



together for  
children  
SUNDERLAND

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS - CORONAVIRUS

**I've heard the schools are going to shut on Friday evening, but that children with EHCPs can continue to go. Is that right?**

Schools, colleges and nurseries are closed until further notice for **most** children. The initial information was that schools should offer places in school for children of keyworkers, vulnerable children (e.g. who have social workers) and children with education, health and care plans (EHCPs). This was clarified in government guidance on 22 March 2020. The advice now is that **if you can keep your child at home you should**. The fewer children who mix in school the safer for everyone.

Schools, nurseries and colleges will offer a form of care and education for the children who need this most based on a risk assessment for each child or young person. This includes children of key workers who would otherwise be unable to carry out essential work (list of keyworkers in next question) and children whose care needs or home situation mean that it is safer for them to attend school than not. Having an EHCP does not necessarily mean your school will offer them a place in school, but it does mean your school should be considering them individually to identify if they need this.

Schools are currently identifying who they should be trying to provide for and contacting families to check information to work this out.

The government has particularly asked that Alternative Provision e.g. PRUs stay open as pupils there are likely to be particularly vulnerable even if they do not yet have an EHCP.

If you want to read the government guidance for yourself it is here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people>

## **I'm not sure if I am counted as a key worker**

The full list is available on the link below but includes staff who are essential in the effort to manage this crisis, including people working in the health and social care, education, key public services, utilities, financial and transportation services.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

## **How will my child's school (special or mainstream) be able to look after my child if most of the children are staying at home, or if the teaching staff are unable to come in?**

Following the announcement, schools, colleges and local authorities have had to move quickly to work out how to offer care/education for the children they identify as needing to still attend. Schools have been contacting parents to say if you have the option to send your child in and what the offer for them may look like as it will not be their normal provision. If you have not heard from your school yet you should contact them.

The government announcement also stated, "Where schools are unable to look after these children, local authorities will work with the Department for Education's regional teams to ensure an alternative option is available in the same area." We think this is likely to mean schools needing to work together across the city to develop an offer to these families, which is achievable and sustainable. This could look different to their normal provision – possibly in a different venue, with different teachers, and a revised timetable.

The Emergency Powers Bill currently going through Parliament will mean that schools and local authorities will only have to do what they reasonably can to meet their legal duties to your child. For example, the duty to make the provision in an EHC plan (section 42 of the Children and Families Act 2014) may be amended to a 'reasonable endeavours' duty. This means the LA needs to do whatever it reasonably can to put provision in place, but if they cannot do so they would not necessarily be breaching the law.

## **But don't they have to still provide what it says in my child's EHCP?**

The government passed new legislation (19 March) in response to the outbreak. As a result, local authorities will need to use "reasonable endeavours" to ensure that provision continues to be available to meet education, health and care needs for each child and prioritise their efforts to support those with the most complex needs. If they can't maintain the usual provision despite these efforts, they will not be breaching their legal responsibilities. In simple terms this means you can't insist on what it says in the EHC plan at the moment.

## **If I agree to my child having provision now that doesn't match what it says in their EHCP will it stay like that when things get back to normal?**

No. The government guidance is clear that parents who consent to changes to, or reductions in, their child's provision during this outbreak will not be considered to have agreed a permanent change to what their child needs in their EHC plan.

## **I don't want my child with an EHCP to go to school as they have a weakened immune system or for other reasons. Do they have to?**

If you feel it would be too high risk to send your child to school because they, or someone else in your family, is at particularly high risk, there is of course no requirement to send your child in. The updated guidance from government is clear – if a vulnerable child can be at home, they should be. Your child's school should carry out a risk assessment to see if they can offer your child some provision safely. Similarly, if the kind of offer your child's school is making for them is one that you feel will be too unsettling for them you can turn it

down. The only parents who may not have a completely free choice whether or not to take up the offer for their child are those who have a social worker involved i.e. through a child protection plan and it is seen as being strongly in the child's interests to go to school.

The guidance dated 19 March 2020 stated: *"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. We are encouraging local authorities to keep open both residential special schools and residential specialist colleges wherever possible. In addition, we want to keep the majority of day special schools and colleges open, including moving staff into these settings to avoid closure.*

*Special schools, colleges and local authorities are advised to make case by case basis 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 provision. For others, they will be safer at home. We trust leaders and parents to make these decisions and will support them as required."*

For more details see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers>

## **My child has an EHCP but is in a private, independent, non-maintained school, college or nursery. Do they need to enable them to still attend?**

Yes, nurseries, private schools, sixth forms and FE Colleges have all been asked to follow the same guidance. Again, there is a lot of detail for them to work through about which children and young people they need to provide for and how to implement an offer to these children in practice. The government has said they will provide financial support for these settings as required. But we have heard that some are closing to all children and young people regardless. Check with the setting your child attends. If they are not making a plan for your child and you think your child is one of those that needs to be getting provision in school rather than being safer at home, ask the SENDIASS helpline for advice.

