



12 October 2021

Recommendations by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare and the Ministry of Education and Culture to providers of education and early childhood education and care during the COVID-19 epidemic

- **These recommendations replace the recommendations issued on 5 August 2021.**

In accordance with the Government Resolution of 9 September 2021, the system of epidemiologically classifying regions into different phases will be discontinued and a uniform system based on local level activities will be adopted throughout the country. The epidemiological situation will be monitored. If regional clusters of infection emerge, they will primarily be managed in a targeted way by local authorities in line with the basic powers laid down in the Communicable Diseases Act.

The temporary provisions of the Communicable Diseases Act on measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic will remain in force until 31 December 2021.

Legal bases and competences

Under section 8 of the Communicable Diseases Act (1227/2016), the regional state administrative agencies coordinate and supervise the prevention of infections in their area. The joint municipal authorities for hospital districts guide and support municipalities as well as healthcare and social welfare units in the prevention of communicable diseases, work regionally to develop the diagnostics and treatment of communicable diseases, and investigate epidemics together with municipalities. The regional state administrative agencies and the joint municipal authorities for hospital districts within each agency's operating area collaborate in the prevention of communicable diseases. The regional state administrative agencies make the administrative decisions laid down in this Act by making use of the expertise of the joint municipal authority of the hospital district, the specific catchment area, and the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare.

Under section 9 of the Communicable Diseases Act, municipalities are responsible for organising the work to prevent communicable diseases referred to in this Act within their area as part of public health work, as laid down in the Primary Health Care Act (66/1972), in the Health Care Act (1326/2010) and in this Act. In this Act, the actions to prevent communicable diseases encompass the prevention, early detection and monitoring of communicable diseases, measures needed to investigate or prevent an epidemic, and the examination, treatment and medical rehabilitation of persons who have a communicable disease or are suspected of having one, as well as the prevention of treatment-related infections.

Obligations under the Communicable Diseases Act to prevent the coronavirus epidemic from spreading

The temporary amendments to the Communicable Diseases Act (447/2021) entered into force on 1 July 2021. The amendments will remain in force until 31 December 2021. Section 58c of the Communicable Diseases Act also places obligations on early childhood education and care providers and education providers. Section 58c of the Communicable Diseases Act consists of provisions on the obligations to prevent the spread of coronavirus in the activities of those defined in the Act. The obligations are directly in force under the Act and do not require a separate decision by the authorities.

Obligations under the section include the obligation to make sure:

- those working in early education centres and schools have opportunities to clean their hands;
- those in early education centres and schools are given instructions on how to keep an adequate distance, hand hygiene and other similar practices to prevent the spread of infections;
- to organise more intensive cleaning of the premises and surfaces in addition to provisions issued elsewhere on cleanliness related to the activities in question; and
- those in early education centres and schools use the premises in a spacious way, taking into account the specific characteristics of the activity in question, and any customer seating is arranged sufficiently far apart.

The guidelines for action for those working in early education centres and schools can be issued in the most expedient way, for example by means of public announcements, written instructions, signposting, signs indicating how to use the premises, or any other effective ways.

Under the Communicable Diseases Act, each regional state administrative agency and municipality monitors compliance with the obligations and restrictions under section 58c and relevant decisions in their respective areas. The regional state administrative agencies and municipalities may inspect the activities of the operators they supervise and the premises used in their operations and stipulate measures to remedy shortcomings and drawbacks.

In addition, those responsible for managing premises must make arrangements so that the premises can be used in a spacious way, taking into account the special characteristics of each activity in question.

Purpose of the recommendations

The purpose of these recommendations is to support schools and early education centres (daycare centres) in ensuring that it is possible for both children and staff to attend school and early childhood education and care during the COVID-19 epidemic. By complying with the recommendations it is possible to control the risk of infection, i.e. to reduce infections and to minimise the number of people exposed in potential exposure situations. When planning activities, it is important to reconcile the best interests and rights of children with the principles of preventing infectious diseases.

Recommendations for safe school attendance and participation in early childhood education and care

1. Do not attend school or early childhood education and care if you have symptoms of illness

Coronavirus causes a respiratory infection. The symptoms may include a cough, sore throat, fever, shortness of breath (dyspnoea), muscle pain (myalgia), abdominal symptoms and headache. You should not attend school or participate in early childhood education and care if you have any symptoms indicative of illness.

If a child becomes ill during the day, the symptomatic child is transferred to a separate space accompanied by an adult to wait for the arrival of the parent or other guardian.

When a parent or other guardian observes that their child has symptoms of infection, the child should not go to school or participate in early childhood education and care. In such cases, make sure to follow the guidelines of the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare. The latest guidelines are available on the Institute's webpages website [Children and coronavirus](#)

[Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare: Symptoms and treatment of coronavirus](#)

2. Risk groups

Cases of severe COVID-19 are rare in children and the risk of severe cases has not increased among healthy children and adolescents or the majority of those who have a chronic health condition. Those at risk of contracting a severe case of COVID-19 comprise children whose underlying condition generally causes an increased risk of serious infections. In the case of a child or a family member with a severe underlying condition or one who needs regular medication that compromises defence mechanisms, the attending doctor assesses whether the child can participate in contact learning or early childhood education and care. It is particularly important that those over 12 years of age belonging to a risk group take care of their vaccination coverage in accordance with national guidelines. The doctor's assessment can be used in decision-making on case-by-case arrangements for school and early childhood education and care.

