

Guidelines for learning and teaching in music during the COVID-19 pandemic

These guidelines are designed to be read in conjunction with the Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance on reducing the risks in schools.

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance on reducing the risks in schools - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues – advice on physical education and expressive arts - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot)

These guidelines recognise the importance of music education in developing skills and supporting health and wellbeing, and the potentially negative impact of limiting music in schools. However, the guidelines continue to maintain a precautionary approach. This is based on the latest scientific advice, with the aim of minimising the risk of transmission of COVID-19 and allowing schools to remain open.

Local authorities and schools should exercise their judgement when implementing these guidelines. Their focus should be to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children, young people and staff, taking local circumstances into account.

The guidelines will be kept under review and updated in response to changing circumstances and updated scientific advice. Local authorities and schools will also need to adapt to local issues, e.g. outbreaks or increases in cases of COVID-19, and follow any locally-determined advice and guidance.

Separate guidance for Early Years and Childcare (ELC) practitioners is available on the Scottish Government website.

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1. Overview of scientific advice

This document has been prepared by Education Scotland with input from key stakeholders. It is based on advice from the Scottish Government Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children’s Issues, the latest version of which was published on 17 May 2021.

The sub-group has updated its advice in the light of:

- the ongoing success of the vaccination programme;
- the continued suppression of the virus; and
- the consequent easing of some of the wider restrictions across society to restore more normality to everyday lives.

The sub-group has also taken into consideration the importance of music for the health and wellbeing of children and young people, as well as their social, physical and cognitive development; creativity, communication, team working, and discipline.

The greater transmissibility of the currently dominant variants of the virus, means that ongoing vigilance is required to minimise opportunities for spread. That vigilance includes continued commitment to reducing activities of higher risk.

There remains an increased risk of transmission of COVID -19 during instrumental and class music lessons (particularly when singing and playing wind instruments). This is because of the respiratory aerosols which are exhaled during these activities and the close proximity of participants.

The table below sets guidance relating to learning and teaching in music for children and young people in schools and ELC settings. That guidance aligns with the risk levels approach contained in the Strategic Framework from Level 3, Level 2 and Level 1. Most local authorities across Scotland moved to Level 2 on 17 May.

The advice recognises there are still risks associated with these activities and reflects growing evidence about routes of transmission including:

- (i) the importance of airborne routes of transmission of the virus, compared with surface transmission; and
- (ii) the greater relative risk of transmission by senior pupils compared with primary and pre-school aged children.

In preventing aerosol transmission, physical distancing and ventilation remain important mitigation measures for music. Where possible singing and other aerosol-generating activities should be conducted outdoors or in large ventilated spaces

which enable physical distancing. This guidance applies particularly in secondary schools.

There should be no sharing of brass or wind musical instruments between learners, unless these instruments are thoroughly cleaned. Careful consideration should be given to the cleaning of all instruments and other equipment such as music stands. People should wash their hands before and after touching such shared equipment.

There remains a hierarchy of risk in these activities. For example, learning outdoors is safer than indoors. Activities undertaken at low volume or those that have lower respiratory exertion are safer than stronger aerosol-generating activities. Individuals or small numbers are safer than large groups performing. Activities involving no sharing of equipment is safer than those where learners do share, or where equipment cannot be thoroughly cleaned between uses. Activities which can be done at a distance or virtually are safer than those experienced in close proximity. Shorter duration activities carry a lower risk than longer duration activities.

The sub-group's advice is that music activities should take place only in situations where they comply with the low risk criteria, set out below, for schools that are working at present in areas designated as Level 3, Level 2 or Level 1.

Levels	Permitted activity in schools and ELC settings
Level 3	<p>Music (low risk - i.e. percussion, keyboards, strings and guitars). Activity permitted outdoors and digitally. Activity indoors is permitted subject to risk assessment and with appropriate mitigations.</p>
	<p>Music (higher risk, singing)</p> <p>For ELC to Primary 3 children singing outdoors and indoors is permitted subject to risk assessment and with appropriate mitigations.</p> <p>For Primary 4 onwards activity is not recommended, except in limited circumstances for senior phase pupils preparing for assessment.</p>

Level 2	Music (low risk - i.e. percussion, keyboards, strings and guitars). Activity is permitted outdoors/ digitally, and indoors subject to risk assessment and with appropriate mitigations.
	<p>Music (higher risk, singing) for ELC and primary aged children Activity outdoors and indoors is permitted subject to risk assessment and with appropriate mitigations.</p> <p>Music (higher risk, singing, wind and brass) For secondary aged young people activity outdoors/digitally is permitted. One to one lessons (singing, wind and brass) are permitted and can now resume indoors for all age groups, subject to risk assessment and with appropriate mitigations including very good ventilation and physical distancing. Group activity should not take place indoors at present.</p>
Level 1	Music (low risk - i.e. percussion, keyboards, strings and guitars). Activity indoors and outdoors is permitted subject to risk assessment and with appropriate mitigations.
	<p>Music (higher risk, including singing) for ELC and primary aged children Activity outdoors and indoors is permitted subject to risk assessment and with appropriate mitigations.</p> <p>For secondary aged young people (higher risk, including singing, wind, and brass) activity outdoors is permitted. One to one lessons (singing, wind and brass) are permitted indoors subject to risk assessment and with appropriate mitigations including effective ventilation and physical distancing. Group activity should not take place indoors at present.</p>

2. Suggested mitigations recommended for music

A clear risk assessment should be in place. This needs to address the risks of COVID-19, using the scientific guidance provided above to inform decisions and control measures. The individual needs of children and young people requiring additional support for learning should remain a priority. Risk assessments should identify clearly all measures in place to control the risks in a music learning environment. Music risk assessments will help to ensure that everything necessary has been done to promote safe learning and teaching during the pandemic. Completed music instrumental risk assessments should be kept under review as circumstances change and advice is updated.

