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Guidance

Managing school premises, which are partially open, during the coronavirus outbreak

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During partial or full closure, educational settings continue to be responsible for a range of health and safety measures and statutory compliance.

See the health and safety (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/good-estate-management-for-schools/health-and-safety>) section of good estate management for schools.

It is important that arrangements remain in place to ensure that children and staff are in safe buildings during reduced occupancy arrangements.

Educational settings should review their arrangements for all building-related systems but in particular:

- hot and cold water systems
- gas safety
- fire safety
- kitchen equipment
- security including access control and intruder alarm systems
- ventilation

Staff should be familiar with the actions for schools during the coronavirus outbreak (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-school-closures/guidance-for-schools-about-temporarily-closing>) and work with their responsible bodies to ensure that statutory health and safety arrangements are in place.

There are increased risks related to safety concerns around water hygiene, building and occupancy safety and building hygiene due to reduced occupancy. Follow this guidance to manage these risks.

Contact your contractors and suppliers to check on any special interim arrangements in place due to coronavirus (COVID-19).

In all educational settings, a member of staff should be identified with responsibility for managing premises. In cases of staff illness, cover arrangements should be put in place as soon as possible.

Cold water systems

This includes tanks, sinks/basins/showers and drinking water outlets (taps and water fountains).

Do not drain down systems.

Increase the frequency of outlet flushing and temperature monitoring to maintain water quality within the entire system.

If required, consider additional water quality testing at water outlets (closest and further from the main water source) and drinking water outlets that remain in use.

Domestic hot water services

This includes calorifiers/direct fired water heaters/sinks/ basins/ showers.

Do not drain down systems, you should continue hot water generation servicing in line with manufacturers' criteria.

Water temperatures must be kept within limits recommended for the control of legionella bacteria in water systems. For reference, use the Approved Code of Practice (<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l8.htm>) and HSG 274 (<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/hsg274.htm>).

Regularly check hot water generation for functionality and if required, temperature recording.

If the hot water system has been left operational the hot water should be circulating as normal and regular checks, in line with guidance, should be carried out.

Gas safety

Do not isolate gas supplies to boilers and hot water generation.

To avoid the risk of leaks and dangerous build-up of gases, isolate gas supplies where not in use, for example, in science labs and prep rooms, design and food technology classrooms, and school kitchens. Otherwise, gas services should remain in normal operation.

Continue planned gas safety checks including gas detection and/or interlocking.

Fire safety

You must review and if necessary, update your fire management plans and ensure any changes to fire escape routes are clearly identified and communicated.

During the reduced occupancy period you must:

- carry out weekly checks of alarms systems, call points and emergency lighting
- carry out regular hazard spotting to identify escape route obstructions
- check that all fire doors are operational

Fire drills should continue to be held as normal.

Kitchen equipment

Equipment that holds water – for example, dishwashers, combination ovens – should be run through at least a full cleaning cycle per week. This is to remove scale build-up and standing water build-up to prevent possible bacteria growth.

Security

All areas of the school should be kept secure.

Access to certain closed areas should only be possible by relevant staff – for example, science laboratories, chemical stores and IT rooms. Check that access control and lockdown systems are operational.

Ventilation

All systems to remain energised in normal operating mode.

Where mechanical ventilation is present, recirculatory systems should be adjusted to full fresh air. If mechanical ventilation systems cannot be adjusted to full fresh air these should be switched off.

Where possible, occupied room windows should be open.

Ventilation to chemical stores should remain operational.

Other points to consider

Core building-related electrical systems should remain in use/energised in normal operating mode, this includes:

- internal and external lighting
- small power
- CCTV
- access control and alarm systems (fire, intruder, panic and accessible toilets)

For drainage systems, check traps have not dried out and ensure water seals are in place to prevent smells within the building, for example, hygiene rooms, sports hall showers.

Update your keyholder information. Intruder alarm / lift/ fire alarm companies often have remote monitoring stations (response centres) – follow advice from these providers.

Continue with all regular cleaning, enhanced disinfection appropriate for coronavirus (COVID-19), maintenance, testing and statutory compliance activities.

Continue carrying out thorough examinations and testing of lifting and pressure equipment during the coronavirus outbreak following the updated HSE guidance (<https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/work-equipment-coronavirus.htm>).

Re-opening after a lengthy closure

Before resuming normal operation, commission a water treatment specialist to chlorinate and flush the complete system for all hot and cold water systems (including drinking water) and certify the water system is safe before the buildings are reoccupied. Allow sufficient time for this activity, approx. 1 week before opening if possible.

Recommission all systems before re-opening, as would normally be done after a long holiday period. This includes gas, heating, water supply, mechanical and electrical systems, and catering equipment.

Check your fire safety systems including making sure:

- all fire doors are operational
- your fire alarm system and emergency lights are operational

Clean and disinfect all areas and surfaces prior to reopening and if necessary, utilise pest control for insect infestations, particularly in the kitchen and/or food preparation areas. Deep clean the kitchen prior to reopening before food preparation resumes.

Further information

More detailed information on maintenance arrangements can be found in good estate management for schools (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/good-estate-management-for-schools>), in the section on maintenance checks and testing (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/good-estate-management-for-schools/health-and-safety#maintenancechecksandtesting>).

Further guidance is also available on site security (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-and-college-security/site-security-guidance>).