?

Yes. Under normal circumstances, schools are not expected to provide free school meals to eligible children who are not attending due to illness or if the school is closed. However, during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak we expect schools to continue to provide support to these children if the school is only open for certain groups or closed.

Headteachers can decide which of the available options will be best for families in their area. Schools can either provide food to be picked up, arrange deliveries or order a voucher to be given to the family. Contact your school to find out what they are providing. More [information on support for pupils eligible for school meals](#) is available.

5. Vulnerable children

5.1 Is my child counted as vulnerable?

During the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, vulnerable children and young people are defined as those who:

- are assessed as being in need under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, including children who have a child in need plan, a child protection plan or who are a looked after child
- have an education, health and care (EHC) plan whose needs cannot be met safely in the home environment

- have been assessed as otherwise vulnerable by educational providers or local authorities (including children's social care services), and who are therefore in need of continued education provision

This might include children on the edge of receiving support from children's social care services, adopted children, or those who are young carers, and others at the provider and local authority discretion.

You can access further [guidance on supporting vulnerable children and young people during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#).

5.2 Is it compulsory for parents of vulnerable children to accept their place offer?

There is an expectation that vulnerable children who have a social worker will attend provision, so long as they do not have underlying health conditions that put them at higher risk than others. In circumstances where a parent does not want to bring their child to an education setting, and their child is considered vulnerable, the social worker and education provider should explore the reasons for this, directly with the parent.

Where parents are concerned about the risk of the child contracting the virus, the education provider should talk through these anxieties with the parent following the [advice set out by Public Health England](#).

Those with an EHC plan should be risk-assessed by their education setting in consultation with the local authority and parents, to decide whether they need to continue to be offered a school/college place in order to meet their needs, or whether they can safely have their needs met at home. This could include, if necessary, carers, therapists or clinicians visiting the home to provide any essential services. Many children and young people with EHC plans can safely remain at home.

5.3 How can I report if I am worried a child or young person might be at risk of harm?

To further protect children and young people from harm, we are working with the NSPCC to expand and promote its Helpline.

Parents or any adult will be able to call if they want someone to talk to, and they should get in touch if they are worried about a child or young person. Anyone with concerns should call 0808 800 5000 or email help@nspcc.org.uk.

6. Critical workers

6.1 Will I be counted as a critical worker?

Parents whose work is critical to the coronavirus (COVID-19) response include those who work in health and social care and in other key sectors.

Children with a parent or carer who is listed on the government's [critical worker list](#) should be considered for a school place.

6.2 If only one parent or carer is a critical worker, can I send my children to school?

Children with at least one parent or carer who is critical to the coronavirus (COVID-19) response can attend school if required.

6.3 I am a critical worker but I don't want to send my child in to school or childcare, do I have to?

Children with a parent or carer who is listed on the government's [critical worker list](#) should be considered for a school place. This is an offer to parents and carers and there is no requirement for parents and carers to send their children to school if they do not need or wish to do so.

7. Resources and support

7.1 What support is available to parents to help them educate their children at home and to access children's social care services?

We want to support schools and parents to ensure children and young people's education can continue.

We also want to ensure that children with a social worker can continue to receive support from children's social care services, and that care leavers have the online access they need to keep in touch with the support and services they need.

To help our most disadvantaged young people access online learning, devices will be ordered for children who would otherwise not have access to one and are preparing for exams (in year 10) and for those who receive support from a social worker or are a care leaver.

Where care leavers, children with a social worker at secondary school and disadvantaged children in year 10, do not have internet connections, we are providing 4G routers to them so that they can learn at home. In addition, we are working with the country's major telecommunication providers to make it easier for families to access selected educational resources by temporarily exempting these sites from data charges.

For support to access social care services, you should first contact your local authority. For year 10 children, you should contact your child's school, who will be able to offer advice.

Other available support includes:

- [a list of online educational resources](#) which have been identified by some of the country's leading educational experts to help pupils to learn at home

- guidance to [help primary school children continue their education during coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#)
- enhanced education provision from the [BBC to include daily lessons](#) starting from 20 April 2020
- an online resource from [Oak National Academy](#) with daily lessons available to both primary and secondary pupils (your child's school is best placed to advise you regarding whether to use the academy alongside their existing offer)

7.2 What resources are available for parents with children under 5 to help support their children's early learning at home?

For parents with children under 5 years old who have not yet started school, the Department for Education's [Hungry Little Minds campaign](#) features tips and practical activities that you can do at home with children to support their early learning. There are many simple ways to help your children learn and it does not have to feel like 'learning'.

Having everyday conversations, make-believe play and reading together all make a big difference to your child's development. You can find more ideas and content from the BBC's [Tiny Happy People campaign](#) and the National Literacy Trust's [Family Zone](#). The Department for Education has published further guidance on how to [help children aged 2 to 4 to learn at home during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#).

7.3 What advice is available to parents with children aged 4 to 11, to help them support their children's education at home?

