Healthcare Quality & Improvement Directorate
Jason Leitch CBE, National Clinical Director

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

T: 0131-244 5176
E: jason.leitch@.gov.scot

FAO: Parents/carers of children returning to ELC and P1-3

I know that many parents and carers will be pleased that their children are able to return to their early learning and childcare (ELC) setting or to school next week.

Some families might have concerns about safety. I've been asked to write to you to explain the reason for the decision to enable younger children to return to ELC and schools.

As always, this decision has been informed by a range of scientific and clinical evidence. One key finding is that younger children are less likely to get or pass on the virus. Because of this, and the measures that are in place, we know that ELC settings and schools are low-risk settings for these children and school staff.

Evidence and advice

It is natural to be nervous about the return to ELC and school, especially with the news of different variants of coronavirus. We want to reassure you that the decision to allow more children to return was based on very careful consideration of the risks and benefits by experts on the Chief Medical Officer's Advisory Sub-group on Education and Children's Issues. You can find out more about this group and see their published advice here.

The sub-group reviewed evidence on: the state of the pandemic in Scotland; transmission among young children and in ELC settings and schools; and the wider impacts of the current restrictions on children and families. The evidence continues to show that younger children are less likely to catch or pass on the virus than older children and adults. The decision to prioritise the return to ELC and early primary also reflects the role that those very early stages play in supporting children's development, and the challenge of delivering this crucial support remotely.

Reducing risk at schools and ELC settings

With the return to ELC and P1-3, our national guidance has been updated, and ELC settings and schools will be reviewing their risk assessments and may be enhancing some of their own measures. Our key focus is on reducing the risk of adult-to-adult transmission, as well as wider community transmission. We know that we need to continue to reduce contact between adults, including both staff and parents/carers.

There are some important steps that you can take to support the safe return to ELC and P1-3.

1. Wear a face covering, both at drop off and pick up time, but also if there are congested areas nearby.

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE
POSITIVE ABOUT DISABLED PEOPLE

2. Reduce congestion at pick up/drop off time. Please limit it to one adult at drop off/pick up time.
3. Keep 2 metres away from other adults, whether you are waiting for your child or walking to or from school or nursery and avoid gathering in groups with other parents. (Even if you can maintain 2 metres distance you may create congestion that makes it difficult for others to keep a safe distance when they pass.)
4. Avoid car shares and limit use of public transport.
5. Be vigilant for any symptoms in your household, and follow the Test and Protect guidance if anyone displays symptoms.

I know that your schools or ELC settings have their own plans to reduce risk, so they may have specific instructions that they'd like you to follow.

Reducing risk at home

It is important that we don't treat the return to school/ELC as an indication that we can relax the rules elsewhere, as this could lead to an increase in community transmission. While children are mixing at their ELC settings or school, it's still important that they don't start having indoor play dates at home. We know it is important for children's wellbeing to be able to play with friends, but, for now, it's really important that this is outdoors.

There are two reasons for this:

1. We need to take things slowly. With some children returning to ELC and school, we will be able to monitor the impact this has. If we go back to 'normal' we risk increasing transmission to levels that mean we need to close schools and childcare settings again.
2. Household mixing in our home environments is likely to be higher risk than mixing in ELC settings or schools, where adherence to strict guidance is monitored. Simply put, children are more likely to pass on the virus to each other in the home environment.

Please also remember that return to school and childcare does not mean that you should stop working from home, if you're able to do so.

Older children

If you have children in P4-S3 then they won't be returning to school on 22 February, with the exception of key worker and vulnerable children who are already attending when necessary. We are unlikely to have more children return to school before 15 March, at the very earliest.

If your child is in S4-S6 you will be aware that a very limited number of senior phase learners will return next week on a part-time basis for essential in-school practical work only. There will also be small increases in children and young people with additional support needs attending school where there is a demonstrable and immediate need but it remains too soon to make any further commitments regarding all other in-person provision. Schools will be in touch about what this means for individual pupils.

Support and advice

This is hard for all families, but the continued restrictions at home and across society are enabling us to reopen ELC and P1-3 from 22 February. I appreciate your support in keeping community transmission rates down.

If you have questions about the arrangements in your own school or setting, please contact them or your local authority directly.

The Scottish Government's Parent Club team are working incredibly hard to ensure that the information about school and ELC is up to date, so please check there for further FAQs and other helpful information.

Yours faithfully

PROFESSOR JASON LEITCH