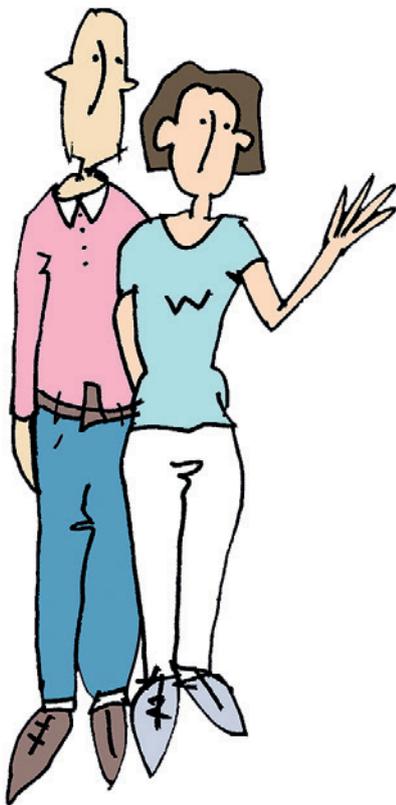


Gloucestershire County Council

COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

Information for parents and carers

Issue 4 : January 2021



Co-produced with

Gloucestershire
Parent • Carer
Forum



gloucestershire
COUNTY COUNCIL

COVID-19

Information for parents and carers

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Welcome to issue 4 of parent carer FAQs.

As we continue through the Covid-19 pandemic and our third national lockdown, our services to Children and Families across Education, Health and Care are working closely with Gloucestershire Parent Carer Forum, Gloucestershire SENDIASS and Gloucestershire's Carers Hub to respond to your most frequently asked questions.

There is a lot of information and guidance provided by the Government on a regular basis so things change but we hope that the responses below help you and your family make sense of what is happening currently.

These are challenging times, especially for families, and our aim is to ensure you have up to date and useful information.

We are grateful to [Gloucestershire Parent Carer Forum](#), [Gloucestershire SENDIASS](#) and [Gloucestershire's Carers Hub](#) for helping us to hear your voice. These community based organisations are there to offer support and advice to you as Parent Carers and help us, as Local Authorities to hear and respond to your queries and concerns.



General information

Will I be able to get a vaccination?

The Government's vaccine committee has revised its recommendations to include unpaid carers in the vaccine priority list. It now recommends unpaid carers who get Carer's Allowance or who are the main carer of an elderly or disabled person (child or adult) whose welfare may be at risk if the carer falls ill should be prioritised alongside people with underlying health conditions.

Therefore, Parents and Carers of Children and Young People with health conditions and/or disabilities will be vaccinated within Group 6 of the vaccination schedule.

We recognise however, that a high proportion of unpaid carers are aged 50+ and already fall within one of the nine Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) cohort groups. Those aged below 50 and caring for vulnerable people fall into cohort 6. Further guidance will be published on this cohort in due course.

It is recommended that all Parent Carers register with their GP as a Carer, if they have not already done so, to ensure that they are able to receive their vaccine as part of cohort 6.

Note: Parent carers added to the Covid-19 vaccine priority list across the UK. [Click here](#) for more information.

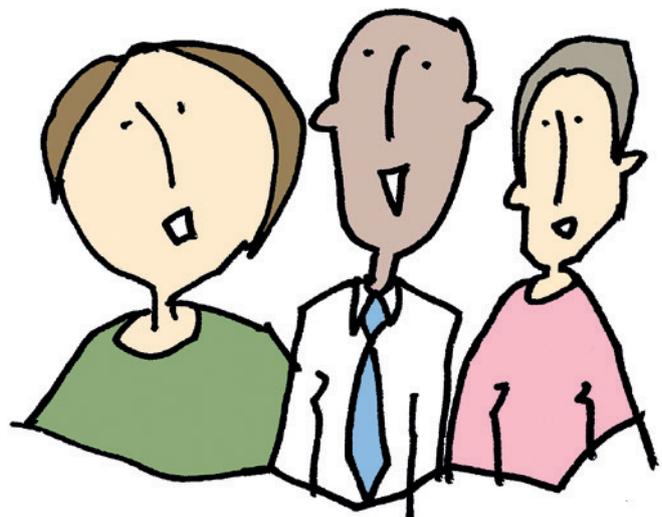
Can I be furloughed?

