

Covid-19: Return to educational establishments Physical Education Guidelines 7th September 2020

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1. Overview and purpose

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Guidance on preparing for the start of the new school term in August 2020](#), Para 136 states: 'Practical, "hands-on" learning and activities, experiments and investigations are an important part of the curriculum across all subject areas'. This document focusses on the practical, experiential nature of learning in, through and about physical education.

Physical Education provides a critical learning opportunity for children and young people as they re-connect and adapt to the new learning environments in schools.

The practical and interactive nature of the subject will lend itself well to supporting nurturing conversations with learners following the period of school closure. This document will assist teachers and school leaders with risk assessment and decision making, leading to the provision of learning through Physical Education in a safe and carefully considered way.

2. How to use these guidelines

This document reflects the latest scientific evidence and advice and the significant progress that Scotland has made in suppressing the virus. A risk-benefit approach to decision making can be helpful while understanding that no risk can be reduced to zero.

This document is designed to promote a consistent and equitable approach against the context of the current pandemic. Local authorities and schools will understand best how these guidelines 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 primary teachers, teachers in special schools and secondary physical education teachers.

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

There is an increased risk of transmission of Covid-19 during activities within physical education, music and drama because of the respiratory aerosols which are exhaled and the close proximity of participants. The wearing of face coverings is usually not possible for activities in these areas.

There is a hierarchy of risk:

- 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 thoroughly cleaned between uses);
- 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.

It takes 2-3 weeks to understand the effects on coronavirus incidence and prevalence of major changes as Scotland progresses through its route map. It is important to enable the actions required to prevent transmission of the virus to become established, and monitoring to be undertaken for a further period before resuming activities which carry such an increased risk (refer to the above hierarchy).

The re-introduction of indoor physical education should be in line with the Scottish Government plans for allowing over 12 year olds to participate in indoor contact sports. The proposed date for this is 14 September. The Covid-19 Sub-advisory Group advises that indoor physical education in schools, for pupils of all ages, **should not re-start until this date**. This will enable the effects of the major step of schools reopening to be understood, and the necessary school-based mitigation practices to become established. **Physical education within school settings should only take place outdoors for the time being.**

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.

4. Practical Considerations

1	<p>Minimising contact between individuals and groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• As a precautionary approach schools should encourage physical distancing where possible between adults, and between children and young people, particularly in the senior phase. Delivery of activities that do not involve close physical contact, will contribute to further lowering of any risk involved.
2	<p>Changing Rooms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Changing rooms are an area of increased risk of transmission and should be avoided where possible.• Consideration should be given to the needs of children and young people who require additional support.• When considering the use of changing rooms, schools should ensure that they implement pragmatic and proportionate control measures which reduce risk to the lowest reasonably practical level. They should have active arrangements in place to monitor that the controls are:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ effective;○ working as planned;○ updated appropriately considering any issues identified and changes in public health advice.• Following a risk assessment, if the use of changing rooms is considered necessary, schools should ensure mitigating actions are in place. This includes ensuring that changing rooms are as well ventilated as possible, used only by small numbers at any point in time to maximise physical distancing, and that close attention is paid 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 PE kit on days when physical education lessons will take place and, where possible, wait until they get home to change.
3	<p>Equipment</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities where there is no sharing of equipment are safer than those that do, therefore activities that minimise the use of equipment should be delivered. • If any equipment has been shared as part of the outdoor activity, this should be carefully sanitised before next use/between each lesson. • Consider keeping extra equipment on hand so that teaching time is not lost to re-clean equipment.
5	<p>Hygiene measures</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 young people move between groups and when entering or leaving an outdoor facility. • Hands should be thoroughly washed and dried 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	<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.

5. List of possible physical activities for outdoors

This is not an exhaustive list:

- Athletics (limited equipment)
- Cross-country
- Cycling
- Dance
- Fitness/Fitness Testing

- Footgolf/Frisbee Golf
- Golf
- Green Bowls (adapted)
- Mini-Tennis/Tennis
- Orienteering
- Outdoor pursuits/learning
- Rounders/softball
- Skipping
- Tai chi/appropriate martial arts
- Target games (limited equipment)
- Team Games – skills and drills
- Throw and Catch Mastery
- Ultimate Frisbee
- Walking
- Yoga

6. Risk assessment

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Guidance on preparing for the start of the new school term in August 2020](#), 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 full return to school. 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.

While intended for wider use, the Health and Safety Executive has produced helpful guidance on [COVID-19 risk assessments](#).

7. 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.

The amount of physical activity undertaken by children and young people during lockdown will have varied significantly. While many will have enjoyed considerable freedom to walk, take bike rides and play outdoors, many others will not have had easy access to a garden, or other outdoor space, to enable them to continue exercising. Families with complex needs and children living in chaotic households will also have faced particular challenges in maintaining a good level of physical activity. These factors, together with the well-established health and learning benefits of activity, highlight the importance of supporting pupils to be active on return to school.

In addition to considerations about physical education as part of the school curriculum, 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. *The Daily Mile* is another activity, that would be recommended at the current time.

The provision of activities or clubs outside the usual school timetable

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Guidance on preparing for the start of the new school term in August 2020](#), Para 140 states: These are important for wider health and development of children and can be conducted subject to following the guidance set out in this note, and guidance for the general public where applicable. Schools should consider the need for out of hours cleaning when scheduling activities.

8. 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 within school settings should only take place outdoors for the time being. The proposed date for the re-introduction of indoor physical education is 14 September when this document will be updated.

9. 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 \(COVID-19\): Guidance on preparing for the start of the new school term in August 2020](#),

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): support for continuity in learning](#) (30 July 2020)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Curriculum for Excellence in the Recovery Phase](#) (5 June 2020)

[Education Recovery Group: Blended learning](#) (June 2020)

While intended for wider use, the Health and Safety Executive has produced helpful guidance on [COVID-19 risk assessments](#).

[Education Reimagined: The Future of Learning](#)

10. Acknowledgements

Education Scotland would like to acknowledge the contribution of physical education practitioners, Scottish Association of Teachers of Physical Education (SATPE), SQA and **sport**scotland in developing the *COVID-19 Pandemic: Return to educational establishments – physical education GUIDELINES*.