

# Covid-19: Return to educational establishments

## Physical Education GUIDELINES August 2020

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### Overview and purpose

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Guidance on preparing for the start of the new school term in August 2020](#), Para 127 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.

The intent of this document highlights physical education as a critical learning opportunity for Scotland's children and young people as they heal, re-connect, and adapt on their return to school. Specifically, it assists with decision-making and the safe implementation of timetabled physical education. Educational establishments should look for safe ways to support children's learning and wellbeing through joyful movement, discovery and experimentation without fear of failure; at a time when every learner should enjoy comfort, safety, and socialisation with peers and caring adults. In physical education, children and young people develop knowledge, skills and experiences that will last a lifetime and advance their executive function, in particular in terms of emotional self-regulation, which sits at the heart of all learning and wellbeing.

For some children and young people in Scotland, learning at home has been an apposite experience, beneficial to their learning during the closures of educational establishments. However, for many children and young people, learning at home has been less positive, and in some cases there have been significant concerns for their wellbeing. Children and young people's sense of trust, belonging, and hope may have been deeply affected. Moreover, many of our children and young people may have experienced ongoing feelings of anxiety, trauma, food insecurity, social isolation, loss and inadequacy, particularly if, learning at home also proved challenging. With students returning to school, it is vitally important that all children and young people are welcomed into a safe and supportive learning environment and are equipped with the necessary skills to support their own health and wellbeing during these uncertain and difficult times. Reinforcing these skills will also help them to develop resilience and the capacity to deal with future difficulties.

Every learner's needs should be considered – with a particular focus on where they have **been** and where they are **now**. Some children and young people may have developed needs not apparent prior to lockdown, which may require new responses and approaches. Decisions relating to the support required to address the impact of interrupted learning and disconnection for many children and young people will be taken by local authorities and schools, appropriate to their circumstances.

## How to use these guidelines

These guidelines reflect the latest scientific evidence and advice and the significant progress that Scotland has made in suppressing the virus. It remains contingent, however, on continuing success in this regard and prevailing public health guidance. A risk-benefit approach to decision making can be helpful while understanding that no risk can be reduced to zero. The outdoors can provide extra space for distancing between consistent groups of learners and help to decrease the risk of transmission. **Therefore, under current circumstances, physical education should take place outdoors.** A review of the safety of indoor facilities and swimming pools will take place in due course.

For clarity, the term 'gym' can mean a number of things: for example, a traditional term (particularly in the primary sector) for physical education; a shortened term for the discipline of gymnastics, a standalone physical activity; or, a colloquial term for an indoor fitness suite full of equipment such as treadmills, weights machines and free weights; or a small indoor space/hall. Physical education encompasses all of these. At present, physical education should take place outdoors.

These guidelines are designed to promote a consistent and equitable approach against the context of the nationwide health emergency. 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 these guidelines are implemented effectively. These guidelines have 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, primary physical education specialists and secondary physical education teachers and local authority leaders to find solutions for the delivery of physical education in our schools.

### **Supporting wellbeing and learning through physical education:**

- Be aware that students may move, think, feel, and act differently now and may need time to relearn skills ;
- Focus on ways for students to connect emotionally and develop/strengthen personal qualities like communication, cooperation, teamwork, and responsibility while following current physical distancing guidelines;
- Embed a health and wellbeing orientation in lesson and activity planning to cultivate a sense of physical and emotional safety; and
- Share necessary information with learners and their parents/carers, communicating at an appropriate level to minimise worry and stress and to acknowledge success and achievement in learning.

### **To foster a sense of physical and emotional safety, physical educators can:**

- Focus on the joy of movement rather than compliance;
- Set and keep a routine ; and
- Encourage learners to ask questions and self-advocate.

To learn, we need to feel safe, regulated and connected to others. Rhythmic, repetitive activities can reduce anxiety, and help learners to understand and regulate their emotions. Being active at school and with family at home, allows children and young people to develop vital life skills, for example, empathy, social skills and self-esteem. These are skills and attributes that will support children and young people now, and in the future.

### **To foster a sense of belonging, physical educators can:**

- Increase focus on learner voice and agency;
- Help the learners feel connected by encouraging them to participate in physical activity challenges for house points or other awards;
- Make time to ask about learners' physical activity and sporting interests; and
- Embed a sense of responsibility by assigning class management roles.

### **To foster a sense of hope, physical educators can:**

- Encourage learners to get fresh air and move when possible;
- Explore individual learners' talents and strengths;
- Give positive affirmation to all learners equally;
- Foster engagement in school ; and
- Make time for acknowledging gratitude and celebrating success.

## To foster a sense of mastery, physical educators can:

- Encourage learner ownership of their learning and physical education journey;
- Give learners the chance to share what they have learned and provide opportunities for peer support to reinforce and consolidate learning;
- Highlight each learner's contribution to learning; and
- Support social and emotional learning to develop self-efficacy.