If you cannot work from home and your employer has indicated that you are not eligible for furlough, you could speak to your employer again as many employers are unaware that you are eligible to be furloughed for childcare/caring responsibilities.

The following links provide information and government guidance you can share with your employer: (Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>

[Working Families | Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - Furlough - Working Families](#)



Holiday Free School Meals



The application form for Holiday **Free School Meal support** is open Monday 25th January to Friday 5th February 2021.

During the COVID-19 pandemic Children and Young People entitled to Free School Meals have been offered support throughout the various holidays and this February half term will be no different.

Please note that if you previously received a voucher in the October half term and Christmas Holiday you do not need to apply to the scheme again.

Please follow this link to apply online for the February half-term Free School Meal Support. <https://gloucestershire-consult.objective.co.uk/public/a2customerfeedback/freeschoolmeals/schoolmeals>

If you have any queries, please ring the helpline on **01452 426165** (during office hours, 9am-5pm) or alternatively e-mail childrensfund@gloucestershire.gov.uk.

How are free school meals being organised and what can my child expect?

The deadline to apply for support over February half-term is this Friday, 5 February. Find out more and apply here: <http://orlo.uk/pPMtW>

Schools are making their own arrangements regarding free school meals. Some are using vouchers while others are providing food directly. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your child's school and discuss with the school directly.

How can I get data for my child to access online learning?

You should contact your school for help accessing remote education as parents, carers and pupils cannot apply directly to the DfE scheme for laptops, tablets or internet access.

Where a child or young person has been advised

not to attend school by a GP or specialist clinician, and does not have access to a device, their school should contact the Department for Education (DfE), so that we can help them to provide support. You can read further guidance on getting laptops and tablets for those who cannot attend school <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-laptops-and-tablets-for-children-who-cannot-attend-school-due-to-coronavirus-covid-19>

What support is available for families who receive a low-income?

The COVID-19 Emergency Assistance Grant is available to support individuals and families who have been financially impacted by COVID-19 with food, utilities and any other essential items. For example, this may include Parents who have been furloughed or have lost their job due to COVID-19. The application form and details on the remit of the fund can be found here: <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/gloucestershire-welfare-support-scheme/covid-19-children-s-fund-and-emergency-assistance-fund-for-food-and-essential-supplies/>

The Gloucestershire COVID-19 Emergency Living Fund provides support for Adults and Families who require support with food, utilities and household items. This is a time limited extension of the already existing Welfare Support Scheme, to help people who are suffering hardship due to COVID-19. A link to further details and how to apply is available here: <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/gloucestershire-welfare-support-scheme>

Further support for low-income families with disabled and critically ill children, including helping to buy specialist equipment, has been made available through the Family Fund. You can read further guidance on how to apply for the Family Fund. <https://www.familyfund.org.uk/>



Education

My child has an EHCP, what should I expect from school? Should my child be offered a place in school?

Guidance from the government through the Department for Education (DfE) published on 14th January is that children with an EHCP in both mainstream and specialist settings are encouraged to attend school and parent carers encouraged to take up the place. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/952377/Guidance_for_special_schools_specialist_post-16_providers_and_alternative_provision_during_the_national_lockdown.pdf

“We want children and young people in special schools, including residential special schools and specialist post-16 institutions, to continue to receive high-quality teaching and specialist professional support. This is because we know that children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and their families, can be disproportionately impacted by being out of education. Special schools should continue to welcome and encourage pupils to attend full-time where the parent or carer wishes for their child to be able to attend. Specialist post-16 settings should continue to welcome and encourage students to attend as per their usual timetable where the young person wishes to attend.”

