

COVID-19: Return to educational establishments

Physical Education Guidelines

Version **11.0**

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Version	Date	Summary of changes
V 1.0	05/08/20	First version of the document.
V 2.0	07/09/20	Various updates for clarification.
V 3.0	14/09/20	Revised date for the re-introduction of indoor physical education.
V 4.0	21/09/20	One update for clarification. The revised text is highlighted in yellow.
V 5.0	05/10/20	One update for clarification. The revised text is highlighted in yellow.
V 6.0	30/10/20	The revised text is highlighted in yellow.
V 7.0	02/11/20	Various updates in line with Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance on reducing the risks from COVID-19 in schools document (30 October 2020).
V 8.0	22/02/21	Various updates in line with ' Prioritising the return of senior phase learners - Education Scotland Technical Guidance ' and Coronavirus (COVID19): Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues – advice on mitigations to minimise transmission during phased return to in-person learning - gov.scot (www.gov.scot) documents.
V 9.0	03/03/21	Update in line with Coronavirus (Covid-19): Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues minutes
V 10.0	08/03/21	Update in line with Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance on schools reopening - gov.scot (www.gov.scot) and Guidance for in-school and remote learning-03-03-2021.pdf
V 11.0	22/03/21	Coronavirus (COVID-19): timetable for easing restrictions 16 March 2021 The revised text is highlighted in yellow.

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1. Overview and purpose

These guidelines must be used alongside the recently published [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance on schools reopening - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#) 8 March 2021 and [Guidance-for-in-school-and-remote-learning-03-03-2021.pdf](#) and [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): timetable for easing restrictions](#) documents.

Schools should ensure that arrangements for individual subjects stay within the existing schools guidance and accompanying mitigations.

2. How to use these guidelines

This document reflects the latest scientific evidence and advice. A risk-benefit approach to decision making can be helpful while understanding that no risk can be reduced to zero.

The guidelines are designed to promote a consistent and equitable approach against the context of the current pandemic. Local authorities and schools will understand best how they can be applied in their settings. They should do so in a way that prioritises the health, safety and wellbeing of all children, young people and staff, and ensure that the risk mitigation measures set out in this document are implemented effectively. It has been written to stimulate conversations on how physical education can be safely and effectively delivered. It recognises the pedagogical expertise and leadership of early learning and childcare (ELC) practitioners, primary teachers, teachers in special schools and secondary physical education teachers.

3. Key Messages from the COVID-19 Sub-advisory Group¹

[The reducing risks guidance](#) provides detailed advice on physical distancing in schools. Following the meeting of the Advisory Sub-Group on 9 February, it was decided that, as an additional protective measure, strict 2 metre distancing should be put in place at the current time between secondary-aged learners, in addition to continuing to be in place for staff in secondary schools. This applies to all learners in secondary schools including vulnerable children and the children of key workers. Physical distancing requirements in primary schools remain unchanged, for example, 2 metre distancing between adults not from the same household should be maintained.

There should also be 2m distancing between adults and children whenever possible.

As an additional measure, face coverings should now be worn at all times by staff and young people in secondary schools; including S1-S3 learners (not just the senior phase) in classrooms, in communal areas and when moving about the school.

The requirement for strict 2 metre distancing between young people in secondary schools may be relaxed when they are outdoors for the purpose of outdoor activities and learning.

Considering the recent scientific evidence, the sub-group has concluded that practical elements of physical education can only take place up until 5 April as follows:

	Indoors	Outdoors
Primary	Not permitted	Children can participate in physical activities

	Indoors	Outdoors
Secondary	Not permitted, except for the purpose of assessment to ensure certification in the senior phase – see note below	Young people can participate in non-contact physical activities

Certification in Senior Phase

The sub-group considered the issue of physical education for the purpose of assessment to ensure certification in the senior phase. The view was that relaxing the mitigations would not be appropriate at this stage, particularly as the science would suggest an increased risk of transmission among young people during physical exertion indoors.

¹ This advice is current on this date. The advice is reviewed periodically and may change as evidence is published and more about the virus is understood.

However, the sub-group was prepared to agree that in exceptional circumstances where, for example, snow precludes it taking place outdoors, physical education for the purpose of assessment could be allowed indoors provided that all other appropriate mitigations were in place regarding strict 2 metre physical distancing, ventilation, and hand and respiratory hygiene etc.

The sub-group recognised the importance of physical education for the health and wellbeing of young people, and would keep the issue under review.

In relation to the new [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): timetable for easing restrictions](#) document, the key indicative dates most relevant to physical education and dance are:

- **12 March – 4 April, For 12 - 17 year olds**
Non-contact, outdoor group physical activity and sport permitted; wherever possible, efforts should be made to keep children and young people within the same groups, in smaller class sizes.
- **5 April, For 12-17 year olds**
Outdoor contact sport can resume.
- **12 April (or end of Easter holidays)**
All pupils go back to school full-time.
- **26 April (Described as a move to a modified level 3 for mainland Scotland.)**
All indoor sport facilities including leisure centres and pools can open for individual, non-contact physical activities/sports
- **17 May (Described as a move to level 2.)**
Non-contact, group physical activities and sports can take place indoors

The dates are dependent on the suppression of the virus and the continued rollout of the vaccine.

