Department of Health and Social Care
Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

Guidance

COVID-19: Guidance for managing playgrounds and outdoor gyms

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Please note: This guidance is of a general nature and should be treated as a guide. It is the event of any conflicting information between this guidance and the relevant health and safety legislation and this guidance, the applicable legislation shall prevail.

1. Introduction

Playgrounds are a valuable community asset that provides children with a stimulating environment to develop their physical and social skills. Playing in the fresh air helps children develop their physical, social, emotional and cognitive development and opportunities for children. Outdoor gyms provide users with the opportunity to exercise and improve their health and wellbeing.

This guidance provides the owners and operators responsible for playgrounds and outdoor gyms with a framework to consider the risks to users and workers and identify effective ways to reduce the risk of transmission of the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2).

Public health is devolved in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This guidance applies to England only. Devolved administrations will be issuing their own guidance. Local authorities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should refer to guidance prepared by the Northern Ireland Executive, the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government.

What do we mean by playgrounds

Playgrounds are defined as:

> outdoor structures designed for children to play in or on. They may include climbing frames, swings, slides, sand pits, zipwires, balance beams, rockers, springs, spring rockers, see-saws and roundabouts.

What do we mean by outdoor gyms

Outdoor gyms are defined as:

> An outdoor space containing exercise fixtures and/or machines.

Owners and operators responsible for playgrounds and outdoor gyms must assess and plan to reduce risks. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has produced a guide, 'The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy's guidance for business on how to manage health and safety during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic'.

Employers have a duty of care to their employees and others who may be affected by their business activities. Employers should consider how they will manage the risk of COVID-19. Local authorities consider a breach of health and safety law.

The actions that employers should take will depend on the nature of specific risks to workplaces to support them to achieve the required standard, through to issuing improvement notices, prohibition notices and prosecution. Local authorities will be expected to take a proportionate approach to enforcement, in line with their enforcement policies. Local authorities will be expected to take a proportionate approach to enforcement, which includes specific obligations and conditions for licensed premises.

Employers are expected to respond to any advice or notices issued by enforcing authorities. Failure to comply with a prohibition notice could result in prosecution. Failure to comply with an improvement notice could result in a prohibition notice. Working with the UK's HSE's agreed COVID-19 Kit working with the government and their partners, local authorities will be expected to take a proportionate approach to enforcing compliance checks nationally to ensure that employers are taking the necessary steps.

2. Purpose of this guidance

This guidance is for the owners and operators responsible for outdoor playgrounds and outdoor gyms. It sets out the steps that owners and operators should take to ensure management of playgrounds and outdoor gyms is safe, taking into account the risks to users and workers. It also sets out the steps owners and operators should take to authorities, housing associations, private landowners, retail landowners, public and volunteers, schools and academies, and other organisations.

Each owner/operator will need to apply this guidance to the facility they are responsible for. Owners and operators should ensure that the risks to users and workers are properly assessed, that the measures in place are proportionate and that it is organised, operated, and managed. They will need to consider implementing processes to ensure that the measures are being kept in place and are working as intended and require time to prepare for the safe reopening of playgrounds outdoor gyms.

This guidance does not supersede any legal obligations relating to health and safety, employment or equalities, and it is important that owners and operators continue to comply with existing obligations including those relating to individuals with protected characteristics.

Local authorities may choose to use their powers to impose requirements on some of these existing obligations.

Some owners and operators decide what actions to take, and to ensure the equipment in their playground and outdoor gym is safe, they must carry out an assessment of the risks. This should be done in the same way as other health and safety risk assessments. This risk assessment must be done in consultation with unions or employees.

3. Thinking about risk

> **Objectives: That all owners and operators carry out a COVID-19 risk assessment**

Owners and operators responsible for playgrounds or outdoor gyms must assess and plan to reduce risks. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has produced a guide, 'Coronavirus (COVID-19): Risk assessment for business or other organisations' to assist with the performance of a risk assessment.

Owners and operators responsible for playgrounds and outdoor gyms need to consider and plan their risk to their health and safety. Owners and operators will need to think about the risks to users and workers, and identify effective ways to reduce the risk of transmission of the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) in their playgrounds and outdoor gyms.

Owners and operators must ensure that the risk assessment for the playground or outdoor gym is carried out by a competent person. This could be an employee, directors and contractors or other people who have the required knowledge, skills and experience, full either about identifying sensible measures to control risk.

Owners and operators should consider the risks to users and workers, and how to adapt their plans as part of the risk assessment. The risk assessment will help owners/operators to identify the measures they need to put in place to reduce the risk of COVID-19. Owners/operators should then put the measures in place, and monitor and review them to ensure they are working as intended.

Playgrounds and outdoor gyms are not high risk environments for COVID-19 but there may be a single place of equipment such as a slide or exercise machine, whereas playgrounds and outdoor gyms are high touch environments and have the potential to be busy and crowded, which may increase the risk of transmission of the coronavirus.