The DfE recognises that on occasion special schools may encounter circumstances where they cannot provide their usual interventions and provision at adequate staffing ratios or with staff with vital specialist training. In these circumstances they should seek to resume as close as possible to the specified provision for the child or young person as soon as possible. Schools are encouraged to use Pupil level risk assessments to help prioritise the provision a child or young person can get if full-time provision for all is not possible.

Will anything change with regards to my child's EHCP?

Where a pupil or student has an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan, it remains the duty of the Local Authority and health commissioning body to secure or arrange the provision specified in the plan (under section 42 of the Children and Families Act 2014). However, there may be times when it becomes more difficult to do so than usual.



In these circumstances, education settings, Local Authorities and health partners (where applicable) should discuss with families to co-produce alternative arrangements for delivering provision. These decisions should be considered on a case-by-case basis which takes account of the needs of, and circumstances specific to, the child or young person, avoiding a 'one size fits all' approach.

In some circumstances Local Authorities have worked collaboratively with settings and families to agree flexible and creative solutions for delivering support.

At this stage, the DfE do not intend to use the powers under the Coronavirus Act 2020 to modify the section 42 duty, but will keep this position under review based on the evidence.

The statutory duties and timescales for undertaking annual reviews remain in place. However, the format of reviews may, in the current circumstances, need to take a different shape, particularly for those children and young people who are not in attendance at school or college.

In these circumstances, it may be more appropriate to gather information electronically and to hold the meeting by phone or as a virtual meeting. At all times, however, it is important that annual reviews continue to ensure that the child

or young person, and their parent and carer, is at the centre of the process and can engage with the process in a meaningful way.

In addition, the Local Authority will continue to meet its statutory duties to finalise placements as appropriate for September, and it is important that schools and colleges co-operate in supporting timely consultations over potential placements, and in providing families with advice and information where requested.

What is the best way to talk to someone in the EHCP Service (SEND Casework Team)?

The EHCP Service (SEND Casework Team) is there to help you with any questions or concerns you have with your child's EHCP. As most Local Authority workers have been working from home as instructed, there have been times when phone contact has been difficult.

As most of the team are working remotely in line with Government advice, the EHCP Service have put in place a telephone Hunt Group for each Locality. This means that if your caseworker is unavailable it will search for a member of the team that is free and they will be able to assist you. An answerphone is also now established which will be monitored and you will expect a call back within 3 working days.

Alternatively, please email your child's caseworker directly.

Education - My child has been offered a place but I don't want to send them at the moment. Will I be fined if I keep them at home?

All schools should continue to record attendance in the register. Schools should follow up on absences of the pupils who are expected to be in school, but where a parent wishes for their child to be absent, the DfE expect schools to authorise the absence during this national lockdown period.

Absence will not be penalised.

DfE guidance is being updated regularly and may change but currently there is no compulsory education for any children during the current lockdown and all absences will be authorised. Please discuss any decisions regarding attendance with your child's school.



What is happening with Alternative Provision including Hospital Education Services?

Alternative provision should remain open to vulnerable children and young people including those with an EHCP and children of critical workers. They should provide robust remote education for those who are not attending. On occasion, alternative provision will encounter circumstances where they cannot provide their usual interventions and provision at adequate staffing ratios or with staff with vital specialist training. In these circumstances they should seek to resume as close as possible to full-time provision, as soon as possible, for all children of critical workers and those deemed vulnerable.

Hospital schools should continue to provide full-time education where it is safe and feasible to do so and in line with hospital infection prevention and control (IPC) measures.

Support with additional needs

What support is available to help my child with a My Plan/My Plan+?

