**Alert Level 4 Guidance for Flying Start and Families First Services – COVID 19**

**To: Directors of Education, Directors of Children’s Services, Heads of Families First Services, Heads of Flying Start Services and Children and Communities Grant Leads.**

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) presents unprecedented challenges to all of our families and services. Thank you for your hard work and professionalism at this particularly challenging time.

On 16 December the First Minister [announced](https://gov.wales/higher-level-restrictions-come-force-control-coronavirus) Wales will move into alert level 4 in order to suppress the spread of the virus in Wales. **Alert Level 4** began on 20 December. Further information about the nature of the restrictions in place for the duration of the **Alert Level 4** period can be found [here](https://gov.wales/coronavirus-control-plan-alert-levels-wales).

This document provides guidance on the provision of Flying Start and Families First services whilst we are at **Alert Level 4**, and supersedes previous iterations of the temporary programme guidance issued during the pandemic until further notice. Please share this with your teams and be assured that we are working hard to ensure we provide guidance to support you in the provision of services for children and families now and going forward as the situation develops further.

We recognise that families will be under additional emotional, financial and psychological pressure at this time. For the safety and wellbeing of your staff and the children and families you support it is also crucial that services are delivered in a way that is consistent with the expert scientific advice being provided by the Welsh Government. Please be aware that the scientific advice and, therefore, guidance may change.

During this period you will also need to ensure that services are compliant with the latest [regulations](https://gov.wales/coronavirus-legislation-and-guidance-law)**.** See also the [guidance](https://gov.wales/covid-19-alert-levels) issued in relation to the new alert levels in Wales.

Any queries relating to this guidance should be directed to the relevant programme mailbox:

familiesfirst@gov.wales

FlyingStart2@gov.wales

Any queries relating to funding should be directed to the Children and Communities Grant team:

FlexibleFunding@gov.wales

**Intended Audience**

This guidance should be used by all those involved in the design, commissioning and delivery of services funded through either the Flying Start or Families First programme, including Flying Start and Families First Coordinators, local authority service leads and delivery partners across all relevant sectors.

Whilst taking account of the [COVID-19 legislation in Wales](https://gov.wales/coronavirus-law) the aims of this guidance are to:

* Encourage a flexible and practical approach to Flying Start and Families First services during the outbreak of novel coronavirus.
* Ensure that Flying Start and Families First services are resilient and relevant to the particular needs of the local population and services.
* As far as possible, enable Flying Start and Families First to continue to play a part in supporting children and their families during the outbreak.
* Enable Flying Start and Families First services to cope appropriately with the additional burden novel coronavirus may place on service provision.
* Promote partnership working across the breadth of services that support families.

These changes are a temporary measure in response to the unprecedented circumstances that we are currently facing. This guidance will be subject to further review as the decisions related to coronavirus are taken.

Please note that, for the duration of the disruption to services, Welsh Government will be taking the disruption into account when reviewing performance against agreed performance levels in relation to caseloads and CAP.

These services remain crucial to families across Wales so we expect every effort to be made to reach as many families as possible through appropriate means during this time.

**Overarching principles:**

Those involved in the delivery of services funded through Flying Start or Families First should take account of the following principles when considering what support to provide to any child/young person/family that either is, or becomes, vulnerable:

* services must work together to ensure all children and young people are safe, seen, heard, nurtured and developing;
* the decision should consider the impact on the child or young person’s emotional, mental and physical health and development in the short, medium and longer term (not acting in the short term may have material impact longer term);
* the decision should consider how any risks, including reducing the risk of escalation to statutory services, could be mitigated through the most appropriate support for the child or young person and their family;
* the decision should take account of the views of the child or young person and their parents/carers, so their needs can be understood and delivered through the most appropriate support (including face to face support with the application of all necessary mitigating COVID-19 safety measures); parents and carers should be given clear information about all decisions reached;
* where necessary, children and young people should be prioritised accordingly for support; and
* the risks to children and young people and their families should be regularly reviewed and monitored on a multi-agency basis.