## **If my child was out of school before the school closures were ordered, do I still have an entitlement to alternative education?**

If your child attends a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) or Alternative Provision, this setting may remain open to provide support for children in the 'vulnerable' category and/or children of key workers.

If your child was not receiving any education, it is likely to be very difficult to enforce the LA's duty to provide education while schools in general remain closed, simply because almost all children are now in the same situation.

## **What about the Easter holidays – I heard our child (with an EHCP) can still attend school then, is this right?**

Yes, the government's guidance says, "Where possible, we would encourage settings to also look after key workers' children and vulnerable children throughout the Easter holidays." Once again providers locally will be working out how they can do this, and which children should have the offer of this childcare as it is unlikely to be all children with EHCPs. When we have more information, we will add it here.

## **I'm worried we will be asked to provide some education or learning for our children whilst they are off school, but I wouldn't know where to start**

Most schools have started to prepare and send resources home with the children. Clearly, this may be much harder for some children with learning difficulties or additional needs, or if you have to work from home as well as look after the kids. There are lots of tips online from experienced home educators but try not to put too much pressure on yourself as this is going to be new for everyone. Surely, a bit of TV now and then will be fine!

Useful links:

<https://www.educationotherwise.org/index.php/links/37-activities-teaching-and-learning>

In addition, the Department for Education are working with the BBC and others to provide resources for children to access while at home. We will add details here as we find them. For parents with children under five years old see [hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk](https://hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk)

<https://www.schools-out.org/> - a free resource - created by parents, for parents - to collate and suggest ideas, learning and fun activities for young children at home.

[Sunderland Autism Outreach Team](#) has been sharing some useful symbol strips and scheduling on their Facebook Page

## **Do we know how long schools will close for?**

No not yet, the government's announcement just says, 'until further notice'.

## **I'm worried I won't be able to cope if schools are shut for a long time. Who should I call?**

Nobody knows how this situation will play out and how long schools will be shut. If you are worried about how you will support your child at home then please talk to your child's school in the first instance.

The following resources have some helpful tips for coping with a lockdown:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/13/the-family-lockdown-guide-how-to-emotionally-prepare-for-coronavirus-quarantine>

## **My child with SEND is really going to struggle without the structure and routine of school – any tips?**

If your child uses Makaton here's a resource to explain why they aren't going to school: <https://www.makaton.org/shop/shopping/freeDownloadDetails/My-school-is-closed>

It may help to create a visual timetable for your child so they can have structure in their days at home. See this template for an

example: [https://search3.openobjects.com/mediamanager/hackney/fsd/files/daily\\_planner\\_to\\_support\\_structure\\_at\\_home.pdf](https://search3.openobjects.com/mediamanager/hackney/fsd/files/daily_planner_to_support_structure_at_home.pdf)

[Sunderland Autism Outreach Team](#) has been sharing some useful symbol strips and scheduling on their Facebook Page

## **Our child is currently having their needs assessed for an Education Health and Care Plan. How will this process be affected?**

The SEN team are still processing requests for statutory EHC assessments, writing EHC plans and redrafting EHCPs from reviews. We are using our best endeavours to complete EHC plans within statutory timescales, employing creative strategies where possible, to complete these. Professionals will continue to provide advice towards EHC needs assessments. They will also speak with other professionals about the children and young people.

The Government have said that they are amending SEND regulations to change timescales relating to EHC plan processes. Reports by professionals will have been done based on existing knowledge of a child. You and your child should still be actively involved in the process.

## **Will annual reviews still need to be carried out?**

The Coronavirus Emergency legislation has given LAs and schools some flexibility on the deadlines for annual reviews. We are prioritising the finalisation of Key Stage transfers for children and young people due to move to a different setting in September 2020, particularly those moving from KS2 to KS3 and those in Y11, 13 and 14. Key stage transfers from: nursery to reception; reception to KS1; KS1 to KS2 and KS3 to KS4 will also be considered. We are consulting with families and settings with the aim of achieving smooth transitions for children and young people to new educational settings wherever possible.

