

Social bubbles and no toys from home: How Italy will reopen kindergartens ^[1]

Under-6s returning to preschool in September won't have to wear face masks but can't mix freely with their schoolmates, according to guidelines from the Italian Ministry of Education.

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Source: The Local

Format: Article

Publication Date: 4 Aug 2020

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

The directive, published on Monday after getting the approval of Italy's regional governors, apply to children attending an asilo nido (nursery school, for 0-3 year olds) or scuola dell'infanzia (preschool, for 3-6 year olds).

They stress the importance of getting Italy's youngest pupils back to class in person from September, more than six months after nurseries, schools and universities were ordered to close in March.

"We're working non-stop everyday to get everyone back to school, from the littlest to the eldest," said Education Minister Lucia Azzolina, whose ministry has been criticised for failing to issue clear instructions with less than a month and a half before schools are due to reopen on September 14th.

While the latest guidance for preschools remains pretty broad, here are the main measures to know about.

No face masks for under-6s

Up to the age of 6, children don't have to cover their nose and mouth at school.

But teachers and other staff are expected to wear masks, as well as gloves and other protective equipment where necessary.

Social bubbles

Kindergartens are advised to split classes into smaller, fixed groups with dedicated supervisors, toys and areas. While children within each group aren't expected to social distance, the groups should avoid coming into contact with each other or sharing equipment.

It is up to each region to decide how many children each educator can supervise, though class sizes are expected to be smaller than usual. The education ministry says it is working to hire extra teachers for state preschools.

No temperature checks

Kindergartens aren't required to take kids' temperature on arrival.

Instead parents are expected to monitor their child's health and keep them home if their temperatures rises above 37.5 degrees C, or if they come into contact with someone positive for the coronavirus. The same rules apply to staff and parents.

Outdoor teaching

Schools are permitted to use all available space to facilitate social distancing, both indoors and outdoors. They can also seek permission from local authorities to use spaces off the school premises.

No toys from home

Children shouldn't bring toys or other equipment from home if it can be avoided; if not, all items must be thoroughly disinfected before being brought onto the premises.

Only one parent on the school run

Kids should be dropped off and picked up by only one parent or guardian at a time, the guidelines say.

If possible, drop-off and pick-up should take place outdoors and at separate entrances and exits. Kindergartens can stagger the process in phases to limit crowding.

Register of visitors

For contact tracing purposes, kindergartens may keep a register of everyone who has been on the premises each day.

Lunches and naps permitted

Lunch and snack breaks are still allowed, so long as children stay within their groups. That might mean eating in the classroom or outdoors rather than in the canteen.

Kids are also allowed to take naps, provided the space is thoroughly cleaned and aired between each use.

Extra hygiene measures

Kindergartens are expected to deep clean and air out all spaces and equipment between uses, as well as making sure that children wash their hands regularly, avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth, and cover their faces when coughing or sneezing.

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