

Advice for Health Professionals Working in Adoption & Fostering and with Looked After Children and Young People in view of Covid-19 outbreak

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Version 10

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1. Advice for Health Professionals working in Adoption & Fostering and with Looked after Children and Young People in view of Covid-19 outbreak

This advice provides a full update to the advice issued previously and reflects the rapidly changing situation in Wales and the UK. The situation continues to change daily and NHS staff are urged to keep up to date with current advice from PHW and UK Government.

<https://covid19-phwstatement.nhs.wales/>
<https://gov.wales/coronavirus>
<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>
<https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/information-for-healthcare-workers-in-wales/>

Looked after Children and Young People (LAC/YP) are a particularly vulnerable group and with school and education providers closing during Covid-19 lockdowns, we need to be aware of the increased risk of safeguarding concerns. We know that educational provision is a protective factor for many vulnerable children. LAC/YP were eligible for continued education provision from the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. See guidance:

<https://gov.wales/vulnerable-children-and-safeguarding-coronavirus>
<https://gov.wales/education-safeguarding-guidance-coronavirus>
<https://gov.wales/education-coronavirus>

Paediatricians and LAC nurses have previously been redeployed into other areas of work which are being prioritised in response to the Covid-19 outbreak. The result of this is a reduction in paediatricians' and LAC nurses' ability to contribute as usual to well-established multi-agency working processes and this is also likely to be impacted by workforce and safety issues within partner agencies. There is the possibility of additional impact from the rollout of the Wales Coronavirus Vaccination programme.

The Chief Medical Officer for Wales confirmed that the NHS England (NHSE) prioritisation guidance for the NHS in England published in April 2020 was applicable in Wales as well. The latest updates can be found here:

<https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/information-for-healthcare-workers-in-wales/>

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/publication/covid-19-prioritisation-within-community-health-services-with-annex-19-march-2020/>

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2020/03/C0552-Restoration-of-Community-Health-Services-Guidance-CYP-with-note-31-July.pdf>

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-06/nhs-wales-covid-19-operating-framework-quarter-2-2020-2021.pdf>

[Written Statement: NHS Wales operating Framework Quarter 3/Quarter 4 2020-21 \(25 September 2020\) | GOV.WALES](#)

Welsh Government's latest advice for children's social services is available through these links:

<https://gov.wales/childrens-social-services-during-covid-19-pandemic-guidance>

<https://gov.wales/coronavirus-regulations-guidance>

This guidance is periodically updated to reflect changing circumstances around COVID-19 and it includes any new advice about restrictions that have been introduced in Wales. The Welsh Government FAQ's on the Coronavirus guidance provides advice about the rules and how they apply to agencies in Wales.

The latest information on the Coronavirus flexibilities to Regulations in relation to adoption and fostering, which have been extended to 30th September 2021, can be found here:

Adoption and Fostering (Wales) (miscellaneous amendments) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 21



Stakeholder Letter -The Adoption and



Health professionals in Wales are working with the National Adoption Service (NAS) and Welsh Government (WG) around practice issues and further guidance and information on processes and pathways can be found in the relevant sections.

We continue to work closely with the Association of Fostering and Adoption Cymru (AFACymru) and the National Adoption Service to co-ordinate advice for health and social care professionals in Adoption:

<https://www.adoptcymru.com/news/update-on-our-services-in-the-current-covid-19-pandemic>



FINAL FRAMEWORK
FOR CONTINUATION

We are also working closely with AFACymru who have issued advice for Fostering professionals and agencies (also see section 6):

www.afacymru.org.uk/supporting-effective-functioning-during-covid-19/

<https://www.afacymru.org.uk/adoption-during-covid-19/>

<https://www.afacymru.org.uk/fostering-during-covid-19/>

CoramBAAF UK have liaised with other organisations and NHS colleagues across the UK to produce practise points to address some of the emerging issues.

<https://corambaaf.org.uk/coronavirus>

<https://corambaaf.org.uk/coronavirus/health>

2. Statutory Health Assessments – Adoption medicals, Initial and Review Health assessments

Health professionals were originally expected to keep contact and travel to a minimum and only when absolutely necessary. This was to comply with current UK recommendations on social distancing and to keep LAC/YP, their families and carers, alongside NHS staff as safe as possible and reduce the risk of virus transmission within communities in Wales and the UK.

All professionals who look after children and young people, should continue to base their judgments and practice decisions on the best interests of the child or children that they are caring for.

We must always be aware of the particular vulnerabilities of LAC/YP and consider the possibility of safeguarding concerns, particularly where we are not able to meet face to face.