Owners and operators need to consider the unique make-up of their playground/outdoor gym when conducting a risk assessment and putting in place measures to reduce the risk of transmission. Owners and operators should consider the number of users, the ages of users, the number of workers, the number of owners and operators (than the responsibility for management of a playground or outdoor gym may be shared), the size of the playground or outdoor gym, and the equipment and facilities available.

See further information from HSE on preparing a basic risk assessment.

4. Key principles for safely reopening playgrounds and outdoor gyms

Preparing a playground or outdoor gym for re-opening

Owners and operators of playgrounds or outdoor gyms are reminded that in addition to complying with their duties under health and safety and other relevant legislation, Coronavirus (COVID-19) regulations, Owners and operators of exercise equipment is safe to use and that risks from damage or defective equipment are addressed before opening.

Social distancing

Social distancing aims to reduce social interaction between people to minimise the spread of coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2).

Following a review of social distancing guidance, 2 metres or 1 metre with mitigations is the current social distance guidance. Owners and operators should consider and take the measures that are most appropriate for their playground.

All owners or operators of playgrounds and outdoor gyms should consider how to put in place measures to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19. Potential measures include:

- encourage people to use their own equipment, for example, cleaning their hands or sanitising the equipment before and after use
- limiting the available number of seats on equipment or numbers of swings available to promote social distancing, including for parents, carers or people who might require children or swings for support
- ensure that there is sufficient space between people who to users, parents, carers, and people who might require support
- using adjacent spaces for queues or working areas for users, parents, guardians and carers to ensure that they can maintain a 2 metre distance from people who are not in their household or bubble, or a 1 metre distance with mitigations in place (for example, facing the surrounding space and increase it does not impede other users)
- encourage people to use their own equipment, for example, cleaning their hands or sanitising the equipment before and after use
- for outdoor gyms the introduction of a clearly marked one way system around the gym to ensure people do not cross each other's paths and maintain a 2 metre social distance
- for outdoor gyms, where machines and equipment are less than 2 metres apart from each other, the introduction of a rotation system to ensure that people are not using it in pairs or in close proximity to people who are not in their household or bubble is acceptable. The mitigations should be set out in the risk assessment

Cleaning and hygiene

Scientific advice suggests that the virus can survive for up to several days on some surfaces and for a shorter period of time on others. Owners and operators responsible for outdoor playgrounds and outdoor gyms that the virus could survive long enough on surfaces to be transmitted to people by touching contaminated surfaces.

Owners and operators should consider the following measures to reduce the risk of touch points transmitting. This could include cleaning regimes for:

- equipment such as swings, climbing frames, zip wire, sand pits, slides, monkey bars and climbing frames
- other equipment such as benches and tables
- enclosed rooms and buildings
- exercise bars and machines available on outdoor gym equipment
- enclosed sports such as golf
- seating areas such as benches and picnic tables
- toilet facilities

Owners and operators should encourage people to use their own equipment, for example, cleaning their hands or sanitising the equipment before and after use. Public Health England (PHE) has produced a guide, 'Cleaning of non-healthcare settings'.

Consideration should be given to:

- using signs and posters
- to promote cleaning of equipment by users, parents, guardians and carers, including providing sufficient time between users to allow for cleaning, and ensuring that there are sufficient cleaning materials available
- encouraging outdoor gym users to bring their own towel and hygiene products and wipe down equipment before and after use
- encouraging parents to bring hand sanitiser gel wipes to clean their children's hands
- ensure that there are sufficient cleaning materials available for users to clean their equipment. Over 30 seconds using soap and water is the most effective way of cleaning hands. Hand sanitiser should be used if soap and water are not available
- a positive approach to parents and carers who need to touch their items, such as to retrieve items from a tree or when a house is not available
- encourage people to use their own equipment, for example, cleaning their hands or sanitising the equipment before and after use
- to promote and remind users, parents, guardians and carers of the need for hand hygiene
- to remind users, parents, guardians and carers to cough into their elbow or use a 'bag' waste bin or litter bin, and not to put into recycling bins
- ensure that there is a sufficient number of waste receptacles to dispose of waste safely and hygiene products such as tissues, and that the number of waste receptacles can be given on how to avoid those with disabilities with complying with the changes to the waste management arrangements, including collection and disposal
- ensure that there is a sufficient number of waste receptacles to dispose of hand washing facilities at the entry and exit points, in addition to public toilet facilities
- using disposable paper towels in handwashing facilities where possible

Public toilet provision

> **Objectives: To ensure that toilets are kept open and to promote good hygiene, hand hygiene, and social distancing.**

Public toilets, portable toilets and toilets inside premises should be kept open and carefully managed to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

Ensure that we ensure you are:

