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Safe Return to School

**Guidance on Covid-19
and Physical Activity
in Schools**

Safe Return to School: Guidance on Covid-19 and Physical Activity in Schools	
Identifier Code: GUI-003	Category: Guidance
Audience: Internal and External	Response Area: NHPRC
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Date: 1 September 2020	Status: Final Version: 2.0
Review Date: October 2020	
Last Revised Date: Superseded V1.0 1 September; updated 1 September 2020	
Distribution: (Delete as applicable) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public (via corporate website)• Welsh Government	
Purpose and Summary of Document: <p>The opportunity to be physically active and develop physical literacy is an essential component of healthy development for children and young people. This document sets out advice and guidance for schools to ensure that children and young people have the opportunity to be active and to maintain their physical development when they return to school in the Autumn in ways that minimise the risk of transmission of COVID-19.</p>	
Document Location: SharePoint Link Archive Version Location: Insert hyperlink to previous version	

1 Introduction

The Welsh Government has published [Operational guidance](#) and [learning guidance](#) in readiness for pupils to return to school in September 2020. It recognises that for some learners going back to normal will continue to be a challenge and for some lockdown will have had a significant impact on their wellbeing, learning and engagement in school education. The purpose of this guidance is to recognise that the opportunity for pupils to be physically active and develop physical literacy is an essential component for all learners when they return to school in September 2020 and beyond.

Schools can provide important opportunities to support learners' physical health and well-being. Physical activity is important for both mental and physical development and wellbeing. It can also provide innovative ways to support the delivery of other aspects of the curriculum and is positively associated with educational outcomes.

The pandemic may have had an impact on learners' access to opportunities to develop their physical literacy. Indeed, [research](#) commissioned by Sport Wales during the national lockdown suggested that while 26% of children were doing more physical activity at home, 35% of children were doing less with 9% of children doing no physical activity at all. Children from lower socio-economic backgrounds appeared to be experiencing the greatest reductions. It is therefore vitally important that learners have the opportunity to be active and develop these capabilities safely as they return to school.

We also know that the risk to children themselves of becoming severely ill from COVID-19 is very low. Current [evidence](#) points to "Infection with SARS-CoV-2 appears to take a milder course in children than in adults: most infected children present with mild symptoms or are asymptomatic, and very few develop severe or life threatening disease. There remains some on-going uncertainty in transmissibility of the disease by children, but real world observation of schools opening in England and other countries has shown little transmission by children".

Although it is not possible to ensure a totally risk-free environment, the Office of National Statistics' analysis on [COVID-19 related deaths linked to occupations](#) suggests that staff in educational settings tend not to be at any greater risk from the disease than many other occupations. There is no evidence that children transmit the disease any more than adults. There is currently a very low prevalence of positive tests among education workers at 3.8% cumulative, among the lowest rates of critical workers.

This document provides advice to support schools in considering how schools can maximise the opportunities for pupils to be active, within the

curriculum and beyond, while reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

2 Key Principles

The [operational guidance](#) for schools set out by Welsh Government for the Autumn Term outlines the key principles for prevention and control of infection in the school setting and provides guidance on risk assessment. These principles should form the basis on planning for the reintroduction of physical activity and physical education and outdoor learning opportunities.

In line with normal practice children and young people should be actively involved in planning and designing activities that deliver the key principles in this document.

2.1 Active Travel to School

Schools should encourage pupils to travel to school using active means wherever possible. Active travel is the easiest way to build in daily physical activity and requires no special equipment and facilities. Travelling independently to school also enables pupils to develop wider skills in assessing and managing risk and develops independence.

Working with parents to support active travel for younger children should also be a priority. Many parents will still have adapted or flexible working arrangements or be working from home. This should provide new opportunities for them to walk, cycle or scoot to school.

This period is an excellent time to consider how to maintain some of the more positive outcomes of the lockdown period such as reduced traffic congestion and improved air quality. Many local authorities are considering restrictions such as preventing parking near schools to incentivise the healthier option known as exclusions zones. This prevents parents dropping off their children right outside the school gate. For example, a 500 metre exclusion zone would mean every pupil walking an extra 5 kilometres per week and can also help to improve air quality immediately outside the school gates where parents are often waiting. Walking school buses are also effective for primary school aged children.

2.2 Non-curriculum activity

Opportunities should be created for children to be active during breaks. Properly dividing playgrounds can help pupils feel safe and know where to go for different types of activity. This could mean different zones for a range of activities such as skipping, hopscotch etc.