4. Practical Considerations

1	Minimising contact between individuals and groups <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strict 2 metre distancing to be observed in the school building in secondary schools• The requirement for strict 2 metre distancing in secondary schools may be relaxed when young people are outdoors for the purpose of outdoor activities and learning.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical distancing requirements in primary schools should remain unchanged: 2 metre distancing between adults not from the same household, and 2 metre distancing between adults and children whenever possible. • Face coverings should now be worn at all times by staff and young people in secondary schools; including S1-S3 learners (not just the senior phase) in classrooms, in communal areas, changing rooms and when moving about the school. • There is a legislative exemption for exercise in respect of wearing a face covering. This is consistent with the advice from WHO.² • Wherever possible, efforts should be made to keep children and young people within the same groups.
<p>2</p>	<p>Changing Rooms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing rooms are an area of increased risk of transmission. When considering their use schools should ensure that they implement pragmatic and proportionate control measures which reduce risk to the lowest reasonably practical level, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ changing rooms are as well ventilated as possible ○ 2 metre physical distancing maintained ○ close attention to cleaning surfaces after use. • If changing rooms are not used: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ consideration should be given to alternative places for storing learners' belongings, for example, assigning each learner their own space ○ young people should be encouraged to arrive at school in their physical education (PE) kit on days when PE lessons will take place and, where possible, wait until they get home to change.
<p>3</p>	<p>Equipment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities where there is no sharing of equipment are safer than those that do, therefore teachers should plan activities that minimise the use of equipment. • If any equipment has been shared, this should be carefully cleaned before next use/between each lesson.

² <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters#exercising>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider keeping extra equipment on hand so that teaching time is not lost to re-clean equipment. • Fixed equipment should be checked by the teacher prior to use to avoid children and young people having to adjust or touch it.
<p>4</p>	<p>Hygiene measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior leaders should ensure the physical education department is linked to the enhanced cleaning programme across the school. • Commonly touched objects: Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance on reducing the risks from COVID-19 in schools Para 33 states: ‘Local authorities and schools should ensure that an enhanced environmental cleaning regime is in place. The regime put in place should be in line with Health Protection Scotland Guidance for Non-Healthcare Settings’. This specifies in particular: ‘Ensuring regular (at least twice daily) cleaning of commonly touched objects and surfaces (for example, desks, handles, dining tables, shared technology surfaces etc)’. <p>Para 36 states: ‘Careful consideration should be given to the cleaning regime for specialist equipment (for example, in practical subjects or for children with additional support needs), sensory rooms, practical subjects with specialist equipment... etc. to ensure safe use’.</p> <p>Equipment that is difficult to clean should be taken out of use.</p> <p>Personal Hygiene:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hand-washing facilities or hand sanitiser stations should be available and easily accessible at entry/exit points, when children and young people move between groups and when entering or leaving a facility. • Hands should be washed and dried thoroughly or sanitised before and after the activity. • There should be no handshakes at the beginning or end of any activity. • There should be no sharing of water bottles.
<p>5</p>	<p>Other considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly communicate the route and rules with learners ahead of every location, movement and transition. • Use learner voice to reflect on how well protocols are being followed and how practice can be improved.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If possible, create a virtual/visual tour of structures and routines and share with learners, staff, parents/carers.• Consider using physical and visual aids to define space and modify layouts, for example, tape, rope or chalk on required surfaces/walls. |
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5. Risk assessment

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Guidance on reducing the risks from COVID-19 in schools](#) includes information on risk assessment.

It is a legal requirement that local authorities and head teachers ensure that risk assessments are conducted or updated to reflect the revised planning assumption of a phased return to in-school learning. All risk assessments should be reviewed regularly as circumstances change to ensure that the safety and wellbeing of children, young people and adults is not compromised.

6. Physical Activity and Sport

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Guidance on preparing for the start of the new school term in August 2020](#), Para 137 states: 'Opportunities to participate in physical activity and sport have the potential to enhance children and young people's mental and physical wellbeing and will support children and young people to lead healthy, active lifestyles now and in the future'.

Attention should be paid to maximising opportunities for pupils to build activity into their daily routines. The COVID-19 Sub-advisory Group emphasises the importance of supporting active travel wherever possible, as the safest means of transport to school in light of COVID-19.

7. Conclusion

Changes in incidence of COVID-19, and the potential impact on the practical, experiential learning in physical education will be kept under review and updated when necessary. Local authorities and schools will also need to be able to adapt to local issues, for example, outbreaks or local increases in cases of COVID-19, and follow any locally-determined advice and guidance.

Until 5 April, in ELC and primary, physical education can only take place outdoors with appropriate mitigating actions outlined in this document to ensure the safety of all children, young people and staff.

In secondary, physical education can only take place outdoors with appropriate mitigating actions outlined in this document to ensure the safety of all children, young people and staff. However, the sub-group was prepared

to agree that in exceptional circumstances where, for example, snow precludes it taking place outdoors, physical education for the purpose of assessment could be allowed indoors provided that all other appropriate mitigations were in place regarding strict 2 metre physical distancing, ventilation, and hand and respiratory hygiene etc.

8. Appendix

These policy documents currently provide a frame of reference for Scottish education. More detail, particularly about wider school issues can be found in the official Scottish Government advice which can be found here:

- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): timetable for easing restrictions](#) 16 March 2021
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance on schools reopening - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#) 8 March 2021
- [Guidance-for-in-school-and-remote-learning-03-03-2021.pdf](#)
- <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-advisory-sub-group-on-education-and-childrens-issues-minutes-9-february-2021/>
- [‘Prioritising the return of senior phase learners - Education Scotland Technical Guidance’](#) 15 February 2021
- [Coronavirus \(COVID19\): Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children’s Issues – advice on mitigations to minimise transmission during phased return to in-person learning - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#) 15 February 2021
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Guidance on reducing the risks from COVID-19 in schools](#) 30 October 2020
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Guidance on preparing for the start of the new school term in August 2020](#) 25 August 2020