All schools must have considered planning for children and young people with additional needs in their current plans. They should be based on what they already know about the child's needs and review their individual plans in light of any ongoing impact of Covid-19. If there are things which have increased the vulnerability of a child, this will be considered in the planning.

Contact your child's class teacher, SENDCo or Head Teacher if you have concerns. The school can arrange to review your child's plan if that is needed.

Gloucestershire SENDIASS

can also provide free, confidential and impartial information, advice and support.



Facebook: Sendiass Gloucestershire

Twitter: @sendiassglos

Website: www.sendiassglos.org.uk

My child has a hearing loss are the online videos being subtitled?

BBC Bitesize is subtitled their new daily lessons, whilst all of the videos at the Oak National Academy are subtitled and many are BSL interpreted. More information on how others can make their resources accessible to deaf children and young people is available in NDCS [accessibility 'how-to' guidelines](#).

For online teaching, some software (e.g. Google Hangouts) is available with automatic captions (using speech recognition software) and there are some [apps](#) that do the same

My child has social, emotional and mental health needs – what support is available while learning from home

Please contact your child's school or educational setting and talk to someone about your thoughts or concerns about your child learning from home and/or returning to school.



The Team for Children with Cognition and Learning / Social, Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties (Advisory Teachers) have a helpline which parents and schools can use. Their details are as follows:

Day of week	C&L	SEMH
Monday	01452 427282	01452 324371
Tuesday	01452 324365	01452 324364
Wednesday	01452 426833	01452 425794
Thursday	01452 426813	01452 425425
Friday	01452 583550	01452 426372

Please click on the link to find out more about the Team for Children with Cognition and Learning / Social, Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties:

<https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/schoolsnet/your-pupils/special-educational-needs-and-disabilities-send/send-support-services/advisory-teaching-service/team-for-children-with-cognition-and-learning-social-emotional-and-mental-health-difficulties/>

Specialist support services, who are currently involved with students (for example, Educational Psychology and Advisory Teachers), continue to work with educational settings to support children's needs. They are all contactable by both telephone and e-mail and are currently offering additional remote support training to schools and children, when needs are identified.

My child has Sensory/Physical Disability needs - what can I do to support them?

Most children and young people with diagnosed sensory loss or physical disability will have already had access to a specialist teacher who will have had involvement with them over time and is able to address any concerns or issues. These specialist teachers have endeavoured to maintain contact with children and young people with the most complex needs, and their schools, during the pandemic and have been active in resolving the issues that have come up.

However, if you are unsure whom to contact, or, have any other concerns or questions in relation to children and young people with sensory/physical needs.

For example:

- If your child has recently been diagnosed with a sensory loss or physical disability
- You are concerned about them starting at a (new) school in September
- You are concerned about them starting back at school in case their specialist support &/or equipment needs reviewing
- You have concerns about accessing remote learning

You can:

- contact us by phone between 9am - 16.30 pm , Monday to Friday **(01452 583728)**
- e-mail your locality area base should you wish to contact us directly.
 - » stroud.ats@gloucestershire.gov.uk
 - » forest.ats@gloucestershire.gov.uk
 - » glos.ats@gloucestershire.gov.uk
 - » chelt.ats@gloucestershire.gov.uk

You will also find helpful support videos and guidance on our Youtube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYrm2ArgsNRy4kKHf9aPsPQ>. This includes practical advice, e.g. how to re-tube a hearing aid.

Visual impairment

My child has a visual impairment

Please continue to use your child's school and qualified teacher of vision impairments (QTVI) as your first point of contact for any curriculum materials suitable for your son/daughter.