Older pupils and initiatives such as the Sport Wales Young Ambassadors can play an important role in stimulating activity. Young Ambassadors will be supported by Youth Sport Trust and Sport Wales to challenge schools who are not planning on providing PE and school sport by demonstrating how it can be delivered safely, and by designing and delivering extra-curricular activities that meet the latest government guidelines. They can also act as a voice for their peers, conducting surveys on what activity learners want to do and informing teachers of the fears that pupils have in returning to school sport so that actions can be agreed to overcome any barriers.

The Daily Mile and other active initiatives e.g. active learning are also an excellent opportunity to embed physical activity into the school day as a matter of routine. Information of the Daily Mile in Wales is available [here](#).

After school clubs and activities are often important opportunities for children to be active. These may relate to specific sports, nature based activities or provide more general [activities](#).

These activities can continue in line with the guidance below and the measures set out in the [Operational Guidance for Schools](#).

2.3 Curriculum Activity

Physical education is a core part of the curriculum and schools should seek to ensure that this continues with the necessary adaptation based on a risk assessment. In addition to physical education, encouraging students to be physically active during classroom learning will increase the amount of time they are active and limit the amount of time they are sedentary.

The Association for Physical Education have produced a self-review risk assessment [tool](#) which includes some useful examples and Youth Sport trust have a range of useful [resources](#).

2.4 Physical distancing

While the risk of transmission is relatively low, particularly among young children and the requirements for maintain a 2 metre distance for those under the age of 11 years have been removed, physical distancing should still be encouraged where possible. Some forms of physical activity do bring individuals into close contact. These include popular team sports such as football, netball and rugby. Activities should be selected and adapted which reduce the need for close contact.

Select activities that are more individually based and make the most of outdoor space. For example pupils can develop technical skills such as ball control that do not involve close contact or sharing equipment.

Mark out and assign space to help them maintain distance and maximise the use of outdoor facilities where social distancing is easier. Consider using tape, rope or chalk on required surfaces/walls to help prompt and remind pupils to maintain their distance.

Schools will have arrangements in place to minimise mixing between groups of young people. Physical activity and sports should be undertaken within these groups. Inter-school team sports should not take place for the time being.

[Face coverings](#) should not be worn during physical activity.

2.5 Hand Hygiene

[Hand washing](#) should be carried out before and after any physical activity. Facilities should be available to enable hand washing and where this is not possible, hand sanitisers should be provided as an alternative.

Activities that require the use of equipment that will be handled by more than one pupil should be avoided, e.g. netball; throwing and passing games.

2.6 Indoor Activities

Activities outdoors should be prioritised wherever possible, however, it is recognised that there will be times when this is not possible.

Leisure facilities and gyms have now re-opened in Wales with clear [guidelines](#) to reduce the risk of infection. Schools may use indoor sport facilities following similar principles and guidelines.

Wet activities such as swimming should be avoided for the time being.

2.7 Changing Rooms

Changing rooms, particularly the use of showers, should be avoided wherever possible. Pupils should be encouraged to wear clothing to school appropriate for physical activity wherever possible. Scheduling activity towards the end of the day so that pupils go home afterwards avoids the need to showering and changing for older pupils.

Where changing cannot be avoided clearly designated spaces need to be provided and enhanced cleaning of the area maintained.

2.8 Outdoor Activities

Schools should maximise the time learners spend outdoors. Schools should consider the availability of wet weather clothing to enable more time to be

spent outside and to support active travel. Additional consideration may need to be given to the storage of wet weather clothing and where provided by the school a need to increase supply to avoid sharing between pupils.

It also has important benefits during the COVID-19 outbreak as:

- evidence indicates that the risk of infection is reduced outdoors
- evidence suggests that the virus suffers in sunlight
- social distancing is easier to observe and maintain outside, which may be easier for schools to manage larger groups of learners outdoors.

There are a wide range of organisations and resources available to support schools and settings when considering outdoor learning. Schools and settings can access support via Hwb, as well as through the Wales Council for Outdoor Learning, including their guidance on 'High Quality Outdoor Learning for Wales' found [here](#).

2.9 Enhanced cleaning

As with other activities, cleaning should be undertaken of any equipment or facilities that are used between groups of young people. Where possible minimise activities that require equipment that is handled by children and young people. Where pupils have individual equipment consider how they will be able to identify which is theirs e.g. by numbering.

2.10 Additional information

Your local Healthy Schools Team is available to provide advice and support on all aspects of health and wellbeing and to support a safe return to school.

Youth Sport Trust has a range of resources that provide schools with suggested activities and teaching tips for Primary and secondary PE to help pupils return to school linked to the impact of COVID-19 including a planning [tool](#).

Natural Resources Wales has a range of activity plans and games to support physically active outdoor learning available [here](#).

In addition guidelines may also be available for individual sports and adventure education in Wales from the relevant governing body.