We have published [guidance for parents of primary school children regarding supporting the continuation of education at home](#). This includes advice and guidance around:

- structuring the day
- use of digital devices
- language development
- reading and writing
- numeracy
- information tailored to each age group
- information for those with children reaching the end of primary school

This guidance is designed to complement support and advice provided by schools and teachers. Engaging with your child's learning will be helpful in their continued educational development. For example, something as simple as talking to them during the day about what they are doing for school, or about anything around the home, enhances learning.

7.4 My child qualifies for a device and connectivity at home but I don't know how to apply for one. How can I do this?

Devices and routers will be sent to schools and children's social care teams. They will contact you once they have the devices and routers to let you know how to access them.

7.5 Which children and young people are eligible for a device or a router and why?

There are 2 groups of children and young people eligible for a device and connectivity who currently lack access. The first is care leavers and children who receive support from a social worker (including families with pre-school children with a social worker, as well as older children), who need to keep in touch with social care services. The second group are disadvantaged students who would not otherwise have access to online learning and are preparing for exams (in year 10).

Any 16 to 19 year olds in education, without a suitable device or connectivity to study remotely, and whose family cannot afford these costs, should approach their college, school or other 16 to 19 providers to request support. Decisions on support will be made by colleges, schools and other providers. Colleges, schools and other 16 to 19 providers will be able to apply to top up bursary funds where necessary to ensure that vulnerable learners receive appropriate support.

We are also working with major telecommunication companies to temporarily exempt certain educational resources from data charges. More details on this will follow.

7.6 There is too much pressure on broadband connections in my area - how can my child do online learning?

The government is having regular calls with the major fixed and mobile operators, and with Ofcom, to monitor the situation and ensure that any problems on the networks are rapidly addressed and rectified.

We fully understand the importance of having reliable internet connectivity, particularly at this time, so that people can work from home wherever possible and access critical public services online, including health information.

7.7 Is my child at additional risk while spending more time online?

With children spending more time online to do schoolwork and other activities, there could be an additional risk. This is why it is more important than ever that children, parents and carers know how to stay safe online.

It is important that parents and carers talk to their children about online safety, show an interest in what they are doing online and ask what they like and dislike about the apps and services they use. Discuss age appropriate 'ground rules' like how much time they spend online doing different things and what games and apps are appropriate to use. Also consider setting up and reviewing age appropriate parental controls. Setting parental controls can be a quick and effective tool to help protect children online.

7.8 Where can I go to get support to help keep my child safe online?

There is support available to keep your child safe online. You can access [further information on keeping children safe online](#).

Here are some useful links to help parents and carers.

- [Thinkuknow](#) provides advice from the National Crime Agency (NCA) to stay safe online
- to help families manage during this time, the NCA has launched [Thinkuknow: home activity packs](#), a set of fun, engaging activities based on Thinkuknow cartoons, films, games, and advice articles
- a new activity sheet for each age group will be published on the [Thinkuknow](#) website every 2 weeks while schools are closed - these activities offer a great opportunity to help you keep up positive, supportive conversations about online safety in your home
- [Parent Info](#) is a collaboration between Parentzone and the NCA providing support and guidance for parents from leading experts and organisations
- [Childnet](#) provides a tool kit to support parents and carers of children of any age to start discussions about their online life, to set boundaries around online behaviour and technology use, and to find out where to get more help and support
- [Internet Matters](#) provides age-specific online safety checklists, guides on how to set parental controls on a range of devices and a host of practical tips to help children get the most out of their digital world
- [LGfL](#) - support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online, including 6 top tips to keep primary aged children safe online
- [Net Aware](#) - support for parents and carers from the NSPCC, providing a guide to social networks, apps and games
- [Let's Talk About It](#) - support for parents and carers to keep children safe from online radicalisation
- [UK Safer Internet Centre](#) - tips, advice, guides and resources to help keep children safe online, including parental controls offered by home internet providers and safety tools on social networks and other online services
- [staying safe online](#) - government guidance offering advice on parental controls, fact-checking information, communicating with family and friends while social distancing is in place and taking regular breaks

7.9 What support is available to parents to help them maintain their family's wellbeing while their children are at home?

Social connections, alongside exercise, sleep, diet and routine, are important protective factors for mental health. Materials to promote and support mental wellbeing are included in the list of [online resources](#) we have published to help children to learn at home. Public Health England's [Rise Above](#) platform supports young people. The Department of Health and Social Care is providing £5 million of additional funding to support mental health charities to increase their provision for adults and children at this time.

Social isolation, reduced exercise and bereavement may affect children's wellbeing in this period. Resources to promote and support children and young people's mental wellbeing include:

- [MindEd educational resources for adults about children and young people's mental health](#) which is relevant for parents and carers as well as volunteers, teachers, and other professionals working with children

- [Every Mind Matters platform](#) which supports looking after your own and other's mental health
- [guidance on looking after wellbeing and mental health](#) during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak
- [guidance on supporting children's wellbeing and mental health](#)

All NHS mental health trusts are setting up 24/7 helplines and seeking to use digital and virtual channels to continue delivering support during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.