

How schools and day care centres in Denmark are gearing up for reopening ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

All day care institutions and the first five forms of primary school can reopen from Wednesday 15th April. But only around half will be ready by this date and many institutions are preparing pupils and parents for a different way of childcare life.

Around half of Denmark's municipalities are ready to reopen schools and day care institutions from Wednesday 15th April, according to the National Association of Local Authorities (Kommunernes Landsforening, KL).

In a survey, Kommunernes Landsforening asked the country's 98 municipalities when they expect to reopen the first day care institutions and schools.

83 municipalities answered the survey. 52 of them expect to reopen day care institutions and 46 expect to reopen schools, on the planned day of Wednesday 15th April. The rest of the municipalities expect to be able to reopen by Monday 20th April.

"We must meet all the requirements of the health authorities before we open the doors. That's why it's going to take some time.

"I hope for the citizens' understanding and support that this must be done right and that it will therefore also be done differently around the municipalities", said Thomas Gyldal Petersen, chairman of KL's children's and education committee.

The decision to reopen the country's day care institutions and schools was announced by Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen at a press conference last Monday.

Since then, the Danish Health Authority (Sundhedsstyrelse) has given instructions on how schools and day care institutions should operate to reduce the risk of infections spreading.

The Local has seen the instructions sent to daycare institutions. They include:

A recommended floor area of 6m² per child for vuggestue (nursery) and 4m² per child for børnehave (kindergarten), meaning some institutions may not be able to accept all children back at first.

Children to play with the same small groups of 3-5, mainly outside.

Children to sit two metres apart at tables.

Food not to be shared.

Staff to supervise the children washing their hands at least every two hours, including after coughing or sneezing, before and after food.

Regular cleaning, including cleaning toys twice a day, disinfecting surfaces such as taps, toilet flushes, tables, door handles, handrails, light switches twice a day.

Staff meetings to be held outside or via telephone/video call.

Those that travel on buses provided by day care, to sit two metres apart. More buses will be provided.

Drop off and collection to be done at intervals and if possible outside.

In Copenhagen, schools and day care centres will use other locations like museums and playgrounds to provide more space.

Copenhagen's mayor of children and youth administration Jesper Christensen, said this would help keep children at the required safe distances.

The National Association of Local Authorities (Kommunernes Landsforening, KL) points out that there will be differences locally and around the country as to how institutions open.

Each school and day care institution will contact parents with details of how and when they will reopen.

Ellen Trane Nørby, the children's and education mayor for the opposition party Venstre commended the municipalities for getting ready to open but said there had been confusion in many places and that more clarity was needed about the reopening.

Yesterday the Danish Health Authority (Sundhedsstyrelsen) apologised for any confusion about whether children should stay home from school if they, or people close to them, are particularly vulnerable.

“The uncertainty is partly due to the fact that there have been different announcements from different authorities. Of course, this is confusing and unfortunate”, said the health authority.

The health authority has now made it clear that parents should talk to the child's doctor if they have any doubts about whether the child should stay at home.

Parents can also talk to management at the school or day care institution. The management can then assess whether they can pay special attention to the child.

If the child lives with someone who is at risk of being severely affected by the coronavirus, the health authority says to also contact your doctor or school and day care management.

If there are people in the at-risk group in the household, such as pregnant or with a compromised immune system, it will not prevent the child from going to school or day care. But there must always be a special focus on the hygiene of these homes, added the health authority.

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