



Ministry of
Education
and Culture



Finnish Institute for
Health and Welfare

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Instructions from 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

Legal bases and competences

In accordance with section 8 of the Communicable Diseases Act (1227/2016), the Regional State Administrative Agencies coordinate and supervise the prevention of infections in their territory. The joint municipal authorities for hospital districts guide and support municipalities as well as healthcare and social welfare 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 (1227/2016), municipalities are responsible for organising the work to combat of 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 and in this Act. In this Act, the actions to combat 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.

Purpose of the instructions

The purpose of these instructions is to support schools and early education centres (daycare centres) in ensuring that it is safe to attend school and early childhood education for both children and staff during the COVID-19 epidemic. By following these instructions, the risk of infection can be reduced in the context of school and early childhood education.

Instructions for safe school attendance and participation in early childhood education

1. Do not go to school or early childhood education if you are ill

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 (<https://thl.fi/en/web/infectious-diseases/what-s-new/coronavirus-covid-19-latest-updates/coronavirus-covid-19>). No child or adult should go to school or early childhood education if they have any symptoms that indicate a possible illness. If a child becomes ill during the day, the symptomatic child must be immediately transferred to a separate space accompanied by an adult to wait for the arrival of the parent. Adults must avoid close contact with the sick child by maintaining sufficient physical distance. Those who have symptoms should contact their own health centre and take a coronavirus test as instructed by their health centre.

2. Risk groups

Cases of severe COVID-19 are very rare in children and the risk of severe cases has not risen in healthy children and adolescents whose underlying health condition is under therapeutic control. In the case of a child or a family member with a severe underlying condition or who needs regular medication that compromises defence mechanisms, the attending doctor assesses whether the child can return to school or early childhood education. Those at risk of contracting a severe case of COVID-19 comprise children whose underlying condition generally causes an increased risk of serious infections.

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

Groups at risk of serious illness from COVID-19: <https://thl.fi/en/web/infectious-diseases/what-s-new/coronavirus-covid-19-latest-updates/coronavirus-covid-19/risk-groups-for-coronavirus-disease>

3. Avoid unnecessary physical contact

COVID-19 is primarily transmitted through droplets (<https://thl.fi/en/web/infectious-diseases/what-s-new/coronavirus-covid-19-latest-updates/coronavirus-covid-19>). Situations in which people are in direct contact with one another are to be avoided in schools and early childhood education and care. Municipal education services and the municipal unit responsible for communicable diseases give more detailed guidance on practical measures, if necessary.

- Do not organise large gatherings.
- Apart from children and staff members, avoid allowing outsiders from spending time in or around schools and early childhood education centres and their surrounding areas. Each unit establishes practices that suit their own situation the best and instructs families to act accordingly.
- Regardless of more effective hygiene, make sure that children receive as much affection, security and interaction from adults as they need, just the way they did before the epidemic.
- Staff members must avoid assembling together, which means that teachers should hold their meetings primarily remotely.
- Staff members in early childhood education and care should work with one and the same group of children.
- No regulations on safe distances between people have been issued. Groups do not need to be split up; instead, spaces can be arranged more spaciouly.
- As a rule, to prevent the spread of infections staff members should not move from one unit to another.
- Under the Assembly Act, activities in school or early childhood education and care do not constitute a general meeting or public event. The activities are not subject to any restrictions on assembly.
- The regulations on group sizes and staffing sizes are in force as enacted in the legislation on early childhood education and care and on basic education.

Further observations on schools:

- Schools are to arrange their spaces in such a way that there are fewer students in the same space than normally. If necessary, empty teaching facilities (e.g. upper secondary schools) can be used for this purpose.
- In primary schools, the different teaching groups are to be kept separate throughout the school day. In lower secondary schools and in optional

subjects, the teaching groups may change if the teaching cannot be organised any other way.

- If keeping teaching groups separate is impossible in secondary schools, for example, effort should be made to create spaciousness and to stagger teaching as far as possible.
- Arrange school meals individually with the students' own class or group; no joint meals in the lunchroom. However, the lunchroom can be used in turns. Ensure proper hygiene when preparing and distributing food preparation as well as during school meals.

Instructions by Finnish Institute of Occupational Health to employees (in Finnish): <https://hyvatyo.ttl.fi/koronavirus/ohje-tyontekijalle>

4. Good hand hygiene and cough hygiene prevents infections

COVID-19 is primarily transmitted through droplets <https://thl.fi/en/web/infectious-diseases/what-s-new/coronavirus-covid-19-latest-updates/coronavirus-covid-19>). Proper cough and hand hygiene practices prevent infections.

- Both children and adults should wash their hands each time they come to school or early childhood education and care, and before they go home. In addition, wash your hands before meals, whenever you come in after you have been out, after sneezing or coughing, or if your hands are visibly dirty. Use disposable paper towels to dry your hands.
- If you cannot wash your hands, use an alcohol-based sanitizer. Alcohol-based sanitizers must be readily available. An adult must supervise children's use of alcohol-based sanitizers.
- When sneezing or coughing, place a disposable handkerchief to cover your mouth and dispose of it 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.
- The use of masks in schools or in early childhood education and care is not generally recommended, but you can use one if you wish, taking into account the instructions for its use.

<https://thl.fi/en/web/infectious-diseases/what-s-new/coronavirus-covid-19-latest-updates/coronavirus-covid-19>

<https://thl.fi/fi/web/infektioaudit-ja-rokotukset/ajankohtaista/ajankoh-taista-koronaviruksesta-covid-19/ohjeita-kansalaisille-koronaviruksesta/kankaisten-kasvomaskien-kaytto-koronaviruspandem-ian-aikana> (in Finnish)

<https://hyvatyo.ttl.fi/koronavirus/tietoa-itse-tehdyista-kasvomaskeista> (in Finnish)

5. Cleaning

COVID-19 is primarily transmitted as a droplet and contact infection when a person coughs or sneezes. It is possible that the virus might also be transmitted through physical contact. Coronaviruses do not survive for long periods in the air or on surfaces of varying temperatures. No cases of transmission of the infection through goods have been detected. Use a slightly alkaline all-purpose cleaner in cleaning. You can use disinfectant to step up cleaning in sanitary facilities. Comply with cleaning instructions of the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health.

- Wipe contact surfaces such as door handles, armrests, desks and tables, light switches and taps at least once a day, preferably twice a day.
- Avoid using shared work equipment, such as keyboards, tablets or hand-craft accessories (scissors, etc.), and if they are used, make sure to always clean them between each user.
- Do not bring any toys of your own to your early education centre (day-care centre).

<https://hyvatyo.ttl.fi/koronavirus/ohje-siivoukseen> (in Finnish)

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

The physician responsible for infectious 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, it will be investigated whether others have been exposed to it, and the exposed must be tracked down and quarantined for 14 days.

Those infected with COVID-19 must be away from school or early childhood education and care for at least 14 days from the onset of symptoms, and for a longer period, if necessary, so that they have been asymptomatic for at least two days before returning to school or early childhood education and care.