



Department of Health & Social Care

Jo Churchill MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for
Prevention, Public Health and Primary



Vicky Ford MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of
State for Children Families

Dear early years providers,

First of all, we want to thank you on behalf of Government for everything you are doing to provide safe and stimulating early years settings, where young children can learn and thrive. We do not underestimate the challenges that this past year has brought for the sector in keeping early years settings open and providing enough places for children, as well as continuing to meet their needs and support their development. This has been especially crucial for some of the most vulnerable children.

We recognise the tremendous value of early education and care and how important this is in ensuring that all children get the best start in life and we are fully committed to this. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of good health and wellbeing for us all. We know that so many of you across the early years sector are engaging in excellent practice to keep children safe and well .

Secondly, we wanted to highlight some of the resources readily available that may be of help for settings to provide the best support for children's health and wellbeing and those elements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) during these challenging times. In doing so we want to emphasise the importance of keeping children safe and well by making sure food is prepared appropriately to a child's age. To support this, we have developed a food safety resource on the [Help for Early Years Providers](#) online service. Government strongly advises all providers to refer to this guidance, which includes advice on safe weaning, foods to avoid, how to prepare food safely to avoid choking and preparing food hygienically.

We also would like to stress the importance of providing access to healthier food allowing children to eat a healthier balanced diet. The [Eat Better, Start Better practical guide](#) is a useful document which helps providers meet the requirement for the provision of healthier, balanced and nutritious food and drink. We, supported by the dental and medical professions, would recommend water or milk only at this age. Good oral health is also incredibly valuable. [Public Health England guidance](#) recommends dry brushing models without the use of water or sinks to minimise infection transmission risks. And last but not least, our role to support the mental health and wellbeing of children so that their personal, social and emotional development is supported as well as their physical development. The Chief Medical Officer recommends including a minimum of 180 minutes of physical activity every day for children aged 1-5.

This letter therefore includes an attachment containing further links and guidance to help you to continue to provide the best support needed in those early years. Thank you again for all you do for our youngest children - to every childminder, practitioner, teacher, manager, cook and administrator who plays a part in delivering high quality and safe early years and childcare provision. Your passion and commitment is hugely valued.

Safe food preparation

As all those working in the early years sector will be aware, the [EYFS framework](#) requires providers to take all necessary steps to keep children safe and well – and providers must be confident that those responsible for preparing and handling food in their setting are competent to do so. Tragically, a child dies in the UK every month from choking and hundreds more require hospital treatment. It can happen quickly and it can happen to anyone.

There are simple steps that can be taken in order to minimise the risk of children choking whilst eating by avoiding certain foods and by making sure that food is prepared appropriately for babies and children of different ages, for example mashed, pureed or cut into appropriately sized and shaped pieces. As practitioners, you will also know the importance of ensuring close supervision whilst infants and children are eating, making sure that they are seated safely in a highchair or appropriately sized low chair.

Government strongly advises all providers to refer to the guidance on the food safety page on the [Help for Early Years Providers online resource](#)- this includes advice on foods to avoid, how to prepare food safely to avoid choking and preparing food hygienically. Early years practitioners may find it useful to refer to this guidance when reviewing policies surrounding food and drink in their setting, or when inducting new members of staff to the EYFS requirements.

The Child Accident Prevention Trust have also published a [one page poster](#) that providers may wish to have up in their food preparation area as a helpful resource for staff, particularly if they are newly qualified.

Healthier Food and Drink Provision

The [EYFS framework](#) sets out what providers must do to promote the good health of children attending the setting. This includes ensuring that children have a healthy balanced diet by providing access to healthier food provision in line with current government dietary recommendations for children. Given what we know about the links between living with obesity in childhood and adulthood, it has never been more important to ensure that children are eating a healthy balanced diet by providing access to healthier food provision and, in doing so, are building an understanding of the importance of healthier choices supporting their development now and in the future. The [revised EYFS learning and development requirements](#) that will come into effect in September 2021 emphasise the importance of supporting children to learn how to look after their bodies, including how to make healthy choices in relation to food.

Helpful resources for consideration are:

- Public Health England's [example menus and useful guidance for early years settings to help meet the EYFS requirements for food and drink](#). This comprehensive guidance was prepared in 2017 by the Children's Food Trust and informed by an External Reference Group. It includes menus and useful information for early years settings, for example, to provide only fresh tap water and plain milk for children to drink.
- [Eat Better, Start Better](#) (produced in 2012 and updated in 2017) – developed by Action for Children in collaboration with the Children's Food Trust, following the recommendations of the Advisory Panel for Food and Nutrition in Early Years. This practical guide is to help providers meet the requirement for the provision of healthy, balanced and nutritious food and drink.

Physical development

We also want to stress the value of children being physically active. The pandemic has meant that many children may have been less able to be physically active, which may have had an impact on physical development. It is very important that children attending early years settings are given the opportunity to be physically active and to develop their gross and fine motor skills.

Physical development is already a prime area of learning in the current EYFS and we have built upon this in the new framework that will be statutory from September 2021 through a more detailed educational programme and new Early Learning Goals on gross and fine motor skills.

The Chief Medical Officer has published [guidance on physical activity](#), which practitioners will find useful to refer to when planning their EYFS curriculum. This recommends a minimum of 180 minutes of physical activity every day for children aged 1-5.

Oral Health

Poor oral health in childhood has a significant impact on children and families, with tooth decay being the most common reason for 6 to 10 year olds being admitted to hospital. From September 2021, the EYFS framework will explicitly include a requirement to promote the good oral health of children in the existing requirement to promote good overall health.

While it is up to individual providers to determine how they meet this requirement in a way that works best for their setting, all providers will need to take steps to find ways in which they can encourage children to take care of their teeth and gums.

Where providers have a supervised tooth brushing activity or programme, [Public Health England guidance](#) is available to help providers with this during the Covid-19 outbreak. The guidance currently recommends dry brushing models where children brush their teeth without the use of water or sinks to minimise infection transmission risks. This can take place with children seated or standing.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Personal, social and emotional development is a prime area of learning enshrined in the statutory EYFS framework. This includes helping children to develop a positive sense of themselves and to learn how to manage their feelings. We know that children who were born just before the pandemic, or who have spent most, if not all, of their life living under social restrictions will have experienced a subsequent reduced level of socialisation than they would have otherwise had. There has never been a more important time to support all children's mental health and wellbeing so that their personal, social and emotional development is supported, even at this difficult time.

Providers may find this list of [mental health resources for parents, carers, children, and staff](#) useful when planning their approach.

Covid-19 guidance for early years settings

Finally, to support early years providers negotiate the various guidance available on managing their settings during the COVID-19 outbreak, we have drawn the information together into one guidance document: [actions for early years providers to take during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#).

This guidance has been written specifically for the early years sector and covers infection prevention and the system of controls to follow to keep children and staff in settings safe. The guidance is updated periodically to reflect new developments and advice so please do continue to refer back to it from time to time.



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