There are further areas of support online:

Guide Dogs have put together guidance in helping your visually impaired child learn at home: <https://www.guidedogs.org.uk/getting-support/information-and-advice/education-support/learning-at-home-and-activities-for-children-and-young-people>

Similarly, Look have produced some support materials and resources: <https://www.look-uk.org/home-schooling-resources/>

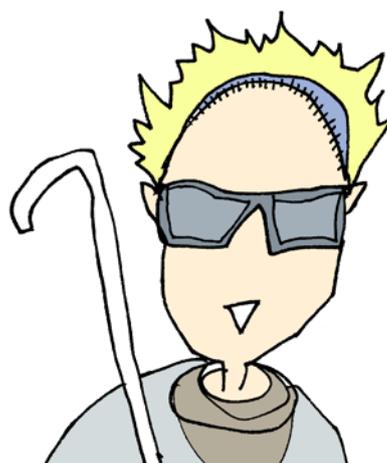
Free stories whilst schools are closed: <https://stories.audible.com/start-listen>

Other websites that have further support resources include:

<https://www.henshaws.org.uk/knowledge-village/children-young-people-and-families/>

<https://viewweb.org.uk/covid-19/>

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/sight-loss-advice/children-young-people-and-education/support-families-during-lockdown>



Hearing Loss Support

My child has a hearing loss are the online videos being subtitled?

- BBC Bitesize are subtitled their new daily lessons, whilst all of the videos at the Oak National Academy are subtitled and many are BSL interpreted. More information on how others can make their resources accessible to deaf children and young people is available in NDCS [accessibility 'how-to' guidelines](#).
- For online teaching, some software (e.g. Google Hangouts) is available with automatic captions (using speech recognition software) and there are some [apps](#) that do the same

My child needs a new earmould

New earmoulds for children are being made without impressions when possible. Manufacturers are re-printing moulds (based on stored scans of impressions) where available, adding a small percentage for growth and then posting to the family. Where scans are not available, Hearing Services may ask you to post in one of your child's earmoulds at a time (so that they are not without amplification altogether) and a remake can then be made from this. These are not perfect solutions, but are working for many children.

Where impressions are considered necessary, your audiology department will arrange a face-to-face appointment. Contact the audiology department your child attends for an appointment if your child needs them.

Gloucester Audiology: Tel: 0300 422 8210 or
Email: ghn-tr.paediatric-hearing.svcs@nhs.net

Swindon Audiology: Tel: 01793 696640 or
Email: gwh.audiology.paediatric@nhs.net

Oxford Audiology:
Email: orh-tr.paediatric.audiology@nhs.net

Bristol Audiology: Tel: 0117 342 1611
Email: childrenshearingcentre@uhbristol.nhs.uk

My child needs batteries for their hearing aid/implant

Call or email the audiology department / implant team and they will arrange to post new batteries out to you.

Gloucester Audiology: Tel: 0300 422 8210 or
Email: ghn-tr.paediatric-hearing.svcs@nhs.net

Swindon Audiology: Tel: 01793 696640 or
Email: gwh.audiology.paediatric@nhs.net

Oxford Audiology:
Email: orh-tr.paediatric.audiology@nhs.net

Bristol Audiology: Tel: 0117 342 1611
Email: childrenshearingcentre@uhbristol.nhs.uk

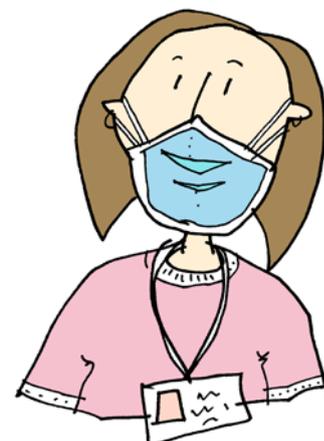
West of England Hearing Implant Programme:
Tel: 0117 342 1607

Birmingham Hearing Implant Programme:
Tel: 0121 204 3830
Email: mhip.clinicalsupport@nhs.net

Use of Face Masks in School when my child has a hearing impairment

If a decision is made to allow face mask/coverings to be worn inside the classroom, you should discuss with the school and your Teacher of the Deaf how this will impact your child. Education settings are legally required to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that your child is not disadvantaged.

