



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

FAQs for Parents on Reopening of Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare settings



Contents

1.	<i>When can my child return to childcare?</i>	3
2.	<i>Can I register my child for a service even if I didn't use one before the COVID-19 pandemic?</i>	3
3.	<i>I'm not an essential or frontline worker, can I still access childcare?</i>	3
4.	<i>Will my child's temperature be checked routinely at my childcare service?</i>	4
5.	<i>Will my child be tested for COVID-19 prior to the service reopening?</i>	4
6.	<i>Will my child be prioritised for testing?</i>	4
7.	<i>What is a play-pod?</i>	4
8.	<i>How can I drop off and collect my child safely?</i>	5
9.	<i>Am I allowed to enter the service?</i>	5
10.	<i>What happens if a staff member or child is suspected to have COVID-19? Will the service shut?</i>	5

FAQs for Parents

1. When can my child return to childcare?

The Government Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business allows for the phased reopening of Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare services, including childminders, from 29th June. Whilst initially the Roadmap indicated that services would resume only for the children of essential workers, this has now been widened.

As Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare services are private businesses, and now that the Roadmap has extended eligibility for services, the allocation of places is a matter for the service provider. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs has provided guidance to help support providers in managing allocation of places when services reopen where demand is greater than the supply available.

If you had a place at a service immediately before the COVID-19 shutdown of childcare services and require access to childcare again now, you should speak to your service provider. Where possible it is proposed that children should be enabled to return to the service they used pre-COVID-19.

If you did not have a place before COVID-19 but wish to access one now you should contact your preferred provider or your local City/County Childcare Committee (myccc.ie) to check availability of spaces in your area.

2. Can I register my child for a service even if I didn't use one before the COVID-19 pandemic?

Yes, the criteria for eligibility for access to childcare has been widened.

Where possible it is proposed that children should be enabled to return to the childcare service they attended pre-COVID-19. However, if there are additional spaces available within your local service you may look for a place there from 29 June. It is important to note that the allocation of places is a matter for the service provider.

Where additional capacity is limited, services are asked to prioritise the children of health and social care workers and other frontline workers, where possible. Services are also encouraged to support children who were sponsored under the National Childcare Scheme or a legacy childcare scheme; children with a disability who previously attended an early learning and care setting; and families that need to access childcare in order to return to work.

Your local City/County Childcare Committee (myccc.ie) will be able to advise you on services in your area.

3. I'm not an essential or frontline worker, can I still access childcare?

Yes, the criteria for eligibility for access to childcare has been widened. You do not have to be a frontline worker to access childcare; however, where additional capacity is limited, services are asked to prioritise health and social care workers and other frontline workers. Services are also encouraged to support children who were sponsored under the National Childcare Scheme or a legacy childcare scheme, children with a disability who previously attended an early learning and care setting; and families that need to access childcare in order to return to work.

If there is no availability in your preferred service, you should contact your local County/City Childcare Committee (myccc.ie) to see what capacity there might be in other services in your area.

Please note that childminders will also be able to resume looking after children in the childminder's home from 29 June.

4. Will my child's temperature be checked routinely at my childcare service?

No, the public health advice is that routine temperature checking for staff and/or children is not required. Temperature checks for children will be in line with the normal policies and procedures of the service. If you have concerns in relation to this, you should discuss them with your service provider.

5. Will my child be tested for COVID-19 prior to the service reopening?

No, public health advice is that children attending childcare services do not need to be tested for COVID-19 unless they are displaying symptoms such as fever (high temperature), cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing. Your child should not attend the service if they or anyone else in the household is displaying symptoms. They should stay home and you should contact your GP.

6. Will my child be prioritised for testing?

Current public health advice is that children attending childcare services do not need to be prioritised for testing. Your child should not attend the service if they or anyone else in the household is displaying symptoms. They should stay home and you should contact your GP. Your doctor will arrange testing for them if they need a test.

Data from the Department of Health shows that, as at 14th June, it was taking on average 1.2 days for the testing process to be completed and 2.4 days for contact tracing to be carried out.

7. What is a play-pod?

The "play pod" model is a safe and playful approach to restricting interactions between closed groups of children and adults as an alternative to social distancing, which is not possible with young children. 'Play-pods' are not physical structures, they are simply a way to describe a group of children and adults who learn and play together.

The purpose of 'play-pods' is to limit the number of people a child has contact with, to facilitate contact tracing, and to support close, positive interactions between children and their adult caregivers, like in a key-worker system, which is characteristic of many childcare settings. This system will also reduce the amount of contact adults have with each other.

8. *How can I drop off and collect my child safely?*

Your service provider will talk to you about the arrangements in place at your setting for dropping off and picking up children. The key principle is that drop offs and collections will be organised to maintain distance between adults and between children from different play-pods.

Public health advice is that this can be done by staggering arrival and collection times, having demarcated waiting areas outside the entrance to the setting or by asking parents to wait with their children in their car until a childcare practitioner comes to collect them.

It is acknowledged that the last option (collection from car) may not be appropriate in all settings or for all age-groups, and so service providers have been asked to consider what works best in the context of the setting, the outside space available, the age range of their children and your needs as a parent. **Whatever approach is used, physical distance should be maintained between adults and between children from different play-pods.** You are advised to adhere to the arrangements put in place by your provider in order to ensure the safety of all attending the service.

9. *Am I allowed to enter the service?*

The public health guidance is based on two key principles:

- That services should take steps to ensure individuals with symptoms do not enter the service, and
- That services should take steps to reduce the chance of spread of the virus in case an infectious person, without symptoms, enters the building.

With these principles in mind services should seek to restrict any unnecessary visitors to the service. Where it is considered necessary for a parent or guardian to enter the service, e.g. to help settle in a new child, social distancing between the parent/guardian and other adults should be observed as far as possible. The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) recommends the use of cloth face coverings in enclosed indoor settings where it is not possible to keep a distance of 2 metres from others. While it is generally not appropriate for childcare workers to apply this when caring for children or when engaging with parents in the presence of their children, the guidance is applicable for interaction between adults when not caring for children.

10. *What happens if a staff member or child is suspected to have COVID-19? Will the service shut?*

If a child/staff member in the service is displaying symptoms of COVID-19 arrangements will be made for them to leave/be collected from the service immediately. They or their parents/guardians should be advised to contact their doctor.

If testing is arranged for them, the childcare service will be contacted by local public health staff to discuss the case, identify people who have been in contact with them and advise on any actions or precautions that should be taken.

It is not necessary for the service provider to take any action in relation to closing the service, partially or in full, until they have been contacted by and discussed the case with local public health staff.