



31 December 2021

Dear provider,

I realise that the increasing Covid-19 cases are causing concern to early learning and childcare providers, staff and the families who use their services. A number of provider representative bodies have asked for guidance from my Department on whether early learning and childcare services should operate from next week.

The current position is that early learning and childcare services should remain open, or reopen from 4/6 January if they have been closed for the Christmas period. My Department will keep you updated if there is any change to this.

Early learning and childcare providers and their staff have shown huge commitment to children and families throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and have successfully implemented infection control measures to keep the children in their care safe.

I recognise that many services may face staffing challenges, due to staff being Covid-19 positive or having to isolate. I would encourage services to avoid full service closure if possible, unless directed by the HSE to close on public health grounds, or where there are no staff available to provide a service. I realise that many services may be dealing with temporary staff shortages. If they are unable to get relief staff, they could consider closing a pod or pods temporarily, with full service closure to be used if no other options are available.

In addition to the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme, the antigen programme for early learning and childcare services and the grant to improve ventilation in services, my Department has a suite of other supports in place for providers to help them in this challenging time, described below.

I will be meeting with the Covid-19 Advisory Group next week (4 January) and will continue to engage with public health experts.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you once again for your work throughout 2021. I look forward to working with you all in 2022 and wish you all a very Happy New Year.



Roderic O'Gorman

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Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

Supports available to services facing staffing difficulties

If a service has reduced staff numbers they can seek to hire relief or temporary staff. DCEDIY and the Department of Education have established a temporary student employment scheme, under which students who are studying degrees in early learning and childcare can work in services for the month of January. Details can be found on <http://www.myccc.ie/>

If a service is unable to fill a temporary vacancy, they can close one or more pods temporarily. Services will continue to receive funding under the DCEDIY funding schemes for early learning and childcare for the closed pod or pods, in accordance with the funding scheme contracts.

If a service is subject to an outbreak of Covid-19, they may be directed to close by the HSE in the interests of public health. In these cases, services will continue to receive full funding under the DCEDIY funding schemes.

If a service is unable to operate due to significant staff absences, they can apply for permission to close and to continue to receive full funding under the DCEDIY funding schemes for early learning and childcare.

Providers, staff and families should continue to check the HSE website for updated guidance on testing and isolation periods that will come into effect on Monday 3 January (<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/covid19/restricted-movements/>) .