



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

Edited on 10 September 2020:

- The section related to COVID-19 testing of symptoms has been deleted from chapter 1, and up-to-date information has been linked to the webpages of the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare.
<https://thl.fi/en/web/infectious-diseases-and-vaccinations>
- Specific details have been added to the section related to the detection of coronavirus infections in Chapter 6: The duration of absences is determined based on the instructions of a physician responsible for communicable diseases in the municipality

Edited on 20 October 2020:

- The section related to hand hygiene in chapter 4 and the section related to quarantine in chapter 6 have been specified.

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, 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 (1326/2010) 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 recommendations

The purpose of these recommendations is to support schools and early education centres (daycare centres) in ensuring that it is possible to attend school and early childhood education and care for both children and staff 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. Avoid attending school or early childhood education and care if you have symptoms

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>). Do not attend school or participate in early childhood education and care if you have any symptoms suggestive of illness.

If a child becomes ill during the day, the symptomatic child is immediately transferred to a separate space accompanied by an adult to wait for the arrival of the parent or other guardian. Adults should avoid close contact with the sick child by keeping at a sufficient physical distance from the child.

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; latest guidelines available on the Institute's webpages website <https://thl.fi/en/web/infectious-diseases-and-vaccinations/what-s-new/coronavirus-covid-19-latest-updates>

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 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. 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.

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. Avoiding unnecessary physical contact

Coronavirus is primarily transmitted through droplets (<https://thl.fi/en/web/infectious-diseases-and-vaccinations/what-s-new/coronavirus-covid-19-latest-updates/transmission-and-protection-coronavirus>). Whenever possible, school situations in which people are in direct contact with one another should be avoided, taking into account the child's age and level of development. Municipal education services and the municipal unit responsible for communicable diseases give more detailed guidance on practical measures, if necessary. Each municipality establishes practices that suit their own situation the best and advises families to act accordingly.

- Regardless of more effective hygiene and physical distancing, it is important to make sure that children receive as much affection, security and interaction as they need, just the way they did before the epidemic.
- The regulations on group sizes and staffing sizes are in force as specified in the legislation on early childhood education and care and on basic education.
- Early childhood education and care should be organised as far as possible so that groups are not mixed or combined. Staff members in early childhood education and care should also work with one and the same group of children.
- In primary schools, the different teaching groups should be kept separate throughout the school day. 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, the focus should be on ensuring spacious areas and on safeguarding hygiene, and to stagger teaching 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.
- If necessary, empty premises suitable for teaching may be used for teaching purposes.
- Whenever possible, school meals should be arranged individually with the students' own class or group and not as joint meals in the lunchroom. However, the lunchroom can be used in turns. Proper hygiene when preparing and distributing food as well as during school meals should be ensured.
- 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.
- Big joint events should not be organised if space is limited and hygiene factors cannot be taken into account.
- Apart from children and staff members, outsiders should avoid spending time in or around schools and early childhood education centres and their surrounding areas. Children and their families should be permitted to get acquainted with the activities of the school or early childhood education and care, taking into account factors related to ensuring spaciousness and hygiene.
- Staff members should avoid assembling together, which means that teachers should hold their meetings primarily remotely.
- As a rule, to prevent the spread of infections, staff members should not move from one activity unit to another.

Guidelines for workplaces by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health for employees (in Finnish):

<https://www.ttl.fi/en/fioh-coronavirus-instructions/>

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

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

- Both children and adults should wash their hands when they come to school or early childhood education and care, and before they go home. In addition, wash your hands with soap and water before meals, whenever you come in after you have been out, 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 single-use 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 hand sanitiser.

- Make sure to have hand sanitisers readily available. Adults 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.

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

5. Cleaning and personal effects

Coronavirus 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 the 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 handcraft accessories (scissors, etc.), and if they are used, clean them at regular interval, and preferably between each user. Make sure to clean toys regularly.
- Children are permitted to bring a toy that is important to them to early childhood education and care and take it back home at the end of the day.

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

6. If a COVID-19 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.

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