

Three toys per child and a teddy bear ban: New rules for Denmark's kindergartens ^[1]

Some kindergartens have removed all teddy bears, others are limiting each child to just three toys, and there's a total ban on bringing toys from home. When Denmark's youngest children returned yesterday, a lot had changed.

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EXCERPTS

At one kindergarten, or *børneshave*, in Vesterbro, Copenhagen, all the soft toys and teddy bears the children usually play with have been removed. "We are leaving only the toys we can wash, not toys we can't clean," Nina, one of the staff, told The Local.

Even those toys that are left have been radically reduced in number, with each group of five children assigned its own selection, which will be washed every two hours and cannot be used by children outside the group.

Other *børneshave* have told parents not to let their children bring their beloved teddy bears or any other toy from home. Others are limiting each child to just three toys.

"We have to follow the guidelines from the health care authorities and the municipality. But how we do it in practice is up to us," explains Louise van der Watt, who works at Gentofte *Børneshave* outside Copenhagen.

Like many *børneshave*-age children in Denmark, those she looks after bring their own lunchboxes from home. But they have now been banned from sharing any food with their playmates.

Each child at Gentofte has been assigned to one of the *børneshave*'s six toilets, which are then cleaned after every use.

Parents are not allowed to enter the premises, and are instead instructed to deliver the children outside. They need inform the kindergarten in advance of the exact time they plan to drop off or pick up their children, so that they can be met by staff.

"We receive the children outside and then we put them into small groups, and those groups are together for the whole day with the same adults," van der Watt explained. The idea is that each child is in close contact with only four or five other children and two adults each day.

Michael Roche, whose child attends a kindergarten in Copenhagen, said that even his child's spare clothes had to be left outside the building, one of the new strict rules he found "very strange and a bit over-kill".

The recommendation from the Danish Health Authority that children sit at least two metres apart at tables is causing problems, as for many *børneshave* it in practice means that each child needs to have an entire table to themselves, despite there not being enough tables to go around.

Other workers at *børneshave* complained that they lacked the staff needed to dress each child themselves at the end of pick-up time, when here is often only one kindergarten teacher left.

The Danish Health Authority (Sundhedsstyrelse) has issued instructions on how schools and day care institutions should operate to reduce the risk of infections spreading. These include:

- A recommended floor area of 6m² per child for *vuggestue* (nursery) and 4m² per child for *børneshave* (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.

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