The current advice remains that virtual appointments/clinics can be used when necessary as in other areas of Community Paediatrics. Using video conferencing or telephone should be considered for LAC health assessments and Adoption medicals. This includes Initial Health Assessments (IHAs) and Review Health Assessments (RHAs). Where a physical examination is warranted, arrangements should be made for this using appropriate PPE adhering to health board guidance. The majority of health boards in Wales have resumed face to face consultations and are using a mix of virtual and face to face consultations with Looked after children and young people.

Please continue to liaise with your local authority to communicate how your health board and LAC Health Team are responding to the current situation.

Across Wales NHS staff working with Looked after Children have adapted to the new arrangements for conducting health assessments and many have reported that LAC/YP and their carers have engaged well and it has been a positive experience.

Health professionals across the UK with the support of CoramBAAF and RCPCH have been considering best practice in these challenging times. Although IHAs and RHAs have been conducted by video or telephone, as health service provision is reinstated, face to face consultations within current guidelines and using PPE is becoming more common.

For LAC Health Teams it may be necessary to provide RHAs only for the most vulnerable LAC/YP and provide support to others as needed. More flexible opportunities for keeping in contact with those LAC/YP who need it the most should be considered. The use of a triage system and discussion between LAC teams and social workers will help identify the most vulnerable LAC/YP. It would be helpful and appropriate for LAC health teams to use an internal RAG risk tool to record and evidence prioritisation decisions.

There is an expectation that LAC/YP placed from out of area will continue to have their health assessments conducted by LAC health team in the area where they are living.

With all assessments carried out virtually, it is important to record that a face-to-face consultation was not carried out. If there is a need for an examination, this should be recorded and planned for when restrictions are lifted.

In adoption, Regulation 15 AA(W)R 2005 requires a written report based on a physical examination:

Reg 15 AA(W)R 2005:

(2) Subject to paragraph (4) (child's consent if of sufficient understanding), the adoption agency must –

- (a) Make arrangements for the child to be examined by a registered medical practitioner; and*
- (b) Obtain from that practitioner a written report on the state of the child's health which must include any treatment which the child is receiving, the child's needs for health care and the matters specified in art 2 of Schedule 1.*

Unless the agency has received advice from the medical adviser that such an examination and report is not necessary.

This means there is discretion for the Medical Adviser to indicate an examination is not necessary, in exceptional circumstances. Liaison with the Agency Decision Maker and the Judge may be necessary in these cases. There should be plans in place to conduct a physical examination post Covid-19 or when face to face consultations are available. It is important that the complete report is available before matching is explored.

For Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), video calls or telephone assessments can be conducted using interpreters, such as Language Line.

Some LAC teams have found ways to conduct 3 way calls to ensure input from the social worker. Whichever platform is being used for video calling or telephone assessments/conversations, it is important to manage this carefully so that LAC/YP have the opportunity to talk on their own and that

the carer is also able to do this. You must check with your Health Board Information Governance regarding the video platform you are using for health assessments.

The RCPCH originally posted a statement concerning Child Protection medicals and LAC health assessments. Only clinically essential face-to-face meetings were advised but the situation is now changing. Please use clinical judgement as to whether or not face-to-face contact is necessary and seek advice from your line manager, health board and also experienced colleagues if necessary:

<https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/covid-19-guidance-paediatric-services#safeguarding-looked-after-children-and-vulnerable-children-processes>

The RCPCH and RCN have posted further statements to outline the principles and standards for the recovery of LAC services. While these documents primarily relate to the system and processes across England, the principles can be applied as appropriate across the other nations of the UK.

<https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/looked-after-children-services-covid-19-pandemic-recovery-plans>

Phone and video conferencing should be used to respond to requests for advice from carers and young people. Health professionals can help with liaison around health concerns, hospital appointments, etc.

As schools reopened, there have been further anxieties for children, carers and staff. A useful video has been prepared by Aneurin Bevan UHB psychology services to help school staff understand and manage this.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mr1KzI4oKck&feature=youtu.be>

Voices from Care continue to support Looked after Children and Young People. Their offer to care experienced young people can be found here:

<http://vfcc.org.uk/coronavirus/>

Some children, young people and their carers are understandably anxious. Please signpost to the PHW Covid-19 site for adults and NSPCC helpline and BBC Newsround for children and young adults for further and regularly updated information on the changing situation with regard to Covid-19.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51861089>

<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/anxiety-stress-panic/worries-about-the-world/>

<https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/>

For those who are advising pregnant young women and care leavers, the RCOG statement is helpful:

<https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/news/professional-bodies-response-to-government-advice-for-pregnant-women-to-self-isolate/>

3. Children moving into Fostering and Adoptive placements

Across Wales, children are being moved to new placements following a robust risk assessment and consideration of all the implications, including the additional risk of Covid-19 transmission.

