

# Covid-19 Briefing

## Briefing for Pupils, Parents & Carers

21<sup>st</sup> December 2020



COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR  
Education, Skills & Children's Services

DMD52161

**Information correct at date of publication.**

**Due to the fast-changing nature of the current situation with Covid-19, the guidance included in this briefing can be subject to rapid change. We will endeavour to continue to provide the most up-to-date information possible to pupils, parents and carers.**

### Changes Announced on 19<sup>th</sup> December

The announcement by the Scottish Government about significant changes to the Covid-19 measures across Scotland from 23<sup>rd</sup> December onwards means that we now need to issue a new briefing to update and change the information circulated to you last Friday. This briefing will address changes to festive arrangements and to the re-opening of schools in January.

Schools will continue to operate as planned for all pupils until our scheduled closing date of 22<sup>nd</sup> December for pupils and staff.

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### Changes to Christmas Bubbles

Following the announcement by Scottish Government, we are now required to update the information issued in our briefing on Friday. Relaxation of restrictions over the festive period is now strictly limited to Christmas Day only.

The legal position about the number of households coming together on Christmas Day remains the same: a maximum of eight people (over 11 years of age) from three households. Whilst this is permitted, the Government are providing strong advice to keep gatherings on Christmas day as small as possible.

Rules about people who live alone forming a bubble with one other household is unchanged and continues to be in place.

### Changes to Protection Levels (Tiers)

From 26<sup>th</sup> December, the Western Isles will move into Tier 3 of the protection levels alongside the other island communities of Orkney and Shetland. Mainland Scotland will move to Tier 4, the highest level of restriction. These changes will be in place for at least three weeks. Details of the measures in place for tiers three and four [can be found here](#).

Parents and carers of children with clinical health vulnerabilities must consider the additional advice relating to school attendance when an area is in tier three. Parents should seek the advice of their child's GP or health professional in the first instance and then discuss the matter with the school.

### Travel Restrictions

The following travel guidance is provided for parents and pupils who had planned to travel over the festive period.

Travel restrictions are relaxed across Scotland for Christmas Day but only where the journey to and from the destination can be completed within that day. Travel from out-with Scotland is unlawful except for expressly permitted reasons.

From 26<sup>th</sup> December, for a period of at least three weeks, there will be very significant restrictions on travel within Scotland due to the changes in the protection level of both the Western Isles and the rest of the UK. This will include increased restrictions on travel to and from the islands.

### School Arrangements for January

It was confirmed on 19<sup>th</sup> December that the Scottish Government was making some national changes to the arrangements for re-opening schools in January.

- Schools will open to staff only from 6<sup>th</sup> January, as planned.

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- Children of critical key workers and vulnerable pupils will be able to attend school from 6<sup>th</sup> January.
- All other pupils will be subject to an extension of the school holiday through to 8<sup>th</sup> January.
- Online learning will commence from 11<sup>th</sup> January for the majority of pupils and will continue until at least 18<sup>th</sup> January. The only exceptions will be those permitted to attend school as children of critical key workers or vulnerable pupils.
- Schools are expected to begin re-opening to all pupils from 18<sup>th</sup> January, subject to Government advice at that time.

### Nurseries and Childminders

Further specific guidance is expected for the operation of nurseries but the Scottish Government has confirmed that they will be subject to the same requirements as schools, where only the children of key workers and vulnerable children will be able to attend from 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> January until at least 18<sup>th</sup> January.

Nurseries usually open during the holidays will continue to operate as planned. There will be no change to the closing dates or opening dates, which have already been agreed.

Childminders will continue to be able to accept all children during the period of restrictions with the appropriate tier three measures in place.

### Key Workers & Vulnerable Pupils

Due to the short period of extended school closure that has been announced, Comhairle schools and nurseries will operate the following arrangements for identifying the permitted attendance of children of key workers and vulnerable pupils. Please do not contact schools before 6<sup>th</sup> January to enquire about key worker status.

#### Children of Key Workers:

- Any key workers who had this status agreed during the first lockdown (23<sup>rd</sup> March to 26<sup>th</sup> June) will continue to be eligible but must only use the provision when there is absolutely no alternative and as long as they have had no change in employment status.
- Key worker status is dependent on having to physically attend at work. Anyone working from home is not eligible to send children to school.