**Flying Start Guidance**

We recognise that families will be experiencing additional stresses and unique challenges at this difficult time and appreciate that the provision of a full suite of Flying Start services delivered through normal arrangements will not be possible in light of [the current COVID-19 restrictions in place](https://gov.wales/alert-level-4). The aim of this guidance is to provide clarity on the framework of Flying Start services which can be delivered to support children and families in need, in line with the [current COVID-19 legislation in place in Wales](https://gov.wales/coronavirus-law), scientific advice in relation to restricting the spread of the virus, and the restrictions in place for wider society.

The guidance is themed under the 4 core elements of Flying Start:

Flying Start Enhanced Health Visiting

In December 2020, all Health Boards received a letter (below) from the Chief Nursing Officer for Wales in relation to the appropriate delivery of the Healthy Child Wales Programme and Flying Start Health Visiting services.



Flying Start health teams should defer to this guidance, paying particular attention to Principle 6 & 7 in relation to support for vulnerable children, until further notice.

Flying Start health visiting teams are encouraged to continue to work collaboratively with generic health visiting as a seamless service during the outbreak, including under the new **alert level 4** restrictions.

Flying Start Parenting

In light of the current advice to [stay at home](https://gov.wales/alert-level-4-guide) Local Authorities will need to continue to make adjustments to the way Flying Start Parenting services are delivered. The [new regulations](https://gov.wales/health-protection-coronavirus-restrictions-no-5-wales-amendment-no-2-regulations-2020), issued to cover the **alert level 4** period, permit the continuation of public services, including face to face services where this is deemed essential and appropriate, subject to the completion of mandatory risk assessments, and [taking all reasonable measures](https://gov.wales/taking-all-reasonable-measures-minimise-risk-exposure-coronavirus-workplaces-and-premises-open) to mitigate and minimise the risks of exposure to coronavirus. However, in order to meet the on-going and changing demand for support, Local Authorities will be expected to continue to explore alternative and innovative ways of reaching children and parents. Where the provision of face to face support is deemed not to be appropriate, blended delivery options – for example, digital engagement or using outside spaces - should be considered where this is possible.

Where alternative delivery models are called for Local Authorities should prioritise on-line open access parenting programmes and targeted provision which can be delivered virtually and which is more conducive to 1-to-1 delivery. Local Authorities should also consider the following guidelines when planning services during this necessary period of revised measures and new arrangements:

1. Local Authorities should use social media to get messaging and support out to their communities. This can be in the form of virtual groups on social media platforms such as Facebook or WhatsApp.
2. Support and advice should be provided digitally via tips and infographics – there are a range of resources available via the Welsh Government [Parenting. Give it Time website](https://gov.wales/parenting-give-it-time), and more will continue to be added as necessary.

3. Where the delivery of face to face services is not appropriate, Local Authorities should provide one to one and group support virtually, maximising the use of IT and digital technologies as part of service delivery. However, Local Authorities need to be satisfied that any alternative to face to face services meets the care and support needs identified in any care and support plan whilst ensuring the safety of all concerned.

4. Where face to face support is assessed as essential and appropriate it is particularly important that all [guidelines](https://gov.wales/coronavirus) and frequently asked questions on covid-safe environments and how to protect yourself and others from coronavirus are closely followed, including the Protective Measures guidelines (link provided under Flying Start Childcare heading below), and also the guidance on reasonable measures in workplaces and premises available [here](https://gov.wales/taking-all-reasonable-measures-minimise-risk-exposure-coronavirus-workplaces-and-premises-open).

The above list is not exhaustive as we recognise that Local Authorities may also have other approaches and ideas that they have implemented or are considering having undertaken a thorough risk assessment as to what is required and possible in conjunction with the introduction of all necessary mitigating measures to minimise the risks of exposure to coronavirus.