As part of the Let's Be Clear Campaign, Gloucestershire Parent Carer Forum would like to send out a pack of 5 clear reusable masks to your family. You can give these to people who teach, support or talk to your child. [Clear Face Masks for Families Grant](#) (google.com)



Home to school transport

What are the plans for home to school transport to ensure it is safe?

Vehicles will be cleaned thoroughly after each journey using standard cleaning products such as detergents and bleach. Particular attention will be paid to door handles, handrails, windows and any other surface which will be frequently touched. This will include the car seat framework, seatbelt clips etc. Any object which cannot be thoroughly cleaned will be removed from the vehicle

What extra hygiene measures will be in taxis and minibuses to keep my child safe?

To lower the risk of the transmission of Coronavirus, the following measures will be in place:

- Face coverings and in some cases, plastic visors, may be used by drivers and passenger assistants where it is appropriate to the needs of the young people being transported
- Wherever possible windows on the vehicles will be kept open to aid ventilation
- We will endeavour to keep the same passenger assistant (where there is one) and driver on each vehicle so that your child is in contact with a limited number of people each day. However this cannot be fully guaranteed due to their own shielding requirements and other factors
- Vehicles will be cleaned thoroughly after each use (see above).

Passenger assistants are very often required to work in close proximity with, and to physically assist, passengers for example: hand holding, putting seatbelts on, handling belongings. For the safety of both parties in this situation passenger assistants may use personal protective equipment (PPE) in the form of face masks, gloves, aprons and hand sanitiser unless the young person they are supporting cannot tolerate this.

My child had no Covid-19 symptoms when they left for school this morning and travelled to school by a GCC contracted taxi. They have started to feel unwell whilst they are at school. Will they be able travel back home via the same taxi?

It will be parental responsibility to arrange transport home for their child, either by their own transport or by using a private taxi company that is prepared to transport their child. Parents should also not send their child to school if they are in any doubt as to whether their child may be exhibiting symptoms of Covid-19.

GCC are unable to knowingly put the health of contracted taxi/bus drivers at risk by asking them to transport a child or adult with suspected or confirmed Covid-19 home. Many taxi drivers are older and more at risk of illness from the variant virus. The taxi driver would also have to self-isolate for 10 days preventing them from being able to drive/transport other children and forfeit other contracts that they cannot fulfil.



Health

Will I need to re-refer my child to therapies such as Speech and Language, Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy, CYPS/CAMHS even though they were getting these services before lockdown?

All services remain open, accepting referrals and delivering care. The 3 methods of delivery are face to face - this could be in the home environment, in a COVID secure clinic setting or in the wider community; Virtual platform (via a platform called Attend Anywhere) or a telephone consultation.

Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust are only discharging cases where care has been completed; this will always be done in collaboration with the child and their family.

If you feel your child has a Speech and Language, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy or CYPS/CAMHS need and you are not in contact with your team please don't hesitate to get in touch.

If your Child has been recently discharged from CAMHS and you wish to make a self-referral as a Parent or Carer – please phone Acorn House to discuss your concerns further: **01452 894300**.

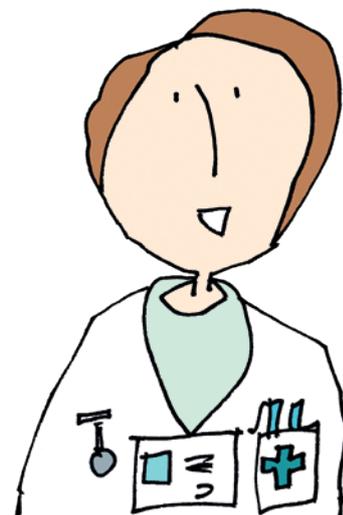
Is it better if someone at school makes a re-referral so it is given more weight with the services?

The source of referral does not impact upon access to services. Referral acceptance is based on the need of the Child or Young Person.

I am worried about the impact my own mental health during this time – where can I get support?