- using signs and posters to build awareness of good handwashing techniques, the importance of not touching your face, and the importance of not spitting, blowing your nose, cough or sneeze into a tissue which is binned, where possible, or into your arm if a tissue is not available, and washing your hands
- consider the use of contactless payment options, such as tap and go, to reduce the risk of the adoption of a cashless entry approach, with one in, one out toilet cleaning regimes in place, if necessary
- to enable good hygiene practice, such as ensuring there is a sufficient number of toilets where safe and practical, and ensure suitable handwashing facilities including sufficient hot water, soap, and hand sanitiser gel wipes, or hand sanitiser stations are available for people to use before and after using the toilet
- setting clear use and cleaning guidance for toilets, with increased frequency of cleaning to be kept under review, including cleaning after each use, and ensuring that cleaning products are available for people to use to clean themselves and their equipment after each to clean all hard surfaces
- ensure that there is sufficient ventilation, for example by fixing doors open where appropriate
- special care should be taken for cleaning of portable toilets and larger toilet blocks, ensuring that the cleaning regime is in place and that it is kept under review
- providing more waste facilities and more frequent rubbish collection

Face coverings

In England, face coverings are currently required by law to be worn in a number of settings the full details of those uses can be found on GOV.UK. Please be mindful of the fact that not everyone can wear a face covering for medical reasons, or may be exempt from wearing one for other reasons. Further information on when to wear and how to make one can be found on further information.

Owners and operators should consider if face coverings should be worn in indoor public space where there are people they do not normally meet. Relevant guidance is contained in the guidance for the use of face coverings. Owners and operators should also ensure that they are complying with the relevant guidance.

Current government guidance states that face coverings should not be used by children under the age of 2, for reasons of safety. Children aged 2 and over should be encouraged to wear a face covering, but it is not mandatory. Face coverings should not be used by children with disabilities or who are unable to remove the face covering without assistance, and should not be used by children who have difficulty breathing or in distress.

It's important to use face coverings properly and that signs promote their use correctly. Owners and operators of a venue should assist their bands before placing them and taking them off.

Additional measures and communicating with parents

Owners and operators can remind users, parents and carers of playgrounds and outdoor gyms focus on promoting responsible behaviour by children, parents, carers and users.

For example, owners and operators should consider putting up signs to make users aware of the measures in place and to remind users to:

- not congregate in groups or have large gatherings in the playground and outdoor gym
- not have guardians or carers should discourage of older including any used protective equipment such as face coverings or gloves properly in litter bins, taking home where a bin is not provided. People should dispose of face coverings and PPE in a bin, and not in recycling bins, and should not be left on the ground or in other places.

Owners and operators should provide clear information to parents to set clear expectations about the measures in place and the behaviour expected to reduce the risk of COVID-19. They may decide to ban or move of signs adjacent to the playground, outdoor gym or playground equipment, or consider other ways to communicate.

Owners and operators may wish to consider reminding parents of the importance of not congregating in groups and maintaining social distance. Owners and operators may find it advantageous to use playground equipment a slow at the rate to allow social distancing.

Considering children with additional needs

Owners/operators must take into account the requirements of children with additional needs.

> **Ensure that we are likely to be specific to this group include:**

- adaptations to the environment, such as signs, posters, and other visual aids
- changes to familiar environments as they to require larger periods of adjustment
- ensure that staff are aware of and understand how they need assistance with doing more one-place to the
- ensure that staff are aware of how needs such as autism find it difficult to adjust to particular contexts and environments, and provide support to ease the transition to coverings or similar frequently
- ensure that staff are aware of equipment, such as hearing loss, and may therefore account for non-responsive behaviour
- supporting for appearance or toilets can be a source of Frustration, and the cause of anxiety
- all higher risk of having limited or budgeting skills

5. Keeping staff safe

Owners/operators responsible for outdoor playgrounds must consider their staff and the risks they may be exposed to and how these can be mitigated. In the context of playgrounds and outdoor gyms, the COVID-19 pandemic, staff risks may include:

- cleaning playground equipment/outdoorgym areas
- managing queues of people using the facility
- observing equipment to ensure users comply with rules made by the owner/operator

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has produced guidance on how to manage and protect workers during the pandemic.

6. Protective equipment for staff

When managing the risk of COVID-19, additional PPE beyond what is usually worn is not required.

Unless staff are in a situation where the risk of COVID-19 transmission is very high, the use of face coverings is not required. Face coverings may be worn if a risk assessment or protection is extremely limited. However, if the risk assessment shows that PPE beyond what is usually worn is required, then it should be worn. Face coverings are not a substitute for wash hands. And PPE usage should be minimised.

Owners/operators should not encourage the precautionary use of wears PPE to protect against COVID-19 in the workplace. Instead, they should focus on the measures in place to reduce the risk of transmission.

Where protective equipment is already used at facilities to protect against non-COVID-19 risks, this should continue.

7. Where to obtain further guidance

The government has published guidance on how to manage the risk to staff and reduce the transmission risk of COVID-19. This can be found on the coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance and support.

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