These guidelines should be shared with all music practitioners and partners who work with children and young people in your establishments and school communities. All private music teachers and all other music partners including external and other private providers who work with children and young people within schools should follow these guidelines. Staff should explain the updated guidance requirements clearly to learners, parents and carers, sharing the rationale and detailed practical music arrangements in place at present for all learners.

Space and ventilation

In preventing aerosol transmission, physical distancing and ventilation remain important mitigation measures for music. Where possible, singing and other aerosol-generating activities should be conducted outdoors or in large ventilated spaces which enable physical distancing. This guidance applies particularly in secondary schools.

There may be a need to use additional alternative spaces to deliver lessons that comply with the current guidelines. These spaces could include, for example, assembly halls, games halls, dining facilities and other general purpose areas. Music staff should liaise with senior leaders as required. Staff should ensure that all indoor spaces being used are well ventilated.

Staff and learners should continue to use masks in accordance with the guidance on reducing the risks from COVID-19 in schools¹. Masks can be removed when necessary for playing, in line with the scientific advice above.

The risk in music environments is reduced when activities take place for a shorter period of time and performers are oriented so they are not positioned face to face.

Instrumental timetables should be reviewed for all children and young people who receive a lesson in school, to reduce pupil movement.

Cleaning and sharing of instruments and equipment

There should be no sharing of brass or wind musical instruments between learners, unless these instruments are thoroughly cleaned. Careful consideration should be given to the cleaning of all instruments and other equipment, such as music stands. People should wash their hands before and after touching such shared equipment.

Cleaning strategies should include regular cleaning and disinfection of musical instruments and all other music devices frequently touched. In addition there should be regular cleaning of hard surfaces, chairs, doors, handles, shared technology, light switches, keyboards, headphones, and any other relevant music or music technology classroom equipment. When learners are using school music headphones, the entire headphone including any headband and adaptor should be

¹ [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance on reducing the risks in schools - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-reducing-the-risks-in-schools/pages/22/index.aspx)

cleaned before and after use. Piano keys, drumsticks etc. should be disinfected with cleaning cloths before and after being played.

Hand sanitisers and other appropriate cleaning materials should be available for use in music classrooms and practice rooms.

Individual sheet and/or digital music scores should be provided for all learners. Music sheets should be provided early in the term to ensure learners can continue to learn at pace. This guidance applies especially to those preparing for SQA or other music examinations, and for any young people unable to attend school at any point during this session.

Use of technology

While there remain restrictions around singing, brass and woodwind, particularly in groups, technology can continue to facilitate collective participation. For example, singing, music lessons and choir practice can take place virtually. Young people might record themselves performing, and then provide the recordings to their teacher.

To support the teaching of individual music compositions, web cams can be connected to interactive boards or visualisers to enable teachers to provide helpful demonstrations and comment.

Performances should continue to be recorded as part of normal learning and as part of a virtual portfolio. This can provide support for the development of music skills and provide latest and best evidence of the level achieved by a learner. Brass, woodwind and singing candidates have been given permission by SQA to choose to record assessment performances at home during COVID-19 restrictions. Where learners choose to do this, teachers should ensure that, over the next term, they enable appropriate school equipment such as tablet computers or hand held digital devices to be borrowed in order to fulfil this requirement. Any music department experiencing challenges in completing this requirement should work with their school senior leaders to ensure equipment is made available.

Preparation for assessment in level 3

While the advice from the Scottish Government's Coronavirus (COVID-19) Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues suggests that young people should not engage in singing, or playing wind and brass instruments with other people at level 3, it is acknowledged that this presents a particular challenge for young people preparing for qualifications.

- It is advised that one-to-one lessons and practice sessions can go ahead for pupils preparing for assessments in brass, wind, piping and singing. These sessions should be kept to the minimum required (both in length and frequency)

to prepare adequately for assessment. Learners will have different requirements and teachers should apply their judgement in deciding what is necessary.

- The recording of brass, wind, piping and singing by individual learners for assessment purposes can also take place in school with a teacher present.
- One-to-one lessons, practice sessions and recording should only go ahead subject to the completion of a very robust local risk assessment by practitioners, with the agreement of senior school leaders.
- These risk assessments should include the following mitigations.
 - Any activity should take place in a large, well-ventilated room.
 - There should be a clearly defined space of 2 metres or more between the learner and their teacher.
 - Where possible a clear screen should be positioned between the learner and their teacher.
 - The teacher should wear a mask.
 - The learner should wear a mask whenever they are not performing.
 - The room must be sanitised carefully at the end of each performance.
 - There should be a delay between candidates using the room to allow aerosol particles to dissipate.