

PRESS RELEASE



**An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige**
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth

Resumption of the pre-school programme postponed and childcare services to remain open for the children of essential workers and vulnerable children only, until 1 February

Wednesday 6 January 2021

Following Cabinet approval this afternoon (6 January) of the introduction of additional measures under full level 5 restrictions, the Minister for Children, Disability, Equality, Integration and Youth, Roderic O’Gorman, T.D. has confirmed the following:

- Resumption of the ECCE pre-school programme has been postponed until 1 February.
- Other childcare services will remain open for the children of essential workers and vulnerable children only.
- Childminders can also continue to provide care to the children of essential workers and vulnerable children.
- A household of an essential worker, without an existing childcare arrangement, can form a bubble with another household for the purpose of providing childcare.

Government funding, including the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS) as well Early Learning and Childcare schemes, continues to be available to these services in order to allow them to deliver care for children of essential workers and vulnerable children.

In light of the extensive financial supports that are available to the sector, Minister O’Gorman is asking that providers pause payment of fees or return fees paid in advance for parents who are not essential workers and therefore cannot access services between 11 – 31 January.

Speaking this afternoon, Minister O’Gorman said:

“Today’s decision has been taken after careful consideration to help to reduce movements in the community and tackle the spread of Covid.

“NPHET’s advice is that childcare services are safe for both children and staff. However, to beat this virus we need to reduce movement, and that is why Cabinet has decided that childcare will be open only to essential workers and vulnerable children.

“The Government is continuing to put significant funding into the childcare sector, in particular through the EWSS. In light of this level of State support, I am asking that services refund or credit fees for those parents who cannot access services.

“I would like to pay tribute to childcare providers, childcare professionals, parents, staff and children. This is a difficult and uncertain time, and the sacrifices they are making are truly appreciated.”

Minister O’Gorman met with the Early Learning and Childcare COVID-19 Advisory Group earlier this afternoon to brief sectoral representatives on this matter. His Department will be issuing guidance to the sector and to parents tomorrow.

Notes to Editors

The list of essential services are set out in the ‘Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021: Plan for Living with COVID-19’. The list can be found on the gov.ie website:
<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c9158-essential-services/>

The Department will provide further clarification tomorrow in an updated set of FAQs that will issue to the sector, as well as publishing FAQs for parents.