

COVID-19: Return to educational establishments

Version **13.0**

Physical Education Guidelines Published **17 May 2021**

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
V 12.0	07/04/21	Update in line with Updated Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance on reducing the risks in schools 24 March 2021 The revised text is highlighted in yellow.

V 13.0	17/05/21	Update in line with Updated Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance on reducing the risks in schools 17 May 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 [Updated Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance on reducing the risks in schools](#) 17 May 2021 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

Updated Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance on reducing the risks in schools provides guidance to ensure a safe and supportive environment for learning and teaching during the coronavirus pandemic.

There is an increased risk of transmission of COVID-19 during activities such as physical education, dance, music (particularly singing, and playing wind and brass instruments) and drama (including school debating type activities) because of the respiratory aerosols which are exhaled during these activities and the close proximity of participants². The wearing of face coverings is usually not possible for these activities.

There is a hierarchy of risk in these activities: outdoors being safer than indoors; activities undertaken at low volume or that have lower respiratory exertion being safer than aerosol-generating activities; individual or small numbers involved being safer than large groups; activities involving no sharing of equipment being safer than those that do (or where equipment cannot be cleaned thoroughly between uses); and activities which can be done at a distance (or virtually) being safer than those in close proximity. Shorter duration carries lower risk than longer duration.

The sub-group has provided advice previously on safe ways of undertaking some form of these activities wherever possible, until they could be recommenced safely in full³. The sub-group has now reconsidered 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 in order to restore more normality to everyday lives. The sub-group has also taken into consideration the importance of physical education, dance, music, and drama 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. These activities are also important routes to equity and inclusion, and are the basis of further education and employment for many. However, the greater transmissibility of the currently dominant variants of the virus means that ongoing vigilance is required to minimise opportunities for spread, including continued commitment to reducing activities at the higher risk ends of the scales outlined above.

The table below sets out the physical education activity for children and young people in schools and ELC settings to align with the risk levels approach within the Strategic Framework from Level 3 onwards. Most local authorities across Scotland moved to Level 2 on 17 May 2021.

This advice recognises there are still risks associated with these activities and reflects growing evidence about routes of transmission⁴ including (i) the importance

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.

²

[S0695 Aerosol and Droplet Generation from Singing Wind Instruments SWI and Performance Activities.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

³ [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues: advisory note on physical education, music and drama in schools - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

⁴ [Advice on the use of masks in the community, during home care and in healthcare settings in the context of the novel coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak \(who.int\)](#)

of airborne routes of transmission of the virus, compared with surface transmission⁵; and (ii) the greater relative risk of transmission by senior pupils compared with primary and pre-school aged children⁶.

In preventing aerosol transmission, physical distancing and ventilation remain important mitigation measures. Where possible, therefore, singing and other aerosol-generating activities should be conducted outdoors or in large ventilated spaces where there is the ability to ensure physical distancing – particularly in secondary schools.

For physical education, activities which involve contact with shared equipment (e.g. gymnastic equipment) should be kept to a minimum. For all indoor physical education, particular attention should be paid to ensuring effective ventilation, good hygiene and sanitising of shared equipment.

Even at Level 0, the aim should be to maintain higher standards of hygiene and ventilation than were present pre-COVID.

From 17 May, subject to risk assessments that reflect the most current advice (all risk assessments should be proportionate to the relevant protection level of the local area), and mitigations are in place (including ventilation when indoors, good hygiene and sanitising of shared equipment) physical education can take place both indoors and outdoors as follows:

⁵ [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\): How is it transmitted? \(who.int\)](https://www.who.int)

⁶ [TFC: Children and transmission - update paper, 17 December 2020 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

	Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Indoor	<p>ELC and Primary</p> <p>Children can participate in contact and non-contact activities.</p>	<p>ELC and Primary</p> <p>Children can participate in contact and non-contact activities.</p>	<p>ELC and Primary</p> <p>Children can participate in contact and non-contact activities.</p>	<p>ELC and Primary</p> <p>Children can participate in individual non-contact activities.</p>
	<p>Secondary</p> <p>Young people can participate in contact and non-contact activities.</p>	<p>Secondary</p> <p>Young people can participate in contact and non-contact activities.</p>	<p>Secondary</p> <p>Young people can participate in contact and non-contact activities, subject to risk assessment and mitigations.</p>	<p>Secondary</p> <p>Young people can participate in individual non-contact activities.</p>
Outdoor	<p>ELC and Primary</p> <p>Children can participate in contact and non-contact activities.</p>	<p>ELC and Primary</p> <p>Children can participate in contact and non-contact activities.</p>	<p>ELC and Primary</p> <p>Children can participate in contact and non-contact activities.</p>	<p>ELC and Primary</p> <p>Children can participate in contact and non-contact activities.</p>
	<p>Secondary</p> <p>Young people can participate in contact and non-contact activities.</p>	<p>Secondary</p> <p>Young people can participate in contact and non-contact activities.</p>	<p>Secondary</p> <p>Young people can participate in contact and non-contact activities.</p>	<p>Secondary</p> <p>Young people can participate in contact and non-contact activities.</p>

For all activity at Level 0, the aim should be to maintain appropriate mitigations, particularly the higher standards of hygiene and ventilation than were present pre-COVID.

4. Practical Considerations

1	Minimising contact between individuals and groups <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wherever possible, efforts should be made to keep children and young people within the same groups.• School staff and other adults in the school should continue to apply strict 2 metre distancing when with other adults and with pupils.• 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.⁷
2	Ventilation <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consideration should be given to ventilation in all indoor spaces. Staff should liaise with senior leaders and follow local/school guidelines. <p>Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance on reducing the risks from COVID-19 in schools Para 52 – 74.</p>
3	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○ 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.

⁷ <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters#exercising>

<p>4</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. • 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>5</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 44 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 47 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.

6 Other considerations

- Greater emphasis should be placed on ventilation, by keeping windows open as much as possible, and doors open when feasible and safe to do so.
- Scientific advice and research also indicates that indoor spaces where there is likely to be an enhanced aerosol generation rate (for example, indoor PE when permitted) should aim to ensure ventilation is sufficient to maintain CO2 concentrations at lower levels (a figure of 800ppm is provided), and should also include additional mitigations such as face coverings for audiences and restricting the size of groups and duration of activities. This advice will be factored into consideration of any wider advice on restart of these activities.
- School operators (e.g. local authorities, leisure trusts, third parties, etc.) should also be aware of additional [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance on sport and leisure facilities - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/Topics/healthandcare/coronavirus/covid-19/sportandleisure) which may be applicable within school buildings, for example, community use of gyms, fitness rooms, sports halls etc.
- 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.

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.

Physical education can only take place as outlined in the table in section 3 of this document. Appropriate mitigating actions must also be in place 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:

- [Updated Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance on reducing the risks in schools](#) 24 March 2021
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues – advice on physical education and expressive arts - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)
- [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