For those working in schools and early childhood education and care, the measures are based on a risk assessment carried out by the employer. Occupational healthcare supports employers in the risk assessment.

[Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare: Risk groups for severe coronavirus disease](#)

Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare: [Vaccines and coronavirus](#)

3. Avoiding unnecessary physical contact

The coronavirus is mainly transmitted by respiratory droplets. Whenever possible, unnecessary physical contact should be avoided in schools, with due consideration for the child's age and level of development. Municipal education services and the municipal unit responsible for communicable diseases can provide further guidance on practical measures, if necessary. Each municipality establishes practices that suit their own situation the best and advises families to act accordingly.

- [Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare: transmission of the coronavirus and protection against it](#)

Early education centres and schools must comply with the provisions on maintaining physical distances laid down in the Communicable Diseases Act (section 58c). Regional or local authorities determine which of the recommended measures to avoid physical contact are to be applied and how, depending on the regional and local epidemiological situation. The spaciousness referred to in section 58c of the Communicable Diseases Act could be implemented by the following measures determined regionally and locally, for example:

- Attention will be paid to spaciousness and hygiene and, where necessary, efforts will be made to stagger teaching in schools as far as possible.
- By organising activities in groups and in a staggered way and by using outdoor spaces, it is possible to ensure that there are as few people in the same space as possible.
- The lunchroom can be used in turns. Hygiene is ensured as required by section 58c of the Communicable Diseases Act whenever preparing, distributing and eating food.
- When organising large joint events, attention should be paid to factors related to hygiene and physical distancing.
- Monitoring has shown that the risk of infection in early childhood education and care and schools has been low, and there is no need to issue general national mask recommendations in these environments. The competent authorities in the regions and local areas may issue supplementary or more limited recommendations in their area or locally based on their risk assessment and powers, taking into account the local and regional epidemiological situation. For this reason, more specific recommendations on the use of masks may vary by region.
- Apart from children and staff members, outsiders may spend time in or around schools and early education centres and their surrounding areas taking into account hygiene requirements under the Communicable Diseases Act. Similarly, opportunities will be provided for children and their families to become acquainted with the activities of the schools or early childhood education and care.
- Staff meetings can be arranged and staff can move from one location to another, taking into account the epidemiological situation and hygiene requirements under the Communicable Diseases Act. Remote connections can still be used in gatherings.
- Regardless of more effective hygiene and respecting distancing, it is important to make sure that children receive the affection, security and interaction they need.

[Guidelines for workplaces to prevent coronavirus infection](#)

4. Good hand hygiene and respiratory and cough hygiene prevents infections

Proper hand hygiene and respiratory and cough practices prevent infections.

- It is recommended that you wash your hands whenever you come in to early childhood education and care or school, before eating, after you have been out, and always after sneezing or coughing, or if your hands are visibly dirty. Dry your hands thoroughly using a clean, dry towel. This may

be either a disposable paper towel or a roller hand towel in which the clean and dirty parts are not in contact with each other.

- If you cannot wash your hands, use an alcohol-based sanitiser. Hand sanitisers should be readily available. Adults always supervise children's use of hand sanitisers.
- When sneezing or coughing, place a disposable handkerchief to cover your mouth and dispose of it in a bin immediately after use. If you do not have a handkerchief, cover your mouth with your upper arm near your inner elbow. Then wash your hands.

Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare: [Hand washing and coughing](#)

5. Cleaning and ventilation

Coronavirus is primarily transmitted as a droplet and contact infection when a person coughs or sneezes. It is possible to catch the coronavirus via small airborne aerosols in indoor spaces where ventilation is poor. Coronaviruses do not survive for long periods in the air or on surfaces of varying temperatures. It is possible that the virus might also be transmitted through physical contact. No cases of transmission of the infection through goods have been detected.

Use a slightly alkaline all-purpose cleaner in cleaning. Under section 58c of the Communicable Diseases Act, more intensive cleaning of premises and surfaces must be ensured in addition to provisions issued elsewhere on cleanliness related to the activities in question; You can use disinfectant to step up cleaning in sanitary facilities. Comply with the guidelines on cleaning issued by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health.

The separate guidelines issued by the Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare should be taken into account when using premises in early childhood education and care and in schools.

- Wipe contact surfaces such as door handles, armrests, desks and tables, light switches and taps at least once a day, preferably twice a day.
- Cleaning shared work equipment, such as keyboards, tablets or handcraft accessories (scissors, etc.) between users is recommended. Make sure to clean toys regularly.

Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare: [Separate guidelines on ventilation](#)

Finnish Institute of Occupational Health: [Cleaning guidelines](#)

6. If a coronavirus infection is diagnosed in school or early childhood education and care

Under the Communicable Diseases Act, a physician responsible for communicable diseases in the municipality or hospital district is in charge of investigating transmission chains. If someone in school or early childhood education and care is diagnosed with COVID-19, action is taken to identify whether others have been exposed to it, and, under the Communicable Diseases Act, those exposed are traced and quarantined.

Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare: [Instructions for coronavirus exposure situations in early childhood education and care, schools and educational institutions](#) (in Finnish or Swedish)

Based on the instructions given by a physician specialised in communicable diseases, those infected with COVID-19 must therefore stay away from school or early childhood education and care.