Flying Start Childcare

To help facilitate the return of increased attendance at childcare settings, including Flying Start childcare, the Welsh Government has published the [Protective Measures in Childcare Settings: Keep Children Safe](https://gov.wales/protective-measures-childcare-settings-keep-childcare-safe) guidance which provides advice and guidance to childcare providers on how to prepare settings in readiness for more children to attend, while ensuring the safety of children and staff. The document places an emphasis on individual risk assessments and on effective hygiene control processes to inform safe practices in childcare settings. In addition, further guidance in relation to **keeping children safe in childcare** has recently been published and is available [here](https://gov.wales/keeping-children-safe-childcare-coronavirus).

In line with the wider childcare sector, all providers of Flying Start childcare services are required to adhere to the Protective Measures guidance, and any other relevant guidance as applicable, in the planning and delivery of Flying Start services until further notice.

**Service Expectations**The Welsh Government’s Coronavirus Control Plan: Alert Levels for Wales [guidance](https://gov.wales/coronavirus-control-plan-alert-levels-wales) outlines that, despite the restrictions proposed for the wider society, childcare services would remain unaffected by the **alert level 4** measures.

This was announced to ensure that children are able to continue to benefit from developmental experiences gained through their attendance at professional childcare settings and to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on young children and their families.

In line with the announcement for the wider childcare sector in Wales, Flying Start childcare settings are to remain open for business for the duration of the **alert level 4** period, as far as this is practicable under the circumstances and safe for both children and staff.

The Welsh Government revised **the** [**Protective Measures in Childcare Settings: Keep Children Safe**](https://gov.wales/protective-measures-childcare-settings-keep-childcare-safe) **guidance** which, along with a number of other revisions, acknowledges the impracticality of social distancing for very young children, and removes the 8 child limit on group sizes in childcare settings. These Protective Measures remain current and continue to apply.

The safety of children and staff remains of paramount importance, and all settings are expected to conduct individual risk assessments to ensure that provision is safe and remains compliant with guidance.

Please note that our ambition continues to be to support as many children as possible in line **with the** [**Protective Measures in Childcare Settings: Keep Children Safe**](https://gov.wales/protective-measures-childcare-settings-keep-childcare-safe).

If children are unable to attend their Flying Start Childcare setting for some or part of the week due to local management of numbers, their development should be supported through other means, i.e. virtual or resources and activities to complete at home.

The national response to the disruption caused by the coronavirus outbreak has shown us that there are innovative ways of continuing to engage with children outside of formal childcare environments, and we are very grateful for the efforts made by local Flying Start teams to date. Given the likely impact of sustained COVID-19 restrictions measures on some Flying Start families, and the disruption to service provision already experienced, it is crucial that efforts are maximised to engage with Flying Start families.

**Funding**

The Flying Start and Families First programmes are funded through the Children and Communities Grant (CCG) along with 5 other early intervention, prevention and support programmes.

Ministers allowed all programmes within the CCG to diverge from the detail of their delivery plans to respond to the impact of the pandemic between 1 April to 30 June 2020 which included the commitment to fund CCG staff and Flying Start services covered by the grant. Welsh Ministers extended this flexibility up to 30 September 2020.

From 1October 2020, Local Authorities revised CCG Delivery Plans to reflect how services would be delivered safely in light of the pandemic for the remainder of the 2020-21 financial year.

In these latest Delivery Plans, Local Authorities set out how services would be delivered during local or national lockdown situations, which included the continuation of funding Flying Start settings whether they were able to operate or not. Welsh Government recognises the importance of retaining the staff and services to be able to deliver services safely in line with the Protective Measures guidance.

Please refer to the CCG guidance (October 2020) for further information and any funding queries can be forwarded to the flexible funding mailbox, (flexiblefunding@gov.wales). Please ensure local CCG leads are kept informed of any communication relating to programme funding with Welsh Government.



