

COVID-19 CHILDCARE ADVICE FOR PARENTS VERSION 3 – 29 JUNE 2020

We recognise that as more parents begin to return to work in line with the Executive's recovery plan, demand for childcare provision will increase. That is why, from Monday 29 June 2020, we will no longer restrict access to childcare to keyworkers.

While we expect that many parents are now able to access informal childcare through the formation of a social support unit or "bubble" with a family member or friend living alone, it is important to follow the rules associated with those arrangements, and not rely upon those who are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 for childcare purposes, such as elderly grandparents, or friends or family members with underlying medical conditions.

ACCESSING CHILDCARE

If you require access to childcare, please:

1. **Check the Family Support NI website:** <http://www.familysupportni.gov.uk> for information on available spaces; and
2. If you cannot find a suitable option please **call Parentline on 0808 8020 400.**

OTHER SOURCES OF SUPPORT

Parents should continue to check the Family Support NI website <https://www.familysupportni.gov.uk/> for up-to-date information in relation to childcare.

Employers For Childcare Family Benefits Advice Service provide free, confidential and impartial advice setting out your best options for financial support, and what is the best choice for your family depending on your specific circumstances. The Advisors are available on Freephone 0800 028 3008, or by emailing hello@employersforchildcare.org.

COVID-19 ADVICE

As a parent you will be anxious to know that your child will be safe and it is important to highlight that childcare settings remain safe places for children. With the decision to widen the range of workers for whom childcare is available, we have put in place a number of measures to ensure, as far as possible, that safety is maintained in infection control terms. Those measures include:

- HSC Trust Early Years Teams being part of decisions to re-open childcare settings, assisted by the Public Health Agency;
- The introduction of Play Pods in Daycare and School Age Childcare settings – organising children and staff in small groups (12 children maximum), who don't mix with other groups in the setting; and

- A gradual increase in the numbers of families childminders can provide childcare for at any one time, from 3 to 4 from 29 June, and to 5 in August 2020. The increase will be paused at any point if it is considered that it has introduced an unacceptable level of risk.

We have issued guidance on all of the above and covering issues such as: the need for effective ventilation and the use of outdoor space where possible; PPE; testing; dealing with children who display COVID-19 symptoms while being cared for; children/staff/parents/family members deemed to be at higher levels of risk, including those who are shielding; and self-isolation in the event that any child or staff member tests COVID-19 positive. All of this guidance is available on the Family Support NI website.

Childcare providers have been issued with guidance on what to do if children become sick in their care including how to protect other children from COVID-19 illness. We have asked childcare providers to develop procedures to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Children who are in the very high risk group for severe COVID-19 should not attend any childcare setting in line with the guidance on shielding. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>.

Children with underlying health conditions which put them at increased but not very high risk of severe COVID-19, can attend a childcare setting if, following an individual risk assessment, it is considered to be in their best interests to do so. Parents must seek advice from the child's GP and, in complex cases, a consultant medical opinion may also be required.

If a child lives in a household with someone who is at very high risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19), they should only attend a childcare setting if stringent social distancing can be adhered to and the child is able to understand and follow those instructions, which may not be the possible for very young children and older children without the capacity to adhere to the instructions on social distancing.

It is vitally important that your childcare provider is informed if you, your child or any other family member has tested positive for COVID-19.