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Guidance

Managing school premises during the coronavirus outbreak

Updated 18 May 2020

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This publication is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-school-premises-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/managing-school-premises-which-are-partially-open-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>

Schools 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.

Managing partially open buildings

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

Schools 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, as well as, building hygiene.

Contact your contractors and suppliers to check on any special interim arrangements in place due to the coronavirus outbreak.

In all schools, 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
- 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.

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

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 the coronavirus outbreak
- 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>).

Preparing for the wider opening of schools

Staff should be familiar with guidance on actions for education and childcare settings to prepare for wider opening from 1 June 2020 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-educational-and-childcare-settings-to-prepare-for-wider-opening-from-1-june-2020>). Generally, school buildings that have been completely or partially closed, should be recommissioned as you would normally do at the end of the school summer holiday period.

A member of staff should be identified for managing premises, reviewing risk assessments and implementing any measures to ensure that safety is maintained for wider opening.

Schools should review their arrangements for all building-related systems but in particular the following areas.

Water systems

Schools increasing operational capacity or re-opening should follow their usual water system building management procedures as they would at the end of the summer holidays.

Chlorinating and flushing water systems may not be necessary if the system has remained operational through routine flushing as advised in the cold water systems and domestic hot water services sections.

You should contact your school's legionella competent person who will advise on the action required. If a full system flush is required but not immediately available seek advice from your competent person on alternative options.

Drinking water

If it has not been possible to maintain system throughput of water from routine flushing to all outlets or a competent person has not tested the water and provided satisfactory bacterial test results, the water may not be safe to drink. In these circumstances, you should supply bottled drinking water until a thorough flushing and chlorination can be undertaken by a water treatment specialist.

Hot water services

Water temperatures must be kept within limits recommended for the control of legionella bacteria in water systems.

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 should be carried out.

Ventilation

Good ventilation is essential at all times in classrooms and particularly during this period. Schools should ensure all systems are working in their normal operating mode.

Natural ventilation via windows or vents should be used as far as possible and where available occupied room windows should be open.

Where centralised or local mechanical ventilation is present, recirculatory systems should be adjusted to full fresh air, if this is not possible systems should be operated as normal. Where ventilation units have filters present ensure enhanced precautions are taken when changing filters. See HSE guidance HSG53: Respiratory protective equipment at work (<https://www.hse.gov.uk/respiratory-protective-equipment/index.htm>).

Fire safety

Fire safety management plans should be reviewed and checked in line with operational changes.

Check:

- all fire doors are operational
- your fire alarm system and emergency lights have been tested and are fully operational

Carry out emergency drills. You might also need to make adjustments to your fire drill and practise it in the first week when more pupils return. Refer to advice on fire safety in new and existing school buildings (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-safety-in-new-and-existing-school-buildings>).

Cleaning

New cleaning arrangements in line with coronavirus preparations should also include regular systematic checks:

- on 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
- where toilets are put back into use ensure the flushing of the toilets occur with the lids down and toilet ventilation systems are working

Continue with:

- all regular cleaning
- enhanced practices appropriate for the coronavirus outbreak
- maintenance
- testing and statutory compliance activities

All other systems

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
- catering equipment

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>).