Schools may need to postpone annual review meetings due to take place in the summer term. Summer term annual reviews may be postponed, although

some schools are using telephone and video conferencing to carry out some reviews.

## **I have an appeal in progress to the SEND Tribunal or was about to lodge one. How will this be affected?**

The SEND Tribunal has confirmed that hearings will be on paper or by telephone (and, where the technology permits, by video) starting on Monday 23 March 2020.

The Tribunal have asked parties not to call the Tribunal until 2 days before hearings if they haven't heard anything as, like every public service, they are affected by staff shortages as a result of COVID-19.

With these measures, it is expected that there should be no need to adjourn hearings if the parties are ready to go ahead, even though they may not be able to take place in person.

For new appeals timescales and priorities have changed in the light of the current emergency. Any new appeals are now going to be listed on a 20-week timetable, unless it is about a phase transfer, which will be 12-14 weeks.

You can find further guidance on how telephone and video hearings will be used during the COVID-19 outbreak here <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/hmcts-telephone-and-video-hearings-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

## **I was about to take an issue to the Local Government Ombudsman. How will this be affected?**

The LGO are not taking any new cases for the time being.

## **What about exclusions?**

The guidance from the government does not mention exclusions. This means schools still have the legal power to exclude. Of course, the usual rules around

exclusions still apply so schools must have a lawful reason to exclude and any formal exclusion must be non-discriminatory, reasonable, fair and proportionate. In current circumstances it is hard to see how exclusion could be justified if the risk assessment process described above has identified that they are one of the few children that need to be in school. Seek advice from our SENDIASS team – [sendiass@sunderlandcarers.co.uk](mailto:sendiass@sunderlandcarers.co.uk)

## Health questions

### **If I suspect my child with SEND/underlying medical conditions is showing signs of coronavirus what should I do? What about their siblings?**

At present, there is **no separate advice** for people with underlying medical conditions who display possible coronavirus symptoms. As with all other cases, if your child has a high temperature or a new, persistent cough, they should self-isolate at home for 14 days and the rest of the family should self-isolate with them. If at all possible, you should try to keep them in a separate room from other people in the house. All other people in the household should also stay at home and self-isolate, where possible.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>.

Here is the government's advice about self-isolation

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-advice/>

If your child's condition does not improve after 7 days or symptoms worsens, you should contact NHS 111 <https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19/>

There is specific advice and plans for additional support for people of any age who are in the extremely vulnerable group at risk of very severe illness if they catch the virus. If your child or you are in this group you will get a letter or be contacted by your GP by Sunday 29 March 2020. For more information <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>

Keep checking the NHS website for guidance in case of changes

## **I think my child's health issues mean they are in the "extremely vulnerable" group. What do I need to know?**

There is specific advice and plans for additional support for people of any age who are in the extremely vulnerable group at risk of very severe illness if they catch the virus. If your child or you are in this group you should get a letter or be contacted by your GP by Sunday 29 March.

We have heard from some parents that this system is not working perfectly. The NHS are using information they have "coded" on medical records and this can mean some people are told to shield who are not extremely vulnerable and others who are have not been contacted yet. If you are unsure contact your GP or your child's specialist to check.

For more information <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>

Keep checking the NHS website for guidance in case of changes

## **I've got symptoms of coronavirus and am self-isolating but I live and care on my own for my child with SEND – what should I do?**

You should follow the NHS advice about staying at home. Where possible you should try to get someone else to care for the child(ren) so that you can self-isolate in a separate room. You ideally need to keep two metres away from others, sleep in a separate bed, and use your own towels. Please see more advice here <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-advice/>

## **In addition to my child with SEND/underlying medical condition, I also care for an elderly relative. What should I do?**

As both elderly people and those with underlying medical conditions are at greater risk we advise you to do all you can to minimise spread of the infection according to the latest government advice

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

## **Should I be asking my child's doctor for additional medication for them at this time?**

GPs and pharmacies are reassuring patients that medical supply chains are in place and working well but we have also read stories about shortages and delays.

Check your child's supply of medication now and, if you are worried about running out, you should call your GP surgery and talk to them about reordering.

You can also register for getting repeat medication directly from your pharmacy. If you haven't already set up an account, it's very easy to do so. You need some basic patient details including your GP surgery and to nominate a pharmacy. You can request any drugs currently on your repeat prescription list and they will deliver.

## **Should / can we stock up on personal protective equipment (PPE), hygiene products or over the counter medicine? Can GPs help as some shops are already empty?**

PPE like masks and gloves are in short supply across all local authorities. We'll keep you updated if we get information about supply chains or solutions.

