Welsh Government published Protective Measures for Childcare Settings: Keep Childcare Safe on the 10th of June which provided guidance on how to keep children and staff safe during COVID-19. This includes guidance on maintaining social distancing by ensuring, amongst other things that children and staff where possible only mix in small, consistent groups of no more than 8, while adhering to National Minimum Standards (NMS) ratios. These small groups have sometimes been referred to as ‘bubbles’.

### Why use bubbles?
- A ‘bubble’ reduces the risk of transmission in children and adults
- Provides parents with reassurance that your setting has put control measures in place
- Allows your setting to ‘organise’ the day – managing space and supporting staff to be responsible for the children within their bubble

### What these bubbles mean
- Your bubbles must be consistent; that is the children and staff must remain in their bubble and not move to other bubbles
- These bubbles must still be kept when accessing the outdoors areas and during snack and lunch times
- Resources must not be shared between bubbles unless they have been thoroughly cleaned or left for 72 hours
- There must be enough space in each bubble to accommodate 2 meters distance between staff and children
- Bubbles are relevant for both adults and children (i.e. staff should not be moving between bubbles) and should be person-centred. It is about minimising contact between children/adults and others between settings as well as within settings, meaning that it is essential to review who each child/adult is grouped with in other Settings (e.g. schools) and making these groupings as consistent as possible.

As children and staff should remain in the same bubble for each session they attend it is important to consider how you will allocate children and staff their bubbles and plan this ahead of re-opening.

### Bubble allocation
- **Mirror school bubbles.** Where you can, try to mirror the bubbles that they have in school. Communication with parents about their use of other education/childcare providers and with schools will be an essential part of your planning and risk assessment process. ‘Bubbles’ should be kept as consistent as possible across Settings to minimise the ‘contacts’ that each child is having and to reduce the rate of potential transmission of the virus. This includes Holiday Clubs reflecting on bubbles that children are a part of during term time.
- **Think about what days the children are booked in for.** Look at your bookings and try to group children so that there are enough in each group on each day. You need to consider those children that are only booked in for one or two days as opposed to a full week as you don't want to create groups where you inadvertently end up with only one child in the group on a single day, this would be distressing for the child who will see other children together in their groups
- **Think about your collection times.** Rarely do all children in After School Club/ Holiday Club stay until the end. Ask parents when you assess your bookings to give you an idea of the time they expect to collect. Try to consider this when allocating your bubbles. It is important that you have groups that are collected around the same time. This is to ensure that you are limiting the number of parents collecting at the same time and also that children are not left for long periods of time as the only one left in their group.
Establishing Small Groups or ‘Bubbles’ - Maintaining Social Distancing in Out of School Childcare Clubs

- **Keep siblings together.** It is important that your bubbles reflect households where possible to reduce the amount of contact people have.
- **Think about the ages of the children.** It would seem logical to keep the bubbles to ages for various reasons, one being that some younger children may find social distancing and infectious control difficult compared to older children, and another being that this will likely be the case anyway when mirroring school bubbles. However, you may need to consider the numbers attending and collection time over this because it may be more distressing for the children to be alone in a bubble for long periods of time.
- **Friendship groups.** Once you have considered the above criteria as far as you reasonably can, try to allocate the children so they are in a bubble with at least one of their friends or a child they spend a lot of time with in the setting. The changes are going to feel very alien to the children and it will make that harder if they can see their friends in other groups and they can’t play with them.
- **Consider your staff rota.** If you have staff that don’t work full time, you will need to ensure you consider their shifts so they coincide with the allocation of bubbles. It is recommended that staff remain with the same group of children and avoid moving between bubbles.
- **Think about your toilets.** When planning your area and placing of bubble groups, think about how each bubble will access the toilets. You may need to consider a one-way system for moving between bubbles to the toilet to support social distancing and distance between bubbles.
- **Consider how you will access outdoor spaces with bubbles.** Outdoor provision is believed to be of benefit in supporting infection control and minimising risk, therefore there should be opportunities for getting outdoors as much as possible. Cleaning resources between use by children and different bubbles will need to be considered if children access outdoor play equipment.
- **Consider transportation.** To adhere to guidance about consistent bubbles and social distancing, it is important to reflect on how children are going to arrive at your Setting and whether transportation methods need to be amended temporarily, working in partnership with parents.

**Things to remember**

- Ensure you include the implementation of bubbles into your re-opening risk assessment and how you will allocate the bubbles.
- Keep an open dialogue with parents and ask them to support you in your plans by being open about their needs, i.e. pick up times and days, and being open about what other provision they are using (schools/other Settings). Ensure parents understand that you will support them as much as is possible but they need to consider that it will be difficult for you to change bookings given the complex guidance.
- Liaise with staff, let them support you in the allocation.
- Keep a record of who is within a bubble, so should there be a case of COVID-19 you will be able to identify which children and staff may have been exposed to the virus, and be able to work in line with Test Trace Protect.