



**Guidance Document for Early Years Services:
Protocol for initial inspections of early years services
reopening under COVID-19 restrictions**

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Early Years Inspectorate Protocol for inspection following the re-opening of services

Introduction

The Early Years Inspectorate is mandated to ensure compliance with the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016. As such, it will be necessary to recommence inspections after the re-opening of early years services on 29th June.

To assist registered providers, Tusla's Early Years Inspectorate has developed guidance to support and facilitate the safe re-opening and operation during the COVID-19 period.

A suite of documents has been created and includes the following:

- Guidance for Early Years Services managing COVID-19, (Tusla) [\[Download here\]](#)
- COVID-19 Notification form for Early Years services, (Tusla) [\[Download here\]](#)
- Early Years COVID-19 Self-Assessment checklist, (Tusla) [\[Download here\]](#)

In preparation for the recommencement of regulatory inspections, this guidance has been issued to describe the principles and methodology that underline this process.

Inspections take place for the following reasons:

- To assess compliance with regulations with emphasis on the safety and wellbeing of children attending early years services.
- Pre-registration of a new service and prior to approval of a significant change in service delivery, for example, an increase in numbers of children or a change of service type¹.
- Following receipt of information identifying a significant or high risk to children.

Guiding Principles

The following principles will guide inspection practice²:

- Scheduling of inspections is intelligence led to maximise public value and provide assurances for families.
- During July, August and September 2020, planned inspections will be announced. This will minimise disruption to service provision while services focus on re-opening and familiarising staff and children with new ways of working. If a subsequent inspection is deemed necessary to further assess non-compliance with regulations, this may be unannounced.

¹ These inspections are Fit For Purpose inspections and have recommenced in services in June 2020 as required.

² The methodology and timeframes stipulated in this document are subject to alteration in line with public health guidance and emerging issues.

COVID-19 Inspection Protocol for RP

- In a small number of cases, it will be necessary to carry out unplanned inspections where significant or urgent concerns are raised about a service (e.g. unsolicited information).
- The inspection process has been amended to minimise the amount of time that Early Years Inspectors spend in the service. The Early Years Inspector will contact the registered provider or person in charge in advance of the on-site inspection and provide them with an opportunity to submit the required documentation prior to going on-site, (see inspection methodology below).
- The Early Years Inspectorate is committed to adherence to public health guidance in the discharge of our duties. Early Years Inspectors will observe good hand hygiene practices on entry, departure and at regular intervals throughout the inspection. Early Years Inspectors will also follow the recommended public health respiratory hygiene etiquette. Early Years Inspectors will observe physical distancing measures and limit the time spent in contact with adults and children. The use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) on inspection, as necessary, will be guided by public health advice.
- It will be necessary to enter care rooms to assess practices and discuss procedures with staff. Early Years Inspectors will limit the time spent in each care room to the minimum time necessary. In some circumstances, it may be necessary to return to the care room later in the inspection, but this will be kept to a minimum.
- Feedback following inspection will be provided remotely and also in the form of the inspection report. In some situations, the feedback meeting may be carried out on-site, but only if the registered provider and Early Years Inspector agree and if there is a suitable location. Any immediate risks identified will be raised with the person in charge or registered provider prior to the conclusion of the onsite inspection.

Role of the registered provider and person in charge

As the registered provider, you should retain records related to service preparedness to prevent and control the spread of COVID 19 in your setting. This will aid the inspection process and reduce the amount of time necessary to spend with you during the inspection.

Please refer to the [Early Years Inspectorate Self-Assessment Checklist for Early Years Services](#) and the focused inspection tool to assist you in preparing your service for opening and the commencement of inspections.

In accordance with the requirements of Regulation 31 of the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016, you are required to [notify](#) the Inspectorate within three days of any incidence of COVID 19 infection within your service.

Inspection Methodology

The scope of inspections will include:

1. the procedures put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in line with the self-assessment checklist

2. previous non-compliances not closed out and
3. the overall care and well-being of children.

The inspectorate reserves the right to adapt the inspection process to address high risk non-compliances if they are evidenced during the inspection.

Inspection Process

The registered provider will receive a 5 days notice of the onsite inspection.

- **Step one:** The Early Years Inspector will contact the registered provider or designated person in charge and provide a list of documents to be submitted (see the attachment entitled "Pre-Inspection Documentation Request"). The registered provider and the Early Years Inspector will agree the records to be submitted via email or copied for the Early Years Inspector to be ready for the on-site inspection. The Early Years Inspector will also outline the inspection process which includes the provision of feedback to the registered provider.
- **Step two:** Early Years Inspectors will review initial submissions and liaise with registered providers in advance of inspection as necessary.
- **Step three:** The Early Years Inspector will insert relevant information into the inspection tool and arrange a phone call with the registered provider or person in charge. This call will include:
 - the opening meeting explaining the inspection process,
 - partial completion of inspection tool as relevant.
- **Step four:** The on-site inspection is conducted. On-site assessment of the service will take place by appointment, and strict physical distancing will be observed. A feedback meeting will take place remotely or on-site if agreed by both parties.
- **Step five:** Following the on-site inspection, the Early Years Inspector will draft an inspection report and issue. It is important the registered provider returns the CAPA and factual accuracy promptly so that inspection reports can be published without delay.

Inspection Tool

The format and content of the inspection tool have been adapted and will be available on the First5 (www.first5.gov.ie) and Tusla (www.tusla.ie) before the re-opening of services.

Additional information via our helpline

If you have any queries around this guidance document or inspections, you can contact:

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Version Control

Version Number	Purpose/Change	Date
1.0	Draft version – post-consultation	26/06/2020
2.0	Minor revisions document	16/07/2020