Most supermarkets are now operating restrictions on the amount of sanitary goods, medicines and food staples that people can buy so theoretically supplies will be maintained but you may need to get there early in the morning or ask staff when deliveries are expected.

If you already get pain relief medication via prescription, you will be able to reorder this via your nominated pharmacy, otherwise you would have to contact your GP first to request it. If the big supermarkets don't have any paracetamol or Calpol, try your local corner shop or convenience store who

may keep stocks behind the counter. Alternatively, ask some of your neighbourhood or online networks.

## **Will the paediatrician see my child or young person as planned?**

All paediatricians are having to pause on non-urgent work and severely limit face-to-face contact with everyone. This is so that they can continue to provide the acute care on the children's wards that is needed to get through the pandemic crisis whilst keeping everyone safe with social distancing.

Urgent outpatient referrals may be addressed in the first instance by telephone consultation.

All of the most vulnerable disabled children and young people will continue to receive telephone support and face to face as needed.

We have expanded the community children's nursing team to improve support for the those with the most complex needs.

Assessments for autism spectrum conditions cannot proceed until the crisis has settled, as these depend on assessments in social settings and this is not possible with social distancing rules in place.

For mental health crises please ring (check with CYPS what number to ring)

For physical health crises please ring 111 and follow their advice.

## **Will my child's appointment with Children and Young Peoples service (CYPs) go ahead?**

It is business as usual for this team, although most appointments will go ahead via telephone, unless patient clinically requires a face to face appointment. Parents and professional can just call usual phone number if want to clarify.

## **My child has currently got therapy support or other appointments coming up. Will these still be going ahead?**

All services are having to do emergency planning for a potential scaling back of services and will be working out how they can continue to provide services for families by alternative methods, eg telephone. Community paediatricians and

therapists are also considering how they can offer face to face appointments if they are clinically indicated.

## **What if my child has a hospital appointment or I need to take them to hospital?**

We have been told that if children need admission by General Paediatrics services, all precautions are taken in the acute wards. But, although planning for any eventuality, health clinicians are not expecting that most children will be severely ill with this virus, because that has not been the pattern at all worldwide.

## **What about dental appointments?**

Routine dentistry and orthodontic treatment has now stopped and will be postponed until the situation changes.

All dental practices will be required to establish (independently or by collaboration with others) a remote urgent care service, providing telephone triage for their patients with urgent needs during usual working hours, and whenever possible treating with advice, pain relief etc. If your child has a dental problem, start by contacting your usual dentist.

## **Mental health questions**

### **My child has high anxiety/mental health issues and is very worried about CV. What can I do to support them?**

A Local charity Safetynet in Brighton and Hove have some very helpful information and ideas:

<https://www.safety-net.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Safety-Net-newsletter-special-edition.pdf>

Special Needs Jungle has produced this useful article:

<https://www.specialneedsjungle.com/calming-coronavirus-anxiety-children-everyone-else/>

There are **easy to read, video resources and social stories** explaining coronavirus for children and young people,

Social story around the virus: [https://660919d3-b85b-43c3-a3ad-3de6a9d37099.filesusr.com/ugd/64c685\\_319c5acf38d34604b537ac9fae37fc80.pdf](https://660919d3-b85b-43c3-a3ad-3de6a9d37099.filesusr.com/ugd/64c685_319c5acf38d34604b537ac9fae37fc80.pdf)

<https://inclusionnorth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Coronavirus-Easy-Read-Information-12.3.2020.pdf>

[Coping During The Pandemic](#) (7-12 yo) – short online course aimed at 7-12 year olds, from the Recovery College

[Coronavirus Regulations: A guide to 'exercise' for SEND parents](#) – Article written by a barrister which is already proving useful for many parent carers

The following are links to groups and articles that will provide advice and support to parents/carers on mental health issues:

- Mencap – Easy Read guide to Coronavirus: <https://www.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/Information%20about%20Coronavirus%20ER%20SS2.pdf>
- Place2Be – Guide to helping parents answer questions from their children and to support family wellbeing: <https://www.place2be.org.uk/about-us/news-and-blogs/2020/march/coronavirus-information-for-children/>
- Young Minds – Talking to your child about Coronavirus and 10 tips from their Parents Helpline to support family wellbeing: <https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/talking-to-your-child-about-coronavirus/>
- Covibook – an interactive resource designed to support and reassure children aged 7 and under, designed to help children explain and draw the emotions that they might be experiencing during the pandemic: <https://www.mindheart.co/descargables>

## Money

## **My child would normally receive free school meals and I am worried about the extra costs of feeding my family when the schools are closed**

The government has announced that they will support schools to be able to offer an alternative for children eligible for free school meals. Schools will be able to purchase meals or vouchers for supermarkets or local shops. You should have heard from your child's school.