These guidelines asserts children and young people's entitlement to core physical education and highlights the critical and unique values physical education offers, activating growth in key aspects of a child's or a young person's life, that is, physical competence, cognitive skills, personal qualities and physical fitness.

## Pedagogical considerations

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| 1 | <p><b>Always respect the current physical distancing rule.</b></p> <p>On the basis of the scientific advice, and subject to all other risk mitigation measures being appropriately implemented, there is no requirement for physical distancing between children in primary schools.</p> <p>The scientific advice is that physical distancing between young people in secondary schools is not required to ensure a safe return to schools.</p> <p>The evidence for this is less clear for older pupils, but at present this approach is being advised for secondary schools on the basis of the balance of known risks, the effectiveness of mitigations and the benefits to young people of being able to attend school. As a precautionary approach secondary schools should encourage distancing where possible between young people, particularly in the senior phase.</p> |
| 2 | <p>Consider using physical and visual aids to define space and modify layouts, for example, tape, rope or chalk on required surfaces/walls.</p>   |
| 3 | <p>Ensure safe, healthy equipment management.<br/>Careful consideration should be given to the cleaning regime, for example, around specialist equipment.</p>   |
| 4 | <p>Incorporate proper hand washing and personal hygiene routines.</p> <p>Ensuring access to hand washing stations or hand sanitiser whenever children and young people move between groups.</p>   |

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|    | Outdoor hand basins or hand sanitisers should be available at entry/exit points, to allow all learners to wash/sanitise their hands as they enter/leave the building when participating in physical education.  |
| 5  | Manage and practice movement through spaces (clear signposting).  |
| 6  | Clearly communicate the route and rules with learners ahead of every location, movement and transition. Utilise learner voice to evidence how movement went and how it can be improved. If possible, create a virtual tour of structures and routines and share with learners, staff, parents/carers. |
| 7  | Stagger movements to limit mixing between cohorts (predefined agreement of working areas for primary/secondary learners in all through schools, avoiding cross contamination and learner traffic).  |
| 8  | Focus on activities that minimise the use of equipment.   |
| 9  | Where possible, avoid sharing equipment by numbering and/or assigning item(s) for that lesson to each learner. Careful consideration should be given to the cleaning regime to ensure safe use.   |
| 10 | Where possible plan to keep extra equipment on hand so that teaching time is not lost to re-cleaning equipment.   |
| 11 | Encourage learners to come to school in clothing that is appropriate for physical education and the weather conditions to eliminate the use of changing rooms.  |
| 12 | When transitioning to/from outdoor teaching areas ensure students use designated areas for changing into/out of jackets and outdoor clothing, such as in a designated desk area or a marked side of the hallway/indoor teaching area.   |
| 13 | Storage of learners' belongings.<br>If changing rooms are not used, consideration should be given to alternative places for storing learners' belongings, for example, assign each learner their own space.   |
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| 14 | Where external playing fields/venues are used, where appropriate and safe to do so, consider meeting and dismissing learners from this location. |
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**Suggested physical activities adapted for outdoors – this list is not exhaustive.**

- Athletics (limited equipment)
- Better Movers and Thinkers scaffolding practices
- Cross-country
- Cycling
- Dance
- Fitness
- Fitness Testing
- Football Golf
- Frisbee Golf
- Golf
- Green Bowls (adapted)
- Hopscotch
- Juggling/Hula Hooping
- Mini-Tennis/Tennis
- Orienteering
- Outdoor pursuits/learning
- Skipping (Individual and group)
- Tai chi/appropriate martial arts
- Target games (limited equipment)
- Team Games – skills and drills
- Throw and Catch Mastery
- Ultimate Frisbee
- Walking
- Yoga

**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](#).

## Physical Activity and Sport

The Scottish Government guidance [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Guidance on preparing for the start of the new school term in August 2020](#) includes a section on physical activity and sport. In addition, [Guidance on organised outdoor sport for children and young people](#) should be considered when planning and preparing for physical activity and sport. Where possible, staff should work with their Active Schools Coordinator to develop opportunities before school, at lunchtime, and after school hours.

Section 18 of the [Phase 3: return to sport and physical activity](#) guidance on the **sportscotland** website has detailed information about organised sport for children and young people.

The [Sport Specific Guidance](#) published on the **sportscotland** website is updated regularly as Scottish Government guidance changes. Many of the Sport Governing Bodies guidance documents, particularly the outdoor sports and outdoor contact sports (children and young people), may be useful for physical education.

## 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.

## 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:

[\(COVID-19\): guidance on preparing for the start of the new school term in August 2020](#)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Guidance on preparing for the start of the new school term in August 2020 Summary version](#)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): support for continuity in learning](#) (5 June 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](#).

[COVID-19 Pandemic: Return to School Canadian Physical and Health Education GUIDELINES](#)

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Phase 3: staying safe and protecting others  
[Guidance on organised outdoor sport for children and young people](#) (July 2020)

[Latest sport and physical activity guidance](#)

[Getting your facilities fit for sport](#)

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

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