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To all registered childcare providers

Thank you for everything you're doing to support the children and families you work with in these challenging times. The Omicron variant is posing real difficulties for many in the childcare sector, particularly around staffing. I am writing to you to provide information on a number of topics in relation to the current situation that have been raised by sector representatives and providers, and to outline where further support is available.

As the First Minister outlined in her [statement to Parliament of 18 January](#), the Scottish Government is "cautiously optimistic" about the current position but "we all still need to play our part in helping to slow the spread of the virus by getting vaccinated as soon as possible, limiting and prioritising contacts that matter the most to you and taking lateral flow tests when you are planning to see other people."

In summary, this notice provides information on:

1. Increasing uptake of the COVID-19 Booster among ELC staff
2. Checklist of COVID 19 mitigations in ELC, school aged childcare and childminding services
3. Financial Support
4. LFD testing
5. Staff available to join the sector
6. Wellbeing events and resources

1. Increasing the uptake of COVID-19 booster among ELC staff

We know that uptake of doses 1 and 2 of the vaccine among ELC staff is high and broadly comparable to rates among the general population – thank you for everything that you have done to support staff to get vaccinated. Unfortunately, uptake of the booster is lower among ELC staff than the general population and there is still relatively low take-up of the booster by younger people working in ELC (fewer than half of those aged 16-29 have received their booster so far).

We would welcome your help in supporting and encouraging your staff to take up the booster. The following messaging may be helpful to include in any communications you are putting out:

Make sure you book your COVID-19 booster to maximise your protection against COVID-19.

People aged 18 and over can book boosters online.

All adults aged 18 and over can book their appointment for a COVID-19 vaccine booster through the online portal on NHS inform: www.nhsinform.scot/covid19vaccinebooster. If you are unable to access the online portal you can book an appointment through the National Helpline on 0800 030 8013.

Even if you've been double-vaccinated, your immunity against COVID-19 wanes over time. That's why boosters are so critical. The booster vaccine gives you the protection you need against serious COVID-19 illness. **Local Health Boards are offering additional drop-in facilities, including evening and weekend slots, and you can find information on their websites and social media pages.**

Appointments must be booked at least 12 weeks after a second dose. However, adults with a confirmed case of the virus since receiving a vaccine should wait four weeks from testing positive to receive their booster. Even if you have had COVID-19 it is still important you come forward and complete your vaccination course to maximise your protection. You can view a short video on how to use the booking portal at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=PiEd6-r_dKU

Anyone in earlier groups who missed their vaccination can book an appointment by calling the National Helpline on **0800 030 8013** which is open from 8am to 8pm, 7 days a week.

For more information about the COVID-19 booster vaccine visit: www.nhsinform.scot/covid19vaccinebooster

2. Checklist of COVID-19 mitigations in ELC, school aged childcare and childminding services

We have updated the checklist of COVID-19 mitigations to reflect the latest guidance for ELC settings, school aged childcare and childminding services. Please see this at the link below: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): early learning and childcare services - gov.scot](http://www.gov.scot/Coronavirus-(COVID-19)-early-learning-and-childcare-services) (www.gov.scot)

3. Financial support

Self-Isolation Support Grant

Where members of staff test positive or have been contacted by Test and Protect and asked to self-isolate due to COVID-19 then they may be eligible for a [Self-Isolation Support Grant](#).

- If you are fully vaccinated (i.e. two doses and booster) you will need a positive PCR test to access the grant. Fully vaccinated close contacts can be released from self-isolation as per the NHS Inform guidance, so the Self-Isolation Support Grant is now only available to fully vaccinated contacts who test positive.
- If you are not yet fully vaccinated and either test positive or are asked to self-isolate by Test and Protect as a close contact, the Self-Isolation Support Grant is still available in line with the conditions set out at the above link.

We will continue to monitor the impacts of the new measures, including changes to self-isolation requirements, on the childcare sector and explore all the available options for further support that may be required.

Ventilation fund

Last week (11 January), the First Minister [announced](#) up to £5 million of additional support to ensure ventilation in schools and early years settings meets the latest COVID-19 safety guidance.

The funding is for any further urgent remedial work required to improve air flow, such as adjustments to windows and doors, use of fan systems and use of air cleaning devices in line with existing safety guidance ([ELC Services](#), [School-Aged Childcare Services](#) and [Childminding Services](#)) to help address the small proportion of learning, teaching and play spaces where ventilation continues to be problematic.

The Scottish Government is working with partners to agree criteria for applications and a swift process for the £5 million ventilation fund, so that this additional support can be made available to you as soon as is practical.

4. LFD testing

Please continue to encourage staff to do a lateral flow test (LFD) regularly (twice weekly) and on every occasion they intend to mix socially with people from other households. This will help break chains of transmission, which is particularly important with the latest, more transmissible, variant. Test kits now require only a nasal swab and take 15/20 minutes to provide a result – you may wish to communicate this to staff where you feel this would promote uptake of testing.

Everyone is encouraged to report their LFD test results whether the result is positive, negative, or void, and you can do so [here](#). Reporting positive results means that people will receive the advice and support they need. Reporting negative and void results helps public health experts to understand the full picture of COVID-19 in an area, the spread of COVID-19 and the impact of the virus on the childcare workforce.

Staff whose settings are participating in the childcare testing programme can continue to access kits that way. For childminders or those whose settings are not participating in the programme, [testing kits can be accessed via the universal offer of free testing](#).

5. Staff available to join the sector

I want to take this opportunity to remind colleagues of a programme to invite those whose registrations to work in childcare have lapsed in recent years, to re-join the sector. A [provider notice](#), which issued in October 2021, provides details of how settings can access candidates who have put themselves forward to re-join the sector. So far, 160 people from across the country have registered their experience and qualifications on MySSSC, creating a pool of qualified staff that are keen to take up roles in the sector.

6. Wellbeing resources and events

Kindness and self-care is more important than ever given the challenging period we are working through, and we know that staff wellbeing is crucial to providing high quality ELC. For that reason we have developed a wellbeing resource specifically for all childcare professionals. The [TeamELCWellbeingHub](#) contains a wealth of practical advice and tips on managing your personal wellbeing and signposts to other sources of support.

A new series of free online wellbeing events, featuring a wellbeing professional providing practical advice on self-care and wellbeing, is being put on to accompany the wellbeing website. **19 events will take place at different times from January until the end of March.** Previous events have been well received by colleagues so I'd encourage anyone who works in childcare to visit the website and book a slot on one of these.

Thank you once again for everything that you are doing to care for children and families at this time.

Best Wishes



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