The risk assessment should consider concerns about increased number of contacts and travel and impact on others of the possible spread of infection vs impact of delay for the child or young person.

Health professionals may be asked for an opinion. Please use the latest information on the PHW site.

When considering moving placements, it is safest to assume that a child may become Coronavirus positive (probably asymptomatic) in the 2 weeks following placement and this should be taken into account when placing children.

The National Adoption Service has produced a framework for decision making to assist services who are considering commencing planning for new introductions. Services report that this continues to work well for them including where local lockdowns / additional restrictions are in place.



FINAL V1.0
Framework for decis

AFA Cymru and National Adoption Service information:

<https://www.afacymru.org.uk/supporting-effective-functioning-during-covid-19/>

<https://www.adoptcymru.com/news/update-on-our-services-in-the-current-covid-19-pandemic>

CoramBAAF has also provided advice on managing introductions and placing children for adoption on their website:

<https://corambaaf.org.uk/coronavirus>

4. Testing in Residential Children's Units

Residential Children's Units originally fell under the "closed settings" guidance. Welsh Government have provided a flowchart of notification, testing and results for COVID19 in care homes:

<https://gov.wales/testing-process-care-homes-covid-19>

At the present time, anyone with coronavirus symptoms in Wales can get a test. Therefore every care home (including children's homes) can access testing for residents and staff.

For the most up to date advice please visit the Welsh Government website as this changes regularly. Responses to FAQs on this topic are available:

<https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/information-for-health-and-social-care/faq-002-childrens-residential-care-homes-faqs/>

It is important to emphasise the importance of taking into account consent, capacity and competence issues and to ensure children's rights are respected.

For advice on individual Looked after Children, health professionals can contact the Consultant for Communicable Disease in their Health Board. Welsh Government advice should be followed.

<https://gov.wales/test-trace-protect-coronavirus>

5. Meetings with adopters/Adoption and Foster Panels

The current advice is we should continue to promote the use of video conferencing, Skype or telephone for Adoption and Fostering Panels and for discussions with prospective adopters. As always it is good practice to follow any consultation with written advice. Clear recording of meetings/consultations is expected from health professionals, to reflect current practice.

AFA Cymru and National Adoption Service information:

<https://www.afacymru.org.uk/supporting-effective-functioning-during-covid-19/>

<https://www.adoptcymru.com/news/update-on-our-services-in-the-current-covid-19-pandemic>

CoramBAAF has provided the following advice:

<https://corambaaf.org.uk/updates/coronavirus-adoption-and-fostering-panel-virtual-meetings>

6. Collating reports and information

There may be difficulties with accessing information remotely and access to Child Health systems and electronic records where NHS staff are required to work from home. This may be a particular challenge for some NHS staff and affect the success of working from home.

7. Contact

Contact remains an important consideration for Looked after children and those with a plan for adoption. Advice is available for local authorities from AFACymru.

The Nuffield Family Justice Observatory has published the following relevant papers:

[Link](#) to: Contact following placement in care, adoption, or special guardianship: implications for children and young people's well being/Nuffield Foundation (nuffieldjo.org.uk)

[Link](#) to: Contact during lockdown: How are children and their birth families keeping in touch?/Nuffield Foundation (nuffieldjo.org.uk)

[Link](#) to: The effects of digital contact on children's well-being: evidence from public and private law contexts/Nuffield Foundation (nuffieldjo.org.uk)

[Link](#) to: Contact during lockdown: How are children and their birth families keeping in touch?/ Nuffield Foundation (nuffieldjo.org.uk)

8. Education

During the various lockdowns affecting school closures, places were available at the school hubs for children of key workers and vulnerable children. This included Looked after Children and Care experienced children, such as those placed for adoption.

<https://gov.wales/schools-coronavirus-guidance>

9. Reports on prospective adopters and foster-carers

At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic it was considered unlikely that GPs would be able to continue to provide health assessments on prospective adopters and foster-carers and therefore the requirement to provide advice would be likely to diminish for Medical Advisers, although advice to the Fostering Team and Regional Adoption Collaborative about individual cases or policy may be required, particularly regarding temporary foster placements.