Flying Start SLC

In light of the current advice to [stay at home](https://gov.wales/alert-level-4-guide), Local Authorities will need to continue to make adjustments to the way Flying Start SLC services are delivered. The [new regulations](https://gov.wales/health-protection-coronavirus-restrictions-no-5-wales-amendment-no-2-regulations-2020), issued to cover the **alert level 4** period permit the continuation of public services, including face to face services where this is deemed essential and appropriate, subject to the completion of mandatory risk assessments, and [taking all reasonable measures](https://gov.wales/taking-all-reasonable-measures-minimise-risk-exposure-coronavirus-workplaces-and-premises-open) to mitigate and minimise the risks of exposure to coronavirus. However, in order to meet the on-going and changing demand for support, Local Authorities will be expected to continue to explore alternative and innovative ways of reaching children and parents. Where the provision of face to face support is deemed not to be appropriate, flexible delivery options should continue.

However, in order to meet the on-going and changing demand for support, Local Allied Health Professionals (AHP) should make assessments of the urgency and priority of work and stratify any identified risks. Professionals should follow up to date Guidance and support from Welsh Government, Public Health Wales and their professional bodies. All additional guidance will be added to the Welsh Government COVID 19 [advice](https://gov.wales/topic/980/latest) pages.

In particular, rehabilitation guidance can be found [here](https://gov.wales/health-and-social-care-services-rehabilitation-framework-2020-2021):

There is also additional advice on the Health Care and Professions Council Advice Hub [here](https://www.hcpc-uk.org/covid-19/):

**Guidance for Families First Services**

This guidance seeks to provide clarity on the services that should be delivered and the way in which they should be delivered at a local level.

We appreciate that in the current circumstances, it is unreasonable to continue to operate the Families First Programme in its current form. The [new regulations](https://gov.wales/health-protection-coronavirus-restrictions-no-5-wales-amendment-no-2-regulations-2020), issued to cover the **alert level 4** period permit the continuation of public services, including face to face services where this is deemed essential and appropriate, subject to the completion of mandatory risk assessments, and [taking all reasonable measures](https://gov.wales/taking-all-reasonable-measures-minimise-risk-exposure-coronavirus-workplaces-and-premises-open) to mitigate and minimise the risks of exposure to coronavirus.

Where the provision of face to face support is deemed not to be appropriate, blended delivery options – for example, digital engagement or using outside spaces - should be considered where this is possible.

Until notified otherwise, Local Authorities should operate in accordance with the following principles:

1. Deliver Families First services in a way that is consistent with the current [regulations](https://gov.wales/coronavirus-legislation-and-guidance-law)
2. Families First services will need to use professional judgement to identify which services remain priorities for families and how they can be delivered in their local areas during the **Alert Level 4** period.
3. This is likely to mean that Local Authorities offer a greater number of services by telephone contact, social media and online. However, Local Authorities need to be satisfied that any alternative provision meets the care and support needs identified in any care and support plan or Team around the Family (TAF) plan.
4. Where face to face support is assessed as being essential and appropriate it is particularly important that all [guidelines](https://gov.wales/coronavirus) and frequently asked questions on COVID-safe environments and how to protect yourself and others from coronavirus are closely followed, including the [Protective Measures](https://gov.wales/protective-measures-childcare-settings-keep-childcare-safe) guidelines, and also the guidance on reasonable measures in workplaces and premises available [here](https://gov.wales/taking-all-reasonable-measures-minimise-risk-exposure-coronavirus-workplaces-and-premises-open).
5. Families First services will also need to use professional judgement to identify how to support at risk and vulnerable groups (like those with safeguarding needs and/or disabled children, young people and/or their families). Families First services will need to discuss the support available for these families with senior managers and other services in their local authorities.
6. Families First services will need to continue to work with schools to ensure that they have robust referral and prioritisation processes in place to ensure that families are offered appropriate support as quickly as possible.

**Monitoring and Funding for Families First and Flying Start**

Although activity against your agreed Children and Communities Grant (CCG) delivery plan will change, data should still be collected for services provided.

In Financial Year 2020-21, Progress Reports and Financial Claims for the CCG are required at three stages: 23 October 2020, 22 January 2021 and 30 April 2021. Monitoring data will not be required to be submitted until April 2021 for both programmes.