There is both face-to-face and online support for Parents who are impacted by their own mental health throughout this time. Adults can make contact with their GP who may make a referral to services like Let's Talk (which also has a self-referral option), as well as accessing online support through services including Qwell and Mental Health Matters. The following page will provide a guide for Adults in accessing local and national mental health support:

<https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/covid-19-information-and-advice/advice-on-covid-19/looking-after-your-wellbeing/wellbeing-support-for-all-gloucestershire-citizens/national-and-in-county-mental-health-services/support-for-adults/>



I am worried that my child is going to have to wait for months before they get a CYPS/CAMHS appointment as the demand is going to be high – are there plans for this?

CAMHS will remain “open for business” across this current lockdown period. COVID-19 has resulted in unprecedented demand for CAMHS mental health and emotional well-being services. CAMHS are experiencing week on week increase in waiting times for both assessment and treatments. Whilst we are working hard to respond to this demand, in the meantime Parents and Carers are able to access the following webpage which provides links to local and national services supporting Children and Young People’s mental health https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/childrens-mental-health/?WT.tsrc=search&WT.mc_id=EMMParentsSearch&&gclid=EAlalQobChMIJTDo6el7gIVQuDtCh366Ap1EAAAYASAAEgLuvvD_BwE.

CAMHS will continue to prioritise children and young people who are presenting with high clinical risk and complex needs and offer timely assessments and treatments. Care continues to be delivered via face to face, telephone or video consultation utilising the Attend Anywhere platform. Group work such as parenting groups, and examples of clinical based group work such as Family Functional Therapy has moved to video consultation to minimise risk of transmission.

All secondary schools who are participating in the Trailblazers, Young Minds Matter (Glos YMM) pilot have easy access to Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) through readily available self-referral pathways. The following website will provide further information on MHSTs and provides a link to the self-referral portal: <https://www.ghll.org.uk/mental-health/trailblazer-programme/>

As a result of school closures some activity has been transferred to virtual platforms e.g. online drop-ins by School Nursing. Other activity has moved to home visiting as a result of reduced access to school settings e.g. equipment reviews and therapy provision for children with EHCP’s.

Community Children’s Nursing and Complex Care Team are open and continue to deliver all care face to face in home settings.

Health visiting continue to offer all families at an initial face to face offer in the home, to ensure a full holistic assessment is performed. Virtual antenatal groups and health promotion hubs are being delivered, and for families who have a ‘universal partnership’ or ‘partnership plus’ family offer they will receive face to face contacts in a COVID secure setting. The 6-8-week universal pathway has a virtual component, which if there are no identified needs, will result in attendance at growth monitoring clinic, but if a need is identified a follow up face to face will be arranged.



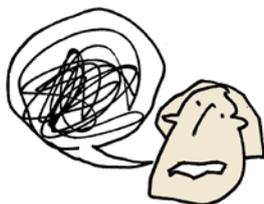
Medical Conditions

What if my child is anxious about going into school?

It will be normal for some children to be worried about returning to school. Talk to them about their concerns and use these FAQs to help answer any questions they may have. If your child seems particularly anxious, talk to your school.

I'm really anxious about my child returning to school.

This is a time where everyone has anxieties. Be assured that your child's school will be following Government guidance and taking every precaution to ensure the safety of everyone working within the school. This includes all children, all staff and any visitors to school.



My child has a serious medical condition which has required them to be shielded, will they be safe at school?

Yes, your child's school will be following Government guidance and taking every precaution to ensure their safety. However, you may like to talk to the consultant/ paediatrician working with your child for more specific information. Your school will work with you/the medical professionals to ensure any additional safety measures are put in place.



My child has a serious condition and the medical professionals have advised against a return to school. Will I get in trouble?

School will need the medical professionals to confirm this is the case. This could be by letter, phone call or email from the professionals. Then, and because they are complying with medical/ public health advice, schools will be able to immediately offer your child access to remote education. These activities will be monitored. Absence in this case will be authorised.

