

Coronavirus COVID-19: Information for Providers of Placements for Children Looked After, Care Leavers and Children in Need

Version 1 – 23 March 2020

Frequently Asked Questions

Lancashire County Council is following national guidance from the government and Public Health England and will update these frequently asked questions as required.

These FAQs are correct as at 23 March 2020 and will be updated at least weekly or sooner if national guidance changes.

This guidance should be read in conjunction with:

- guidance published by the UK Government on the following webpage <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>
- guidance contained on the Lancashire County Council's website, including the below link, which includes Care Provider Information at the bottom of the following webpage: <https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/your-health-and-wellbeing/coronavirus/>

1. Will placement finding processes change?

There are currently no plans for placement finding processes to change.

All our Access to Resources Team (ART) members are set up to work in an agile way and have all the necessary equipment to continue to operate placement finding processes as usual. Placement finding and COVID-19 related contract monitoring issues are being prioritised by the team.

We ask providers to notify ART (via artenquiries@lancashire.gov.uk), alongside a child's social worker, of any general and case specific issues relating to COVID-19 so we can ensure effective oversight and consistency of approach across the county.

2. Should I close my service to all visitors?

No, we do not advise you to close to all visitors unless you have been specifically advised to do so by Public Health England.

But you should restrict visiting to essential visitors only.

Lancashire County Council supports your pragmatic decision-making, consistent with government advice, on social distancing and infection prevention measures. We also support you to have discussions about whether visits from professionals are essential, can be done in another way, or can be delayed.

We are instructing social workers, wherever possible, to consider alternative methods to face to face visits, such as via telephone or Skype. However, any restriction on visitors must not unreasonably restrict access to professionals carrying out statutory or otherwise essential duties, for example social workers or police needing to visit to investigate child protection concerns.

Anyone with coronavirus Covid-19 symptoms (high temperature or a new continuous cough) should not enter the home.

Alternative arrangements may need to be made for contact with relatives, for example telephone calls or Skype.

3. Should Lancashire Children Looked After (CLA) be going to school?

The government has published guidance for schools, colleges and local authorities on maintaining educational provision and in relation to vulnerable children and young people:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people>

In line with the most recent scientific advice on how to further limit the spread of COVID-19, the advice is that if children can stay safely at home, they should, to limit the chance of the virus spreading. Schools have been asked to remain open for those children who absolutely need to attend, which includes children who are vulnerable. Vulnerable children are classed as those who have a social worker or an education, health and care (EHC) plan in place.

It is important to underline that schools, colleges and other educational establishments remain safe places for children. But the fewer children making the journey to school, and the fewer children in educational settings, the lower the risk that the virus can spread and infect vulnerable individuals in wider society.

The guidance includes the following key principles:

1. If it is at all possible for children to be at home, then they should be.
2. If a child needs specialist support, is vulnerable or has a parent who is a critical worker, then educational provision will be available for them.

3. Residential special schools, boarding schools and special settings continue to care for children wherever possible.

The guidance states that there is an expectation that vulnerable children who have a social worker will attend school, as long as it is safe for them to do so. In circumstances where a care provider (e.g. foster carer) does not want to send a looked after child to school, reasons for this should be explored with the social worker to help determine what is in the best interests of the child and /or resolve any concerns or difficulties wherever possible.

4. Will staff/ foster carers be expected to provide care to children and young people who are symptomatic?

Yes. Fostering households, residential children's homes and supported accommodation/ semi-independent settings are considered households for the purposes of the household self-isolation policy. Meaning, the setting should follow national guidance and self-isolate if any resident shows symptoms:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-isolation-for-residential-educational-settings>

Providers will be expected to continue to care for children and young people who are self-isolating or diagnosed – unless hospital care is required due to serious illness or treatment that can only be provided in a hospital setting.

Providers will be expected to receive back into their care symptomatic children and young people who no longer need to be in hospital.

5. How do we support children and young people who refuse to self-isolate?

Where a child or young person is found to have the virus but refuses attempts to be isolated, all attempts at reassurance and persuasion should be made by suitably qualified and experienced support staff and the child's social worker/ personal advisor.

We are awaiting national guidance on further steps that will need to be taken and will update accordingly.

6. I am worried we won't be able to cope if staff become ill. How can this be mitigated?

You should keep under review your business continuity plan to ensure that you can provide services in as many circumstances as possible. Staff ratios should be maintained at a safe level to protect children and young people.

Providers should assess staffing levels on a daily basis and liaise with the Access to Resources Team (ART) via 01772 533390 or artenquiries@lancashire.gov.uk where there is a risk of staffing shortages.

7. Will Lancashire County Council provide additional funding to cover increased operating costs e.g. agency staffing?

Requests for additional resources/ increased placement costs will continue to be considered on a case by case basis.

Please include ART into any requests being made to social workers for additional resources/ funding so we can maintain effective oversight and ensure a consistent countywide approach.

If you are having cash flow issues of any kind from any cause that affect the viability of your business please speak to us sooner rather than later. It is in all our interests to keep our providers in business and optimal operation wherever practicable.

8. The block commissioning supported accommodation arrangement contains stipulations such as when staff must be on site, and the number of support hours deliverable. In light of emerging staff pressures, can we operate more flexibility / creatively to allow us to ensure that young people and our staff remain safe?

Lancashire County Council fully recognises that support providers, as with the Council itself, are very quickly having to adopt different ways of working to ensure that services can operate safely. We support providers to make professional judgements as to how their services can best be delivered. We do ask that ART is informed immediately of any operational decisions that will affect service delivery.

Please ensure ART is informed in advance of any significant changes to delivery or emerging difficulties or queries not covered within these FAQ's.

For out of hours emergency issues that cannot wait for the next day – Contact the LCC Emergency Duty Team on 0300 123 6722