CoramBAAF developed a “self-declaration of health for use during the Covid-19 pandemic” form for social workers to use if agreeing an emergency temporary placement or where it is not possible to obtain Adult Health (AH) forms from GPs.

In Wales, Welsh Government issued guidance on medical reports for foster carers to be used during the Covid-19 pandemic only, which included use of the CoramBAAF “self-declaration of health” form. Use of the self-declaration form was to lead to temporary approval as a foster-carer, with the expectation that a full AH form is obtained as soon as is feasible. Local authorities will continue to need advice from their Medical Adviser.

<https://gov.wales/annex-2-adult-fostering-medical-assessments-and-reports-during-covid-19-crisis>



Covid 19 Medical
Assessment for pros

The use of the self-declaration form was reviewed on 30th September 2020 and a decision was made that it would no longer to be used in Wales as all fostering agencies should now be requesting a full CoramBAAF Adult Health (AH) form. For cases where temporary approval has been agreed using the self-declaration form, fostering agencies are expected to arrange for a full AH report to be obtained and the case returned to panel by 31st March 2021. Welsh Government allowed some flexibility where the self-declaration health form had been used for fostering assessments already scheduled for panel, up to and including 7th November 2020. The date by which a full AH report and the case returned to panel has been extended to 28th May 2021.



Stakeholder Letter - Stakeholder Letter -
Medical Assessment Medical Assessment

CoramBAAF have developed an optional video consultation section of the AH form for GPs to use if necessary instead of the physical examination which fulfils the legal requirements for a full examination.



Form AH
coronavirus videoco

Welsh Government have endorsed the process for obtaining medical advice on prospective foster-carers and the use of the video consultation tool in Wales. The request letter that now should accompany the report for the GP to complete contains reference to a letter from the Minister of H&SS. It also

refers to the importance of the GP's role in the foster-carer approval process in ensuring children can be placed without delay, even at this difficult time.

[Letter-to-GP-AH-reports.doc](#)

The Minister for Health and Social Services wrote to Health Boards and Trusts on 6th May 2020 and provided a Framework for the next phase of operation. Within this framework (under the Primary Care section) there is reference to the need for data to continue be shared in the best interests of the patient and reference to GPs prioritising health assessments for adoption and fostering cases.

<https://gov.wales/written-statement-coronavirus-covid-19-nhs-wales-operating-framework-quarter-1-202021>

The Adoption Regulations do not allow for adoptive applicants to be approved without a GP report which must include a physical examination. The request letter that accompanies the report for the GP to complete contains reference to the above letter from the Minister of H&SS. It also refers to the importance of the GP's role in the adopter approval process in ensuring children can be placed for adoption without delay, even at this difficult time.

CoramBAAF have developed an optional video consultation section of the AH form for GPs to use if necessary instead of the physical examination which fulfils the legal requirements for a full examination.



Form AH
coronavirus videoco

Welsh Government have endorsed a new protocol for obtaining medical advice on prospective adopters and the use of the video consultation tool in Wales.



Letter to GP Covid
new CB process Jun



Protocol for
obtaining medical re

Since December 2020, some GP practices and health staff have been required to take part in the nationwide vaccination programme. This may have an additional impact on the availability of NHS staff and GPs in providing the necessary reports.

RCPCH Wales and the BMA have issued a joint statement concerning the importance of GP reports on prospective adopters and foster-carers:

<https://www.rcgp.org.uk/about-us/news/2021/april/medical-assessments-for-prospective-foster-carer-and-adopters-in-wales-statement.aspx>

CoramBAAF continue to provide guidance for health professionals which is regularly updated. It is important to consider that there is a difference in Regulations in Wales, although the general principles of good practice will apply. The information can be found here:

<https://corambaaf.org.uk/coronavirus/health>

It is important to be aware of the most current government advice on lockdowns and social distancing.

<https://gov.wales/coronavirus-regulations-guidance>

The Fostering Network has provided advice and support to which foster-carers can be signposted:

<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/coronavirus-covid-19>

The Fostering Network have raised concerns about difficulties for foster-carers during lockdown, in view of being required to provide support for online schooling, online contact with birth family and online meetings with social workers, etc.

<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/scrutinyofcovid-19anditsimpactonchildrenandyoungpeople-responsefromthefosteringnetwork1008.pdf>

10. Coronavirus Immunisation

Welsh Government have published a plan for the administration of the Coronavirus immunisation according to priority groups:

https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-01/vaccination-strategy-for-wales_3.pdf

It is expected that foster-carers, as well as health and social care staff, will accept the vaccine when invited to do so according to Welsh Government criteria.