My child has been shielding, can I keep them off school?

There has been new guidance produced in January 2021. Please refer to:

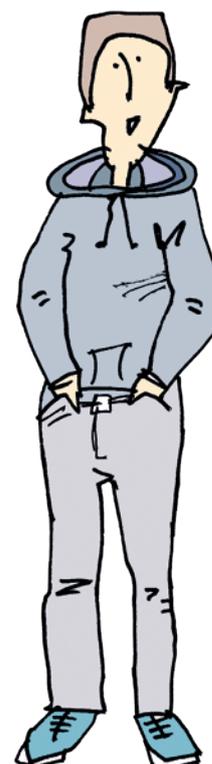
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>

As our knowledge of COVID-19 has grown, we now know that very few children and young people are at highest risk of severe illness due to the virus. Doctors have therefore been reviewing all children and young people who were initially identified as clinically extremely vulnerable to confirm whether they are still thought to be at highest risk.

If you have already discussed this with your child's doctors and they have confirmed your child is still considered clinically extremely vulnerable, your child should follow this shielding advice.

Under the current national lockdown, children will learn remotely until February half term, except for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers who may still attend school.

Clinically extremely vulnerable children and young people should not attend school or other educational settings, because the risk of exposure to the virus in the community is now very high. Your school or college will make appropriate arrangements for you to be able to continue your education at home.



Disabled Children and Young People's Service



I used to use Hop Skip Jump for my child. Now that is closed I can't access securely located provision away from our home. What are GCC doing to address this gap in provision?

GCC recognise that the closure of Hop Skip Jump has left a gap in the market place for securely located provision and are working with partners and providers to stimulate the market place with the aim of developing new provisions. In the meantime, social workers and lead professionals continue to work with families to ensure access to short breaks.

During the first lockdown GCC offered some additional flexibility with use of their personal budgets. If families have not used the full allocation of funds through a personal budget, will they be expected to pay it back?

Where a parent has a direct payment we will work with the family to understand the reasons for unspent money in the account. Where there is clear rationale and a timescale for the funds to be spent in line with the child's plan we will work with the family to monitor this. If in discussions the money isn't going to be spent within an agreed timeframe this will need to be returned to the LA.

We understand this has been a challenging time for families and PA's and other services to provide short breaks may not have been as available as they previously would but we do have to work in line with corporate policy and request return of unused funds. This will not effect your child's plan moving forward and direct payment money will continue to be paid but will be monitored in line with policy.

Direct payments are taking a long time to come through – what can I do?

The Disabled Children and Young People's Service are working hard to ensure that direct payments are being authorised quickly and have increased the number of decision making panels to ensure that families receive a timely response.

Your lead professional or social worker will be able to support any questions or queries you have. Please phone them or contact them directly via their email.

I am worried that because we have coped as well as possible without breaks during COVID-19 that services may be reduced or withdrawn – is this likely?

There is no plan to reduce any care or support packages in light of COVID-19 lockdown.

Disabled Children and Young People's Service understands fully that families have been managing in some very difficult and adverse circumstances to support and keep their children and young people safe. We recognise the tremendous effort and know that this does not mean that your child no longer has a need for support going forward.

We are very much aware of the impact on families' physical and mental health. Disabled Children and Young People's Lead Professionals and Social Workers have been keeping close contact with their families to understand their lived experience.

We continue to work with families creatively and flexibly to find support solutions.

What are the plans for providing access to COVID-19 safe short break activities moving forward?

We are working with our commissioning colleagues and short break providers to be able to offer safe short breaks in line with government guidance. We understand the challenges that this brings for providers with an ever changing landscape.

We are working with some schools to be able to develop extended services. We have been able to successfully support some short break settings to be able to open and we continue to focus on families being able to safely take a break that works for them and their personal circumstances.

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