Please beware of scams. Schools will NOT ask you for bank details.

## **My child's DLA is about to run out and I need help with applying for this or PIP**

The government has announced that there will be no new reviews or reassessments across all benefits for three months. This includes DLA and PIP, as well as Universal Credit and Employment and Support Allowance. Awards that were due to expire will be extended by three months. So if you have an existing DLA claim or if your child is due to turn 16 and switch to PIP you should not now have to do this for the time being.

The DWP have also stopped all face-to-face assessments for health and disability-related benefits for the time being. If you have an appointment you do not have to go to this. They will contact you.

It's not yet clear whether people who have **already been sent** renewal claim forms will still be expected to return them in good time and before the date their current award ends. So, if in doubt and you or your child's award is ending in the next 4 weeks, it is probably worth ringing DWP to check and request an extension. Hopefully this will become clear in the next few days.

If you were due to ask for your child's claim to be reassessed because of a change in circumstances, for example to get the mobility component when your child turns five, you can still do this.

## **I was about to claim DLA or PIP. Can I still do that?**

Yes the DWP are still taking new claims as usual.

## **I have just had a decision on a DLA or PIP claim that I think is wrong. Can I still try to get this changed?**

Yes. If you already have a decision that you do not agree with, be aware the timescales for requesting a mandatory reconsideration or lodging an Appeal are short and have not changed. If you need extra time to get advice do contact DWP and ask for more time given the current crisis.

## **I have an appeal in progress about DLA or PIP. What is happening with appeal hearings?**

Appeal hearings have been put on hold so the appeals service can work out how to carry them out in another way e.g. by phone or video conference. They will contact you to let you know what is happening. If your appeal hearing is less than a week away and you have not yet heard you should call them.

## **I am worried about how my family is going to survive this financially. I can't afford to stay at home if I am sick or to care for my child. I am self-employed and can't work. Or I think I may lose my job. What help is there?**

The government has introduced a range of measures to help people in the crisis.

Statutory sick pay (SSP) is now available for eligible individuals diagnosed with COVID-19 or those unable to work because they are self-isolating in line with Government advice. The extended SSP is for all those who are advised to self-isolate, even if they haven't yet presented with symptoms. SSP will be payable from day one instead of day four for affected individuals.

If you are not eligible to receive sick pay you may be able to apply for Universal Credit and/or apply for New Style Employment and Support Allowance. Citizens Advice explain things

here: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/benefits/coronavirus-check-what-benefits-you-can-get/>

There have been changes in how to apply and some aspects have been made easier or more generous, for example allowed housing costs. Official government information on coronavirus and claiming benefits: [Understanding Universal](#)

Credit This has information on new claims and for existing ones and covers more than just Universal Credit.

If you are employed but could be laid off due to coronavirus affecting your job, your employer may be able to get government support to keep paying you 80% of your normal pay. You will need to ask your employer but for an outline of how this works look here <https://www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus>

Other steps include avoiding people having their utilities cut off or losing their home for falling behind with their rent or mortgage payments. Find out more here: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money/if-you-cant-pay-your-bills-because-of-coronavirus/>

And you can get an isolation note through a new online service on the NHS website (<https://tinyurl.com/vccz7ux>) and NHS 111 online (<https://www.111.nhs.uk/covid-19>). Isolation notes will provide employees with evidence for their employers that they have been advised to self-isolate due to coronavirus, either because they have symptoms or they live with someone who has symptoms, and so cannot work.

### **Other useful websites for parents/carers for advice:**

#### National

- National Autistic Society – guidance and helpline for parents', young people and staff: [https://www.autism.org.uk/services/nas-schools/vanguard/news/2020/march/coronavirus-\(covid-19\)-advice.aspx](https://www.autism.org.uk/services/nas-schools/vanguard/news/2020/march/coronavirus-(covid-19)-advice.aspx)
- Public Health England have produced an easy read version of their Advice on the coronavirus for places of education. You can download the easy read version here.
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#### Local

- <http://www.pallionactiongroup.co.uk/> - Pallion Action Group is a great source of local information
- <https://www.shineyadvice.org.uk/> ShARP is another great source of information (particularly with welfare rights, benefits etc.)

