

27 January 2021

Dear colleague

Since the pandemic began last year, the ways in which you have adapted your settings and your practice to ensure your settings are safe and welcoming has been testimony to your professionalism in supporting the children and families you work with.

As 2021 has begun with further restrictions on our lives and work, I'm writing to update you on why the current measures are in place and to reassure you that the evidence continues to tell us that your workplaces remain lower risk environments, as long as appropriate safety measures and mitigations are put in place.

Current arrangements for childcare settings are in place as a precautionary measure in light of developments in the virus and levels of community transmission. The evidence we have, shows that childcare settings are not high risk environments when appropriate mitigations and safety measures are implemented. There is no evidence that childcare settings are driving transmission of the virus.

However, controlling levels of community transmission is essential for ensuring that our childcare environments can stay safe, open and welcoming. Current arrangements are therefore intended to suppress levels of infection in the wider community and to ensure sufficient time to understand the characteristics of the new strain of the virus, prior to the safe reopening of childcare settings to all children.

I recognise that news of a more transmissible version of the COVID-19 virus will be a cause for concern. While cases of the new variant are increasing in all age groups, the rate of increase is slightly lower in children under 5 and, compared to other age groups in Scotland, children under 5 continue to have far fewer diagnoses of COVID-19. Indeed, since the start of the pandemic, 985 children aged 2-4 have been diagnosed with COVID-19. This is only 0.6% of children in this age group.

I want to reassure you that Public Health Scotland are continuing to closely monitor the new variant of this virus, its severity and its transmissibility between children, and from children to adults. While increased transmissibility is thought to be a feature of this variant, increased severity and hospitalisations are not. Any additional mitigations that can be put in place will be communicated straight away. At the moment though, childcare settings should continue to apply the safe operating guidance, published on the Scottish Government website:

[Early Learning and Childcare](#)
[Childminding Services](#)
[School Aged Childcare](#)

Public Health Scotland have investigated the risk of severe COVID-19 in different groups of adults who work and live with children, including teachers, healthcare workers with children, and the general Scottish population. The investigation concluded that, in Scotland, there is no evidence that working with children increases the risk of being hospitalised with COVID-19 or having more severe COVID-19, or that living with children (compared to not living with children) increases the risk of severe COVID-19.

Although there is good evidence that ELC settings remain lower risk environments, when the appropriate measures are in place, we must recognise that the evidence is constantly developing and uncertainties exist in our overall knowledge. We are aware that, where cases have been found in ELC settings, adult to adult transmission appears to be a key factor and our public health officials continue to monitor this.

This adds further weight to our advice that adult to adult transmission should be minimised in all work settings by following FACTS and making sure rooms are well ventilated, natural ventilation is most usually sufficient. Transmissibility of the new variant is greater, so extra vigilance to applying your mitigations and safety measures is important.

We know that adults who work in the education sector consistently make up around 5% of test positive cases in Scotland. Any changes to this number have reflected the pattern of community infections over time and by place. They have not reflected an increase in transmissibility in education settings.

The COVID-19 Antibody Survey of Education Staff in Scotland indicates that around 7.3% of education staff tested positive for antibodies, an indicator of past infection, to the COVID-19 virus in the period mid-October to mid-November 2020. This is similar to the prevalence of 7.1% for the general adult population reported by the Office for National Statistics Infection Survey for the same period. These figures give us re-assurance that childcare workers are not at an increased risk of infection from COVID-19 compared to the rest of the Scottish population.

In the current climate, we cannot assume that any environment is entirely risk free, therefore it is vital that we all continue to follow appropriate guidance to lower risks wherever possible. With that said, I hope this letter provides reassurance that, with appropriate mitigations and safety procedures in place for maximising physical distancing and using face coverings during contact between adults, good hand washing, environmental cleanliness, avoiding car-sharing, good natural ventilation and getting tested and staying at home when symptoms arise, childcare settings can remain lower risk environments.

I want to finish by recognising again, the important work you are doing to support children and families across Scotland at this challenging time, and to thank you for your continued vigilance in keeping yourself and others around you safe.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gregor Smith', with a stylized flourish at the end.

DR GREGOR SMITH
Chief Medical Officer