



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

# Preparing to Reopen Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare settings



## Planning to reopen your setting

### 1. Preparing the premises

#### **Health and safety**

Conduct a health and safety check of the premises as set out in the [ECI Health and Safety checklist](#).

#### **Risk assessments**

Risk assess all planned activities in light of Covid-19, in conjunction with relevant staff where applicable, and give due consideration to how usual practice may need to be adapted.

#### **Cleaning and hygiene**

Have a clear procedure for how hand washing will be managed. Cleaning will be required at regular intervals. Decide on how this can be managed in your setting. Make this information available to staff and parents.

#### **Space management**

Consider your premises and how they can be best used to keep small, consistent 'play-pods' of children together throughout the day, and to keep the play-pods apart from each other.

Where possible, there should be two adults in a 'play-pod', to allow breaks without need for floating staff. Services should continue to operate within regulatory adult-child ratios and so pod size (with e.g. one or two adults) will be limited by those ratios.

In many cases, a room will contain a single 'play-pod'. A large room may contain more than one 'play-pod' provided there are partial partitions that prevent physical contact between the 'play-pods', and provided the layout complies with the Early Years Regulations and with fire safety requirements. Particular attention needs to be given to any shared entry or exit points to reduce contact between pods.

### 2. Preparing to implement practical measures to reduce risk

Consider the measures that you should implement to reduce the risk of transmission in your setting. Consider how you can involve staff in developing policies for your setting. Policies should include advising parents to keep children with any signs and symptoms at home, staff who are symptomatic not attending work, frequent hand cleaning and good respiratory hygiene practices, regular cleaning of the setting, and implementing minimum contact and mixing outside the play-pods.

### 3. Reviewing your staff availability to work in the setting

Talk to all your staff to determine their availability to work in the setting from when you reopen. Take into consideration any underlying health conditions and how you can best support staff to return to work. Consider staff wellbeing, including any support that may be needed for those who have suffered bereavement and/or trauma.

### 4. Agreeing a protocol for responding to a suspected case of Covid-19 based on public health guidance, and ensuring the setting is prepared

Develop a procedure for your setting to respond to a suspected case of Covid-19. This should be based on public health guidelines. Think about a space for isolation. Consider communication mechanisms with parents in this regard.

### 5. Communicating with staff

Communicate your plans for the opening of the setting with staff, ensuring they are aware of and understand all new measures to reduce the transmission of Covid-19 and their roles and responsibilities. Build in time for staff to review processes and procedures and to ask questions and raise any concerns in advance.

### 6. Communicating with parents/guardians

Communicate your plans for the opening of the setting with parents and guardians, ensuring they are aware of all new measures put in place to reduce risk of transmission of Covid-19, how this impacts them, and their responsibilities in supporting this. Where appropriate, review your policies and procedures with parents and guardians and inform them of any updates you have made.

### 7. Identifying the likely numbers of children returning to the setting

Identify the children who are likely to be returning to, or joining, the setting when you reopen, working with parents and guardians, and with your local City and County Childcare Committee, where relevant.

### 8. Planning your setting's play-pods

Audits of staff availability and assessment of likely demand for places for children who will be attending settings should be used to plan 'play-pods', working within the adult-to-child ratios in the Early Years / School-Age Childcare Regulations. Consider any risk assessments that you will need to undertake to ensure the safe care of children can be maintained at all times, taking the need for staff breaks into account.

### 9. Identifying children with additional needs and child wellbeing requirements

The priorities at this time are helping young children to adapt to their new routines and supporting them to settle back into the setting, especially where there have been staffing changes. The Covid-19 outbreak may have caused significant mental health or wellbeing difficulties for some children. It is important that staff have a heightened awareness and are alert to children's emotional state.

The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) will continue to provide supports for children with disabilities when the ECCE programme recommences. Applications for AIM reopened on 2<sup>nd</sup> June and should be made via the Programmes Implementation Platform (PIP) on the Pobal website. Please note, although the AIM application will be processed, in light of public health guidance the delivery of AIM supports are dependent on the timing and nature of the re-opening of the ECCE programme for 2020/21. Further detail on this will be made available by the DCYA in due course. For further help on AIM supports and applications, you can contact (01) 511 7222 from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday.

## Guidance and templates for planning

Guidance and a self-assessment tool for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare settings have been developed by Tusla Early Years Inspectorate to support registered providers to plan and operate safely within the Regulations during the COVID-19 global pandemic, more information can be found on the [Guidance to Reopening website](#).

In addition, guidance and templates for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare settings have been developed by Early Childhood Ireland ([available here](#)) to help employers and managers to

get their business up and running again and to inform workers about what they need to do to help prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the workplace. They have been drafted based on the Government's [Return to Work Safely Protocol](#) and should be read in conjunction with the Protocol.

It is important when using any of these templates that Providers make them relevant to their own setting and situation.