Main safety measures in education institutions. Answers to questions

The Covid-19 safety measures that are being introduced this school year have been affecting the usual learning processes in schools and kindergartens. The new restrictions are prompting questions from parents. We are providing answers to the most frequently asked questions.

Both schools and preschools have the right to decide independently on their safety measures aimed at preventing the spread of the coronavirus, by adding regulations to their internal rules that are binding to the pupils and third persons, including parents. They are available on the institutions’ websites or from school administrations.

* **Main safety measures in preschools**

**What changes have been introduced in kindergartens to contain the spread of Covid-19?**

Previously, parents could take their children to the kindergarten classroom, change their clothes and talk to the teacher. Now, parents are prohibited from entering the classroom. Adults are only allowed to take the children to the entrance of the classroom and hand them over to the teacher or teacher’s assistant who then change the kids’ clothes. Parents are only allowed to change their children’s clothes and lead them to the classroom door in those kindergartens where cloakrooms are not situated in the class premises. These rules can vary across preschools depending on the layout of each particular kindergarten’s premises. They are regulated by the institution’s internal rules. Also, parents will not be allowed to attend festive events and celebrations at kindergartens until the regulations introduced to curb the spread of Covid-19 are lifted.

**What items can be brought from home to the kindergarten?**

The items that can be brought to kindergarten include clothes and footwear. Toys from home are not recommended. However, small kids who are just starting to attend kindergarten can take along a favorite toy from home to hold while sleeping so they can feel more at home.

**Is the kindergarten administration allowed to hold meetings with parents at kindergarten premises?**

Yes. It is recommended to hold the meetings in school halls or premises where it is possible for participants to keep a safe distance from each other and wear face masks. If there are no such possibilities at the kindergarten, the meetings can take place in classrooms where parents are required to wear face masks and disposable shoe covers.

**Parents worry that during the adaptation period they will be prevented from being with their offspring as they start kindergarten. Is that true?**

During the adaptation period, parents can accompany their children to the classroom on the condition that they wear face masks and disposable shoe covers.

**How many days a child can stay at home without having to submit a doctor’s note about the child’s health condition?**

The doctor’s note is only necessary in cases where the child has been ill or left the kindergarten with symptoms of an illness.

* **Main safety measures in schools**

**What should the teacher do when a pupil with symptoms of an illness turns up in the classroom?**

When noticing a pupil showing symptoms of an illness, the teacher gives the pupil a face mask and leads the pupil to an isolated room, which is not the nurse’s office, to wait for the parents who have to be called to take their child home. This rule applies to all schoolchildren, from grade one to 12. Of course, a kid can have a simple cold and not the coronavirus, but during this school year everyone is required to respond in accordance with the above recommendation (or new instructions from the Center for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC)).

**Is a pupil who has been in contact with someone with Covid-19 allowed to attend school? Will such a child be allowed into the classroom?**

This decision will be taken not by the school or parents, but by CDC specialists. If they order the pupil to quarantine at home, the school has to ensure the child can learn remotely. When the quarantine is over, the pupil can return to school, submitting a doctor’s note about his or her health condition.

**Does the CDC inform education institutions about the children that arrive in Latvia from countries that have been included in the “red” or “yellow” list because of high public health risks?**

No. The CDC only informs schools about those children who have tested positive for Covid-19 or who have been in contact with a Covid-19 patient and are therefore obliged to remain in self-isolation or quarantine at home.

**If someone in the class becomes ill with Covid-19, does the whole class have to go into self-isolation?**

In this situation, it is again for the CDC to provide instruction to the school principal. If the whole class is sent to quarantine at home, to ensure the teaching process, the particular class will switch to the C model, or learning only remotely. Most probably, the whole school will not be sent to quarantine at home because of one infected child.

**Will the pupils returning to school after self-isolation be required to submit a doctor’s note about their health condition?**

No. They will not need a doctor’s note after self-isolation.

**What are the safety measures taken by schools?**

The children stay in the same classroom all the time, their lessons are scheduled so that pupils from various classes do not meet in the corridors during the breaks. While the classroom is aired during breaks, the pupils must be in the corridor and not sit in the classroom in their outdoor clothes. The school administration appoints teachers who make sure pupils do not crowd in restrooms. All schools have been provided with disinfectants.

**Where do children change their clothes?**

When planning the movement of pupils, schools can choose various solutions – some classes can be allowed to leave their outdoor clothes in the classroom and others in the cloakroom, thus ensuring as little contact between pupils from different classes as possible.

**Why do some schools provide optional extended-day programs while others have ended them?**

The extended-day programs are not mandatory in Latvia. The local authority of Riga has been financing optional extended-day programs for pupils in grade one and two for several years already. Extended-day classes typically bring together kids from various classes, so teachers have to make sure the children are seated in line with CDC recommendations.

**Has the classroom cleaning schedule been changed in schools?**

Yes, it is starkly different from the previous cleaning schedule. Previously, schools were cleaned once in a day, but now they have to be cleaned with disinfectants several times a day. This year, the classroom cleaning rules have been elaborated to the smallest detail, including how many times doorknobs have to be cleaned each day.

**How about school meals while learning remotely?**

To balance the teaching process and compliance with epidemiological requirements, the teaching process in Riga’s municipal schools is organized, choosing one of the models recommended by the Education and Science Ministry, and the catering services too will be provided to schoolchildren in accordance with these models – hot meals to pupils learning in classrooms and food packages to pupils learning remotely. If the children switch to distance learning, the schools in cooperation with the catering services providers will have to arrange the provision and delivery of food packages in accordance with the law.

* **Measures applicable to all education institutions**

**Are education institutions allowed to inquire about children and their family members’ contacts with Covid-19 patients or return from countries on the “red” and “yellow” lists?**

Education institutions have no rights to demand information from pupils’ parents about the return of the child and the family from abroad, contacts with Covid-19 patients or their contacts, as well as the results of pupils’ Covid-19 tests. This provision also applies to minors who receive paid or free services at schools’ sports facilities or swimming pools.

**How to recognize a possible Covid-19 case and distinguish it from other illnesses, including chronic or allergic conditions?**

There are altogether 11 symptoms that can suggest of a Covid-19 case, but there can just as well be only one symptom, and it can be mild. The Covid-19 symptoms include increased body temperature, cold, cough, headache and gastrointestinal problems, among others. However, similar symptoms are also typical of other virus infections, such as influenza, as well as some chronic illnesses. It is therefore not useful to check children for symptoms at school on a daily basis. If a child has a cough and cold, but no fever, medics do not recommend identifying such a child as ill and sending them home. A sore throat is not a reason to stay away from school either, because the soreness can be caused by various reasons. However, if the child or his family members are known to have returned from a country with high Covid-19 incidence, the symptoms should raise suspicions of Covid-19.

The Education, Culture and Sports Department of the Riga City Council urges everyone to take a responsible approach to their own and other people’s epidemiological safety.