- Any parents who believe themselves to be critical key workers but had not registered during the first lockdown should self-identify at school from the morning of 6<sup>th</sup> January. It will be a requirement to attend in person to do this.
- When you are presenting your children at the school you must wear a face covering, maintain physical distancing from other parents and staff and be prepared to wait whilst the school processes requests.
- In circumstances where both parents/carers are involved in the regular care of the child, they must BOTH have key worker status to be eligible to access school attendance.
- School offices will record the names of those attending and the eligibility reasons provided by parents. Please be prepared for schools to challenge requests for key worker status, as it is a requirement for them to do so.
- Should the period of online learning be extended, the Comhairle may review the criteria for permitted attendance.

In the interests of public safety, the Comhairle has a duty to ensure that attendance at school is kept to an absolute minimum during this Covid-19 restriction and parents should only request to use the provision when they are critical key workers and have no safe alternative provision available to them.

The Scottish Government has not yet published any different guidance about key workers to that already published for the first lockdown. Parents will be informed if this changes before 6<sup>th</sup> January.

#### Vulnerable Pupils:

- It will be a matter for individual schools and nurseries to identify the pupils eligible for attendance due to vulnerabilities. This process will begin from the register from the previous lockdown and will be updated accordingly, to take account of any changes of circumstances.

### Online Learning Arrangements

The government announcement on 19<sup>th</sup> December confirmed that, from 11<sup>th</sup> January, learning will be online and remote for all pupils except children of confirmed key workers and pre-identified vulnerable pupils, who will be permitted to attend school.

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Each school will provide information about their individual arrangement for online and remote learning during the period of 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> January in preparation for commencement on 11<sup>th</sup> January. Depending on the digital resources, curriculum programmes and the ages and learning needs of pupils, arrangements may vary from school to school.

In addition, e-Sgoil will continue to work alongside our school staff to provide access to relevant elements of the National Curriculum Offer, if that is required.

Please note that the period 6<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> January is an extension to the holiday for pupils and online learning will not be provided over this time.

### School Transport & Meals

It is currently expected that school transport will operate as normal for at least 6<sup>th</sup> January and will then be reviewed based on key worker demand. This will be subject to change at short notice and any affected parents will be notified of specific arrangements affecting them.

School and nursery meals will continue to be available for any pupils permitted to attend school during 6<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> January. There may be changes made to the menu offer and this will be communicated by individual schools to their own families.

### Impact on SQA Assessment Processes

Having already received confirmation that SQA exams for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses have already been cancelled, our schools have been preparing and gathering evidence for the alternative assessment approach to be used in 2021.

As long as the period of restricted attendance does not go beyond 18<sup>th</sup> January, it is expected that there will be only minimal impact on these arrangements. We will keep this under continuous review and communicate with affected pupils and parents, as required.

Secondary schools will provide specific subject and course information relating to online learning ahead of commencement on 11<sup>th</sup> January.

### Contact over the Holidays

We provide the number below for parents and carers who need to contact us in urgent circumstances during the holidays. It will connect to the Faire Community Team who will pass your details to the duty education officer.

**01851 701702**

Use the number to:

- ✓ **inform us of a positive Covid-19 test linked to the household of a pupil attending school or nursery;**
- ✓ **tell us about a critical emergency matter relating to a school pupil.**

DO NOT use this number to:

- ✗ **ask about key worker or vulnerable pupil status;**
- ✗ **enquire about online learning arrangements;**
- ✗ **ask about self-isolation or travel restrictions;**
- ✗ **make general school-related enquiries.**

### Contact from 6<sup>th</sup> January

School offices will be open again from 6<sup>th</sup> January to respond to any matters relating to the re-opening of schools or other questions from pupils, parents or carers. Please contact your school office in the first instance.

### Links to Latest Advice

The following links provide access to the most current published arrangements relating to Covid-19.

[Scottish Government Coronavirus Index of Information](#)  
[Scottish Government Advice for the Festive Period](#)  
[Scottish Government Latest Protection Levels](#)  
[Scottish Government Advice for Travel & Transport](#)  
[Scottish Government International Travel Advice](#)  
[CNES Coronavirus Information Page](#)  
[NHS Western Isles Coronavirus Site](#)