

COVID-19: Return to educational establishments

Physical Education Guidelines

Version **9.0**

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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. The revised text is highlighted in yellow.
V 9.0	03/03/21	Update in line with Coronavirus (Covid-19): Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues minutes The revised text is highlighted in yellow

Contents

1. Overview and purpose	2
2. How to use these guidelines.....	2
3. Key Messages from the COVID-19 Sub-advisory Group	2
4. Practical Considerations.....	4
5. Risk assessment.....	6

6. Physical Activity and Sport	6
7. Conclusion	6
8. Appendix	7

1. Overview and purpose

These guidelines must be used alongside the recently published [‘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.

Senior phase learners timetabled in school to undertake practical work at any one time should be no more than 5-8% of the secondary school roll. That figure is additional to those children and young people already in attendance as a result of being classified as vulnerable or through key worker status. 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

Given the new variant, the high current prevalence of COVID-19, and the advice from senior clinicians (as set out in the sub-group advice published on 3 February) the sub-group has concluded that its advice on physical distancing for secondary schools should be strengthened. At the current time, and during the phased return to in-person learning, 2 metre distancing should be in place for secondary aged pupils, in addition to continuing to be in place for staff.

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.

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.

Within early learning and childcare (ELC) establishments, 2 metre distancing should be in place between staff, but no distancing should be required between young children, or between young children and staff.

The sub-group has concluded that its previous advice on face coverings in schools and ELC settings should be maintained, with the additional requirement that senior phase pupils should wear face coverings in classrooms.

The sub-group is aware that this is more cautious than other guidance, and this is to support a limited return to school. This will be kept under review as we continue to suppress the virus and more children and young people return to school.

Considering the recent scientific evidence, the sub-group has concluded that practical elements of Physical Education can only take place as follows:

	Indoors	Outdoors
ELC Primary 1 - 3	Not permitted	Children can participate in physical activities

	Indoors	Outdoors
Secondary	Not permitted	Young people can participate in physical activities and 2 metre physical distancing must be maintained

National Qualifications assessments

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.

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.

4. Practical Considerations

1	Minimising contact between individuals and groups <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2 metre physical distancing must be maintained for young people in secondary schools.• 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.• Secondary schools should ensure young people wear face coverings, when in non-participating areas, for example, changing-rooms.• 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.
2	Changing Rooms <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
3	Equipment

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

	<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. • 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.

5	<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. • 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.

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 and 2 metre physical distancing must be maintained with appropriate mitigating actions outlined in this document to ensure the safety of all children, young people and staff.

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:

- <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](#)