

ADVICE FROM THE COVID-19 ADVISORY SUB-GROUP ON EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S ISSUES 10 September 2020¹

Physical education, music and drama

Key messages

There is an increased risk of transmission of COVID-19 during activities such as physical education, music (particularly singing and playing wind instruments) and drama (including school debating type activities) because of the respiratory aerosols which are exhaled during these activities and the close proximity of participants. The wearing of face coverings is usually not possible for these activities.

There is a hierarchy of risk in these activities: outdoors being safer than indoors; activities undertaken at low volume or that have lower respiratory exertion being safer than aerosol-generating activities; individual or small numbers involved being safer than large groups; activities involving no sharing of equipment being safer than those that do (or where equipment cannot be cleaned thoroughly between uses); and activities which can be done at a distance (or virtually) being safer than those in close proximity. Shorter duration carries lower risk than longer duration.

The reopening of schools is a major and significant step. It is important to enable the actions required to prevent transmission of the virus to become established, and monitoring to be undertaken for a further period before resuming activities which carry such an increased risk. There should be an incremental approach to the introduction of these activities, and further consideration should take place later in the school year when there will be further understanding about the virus and viral transmission.

Physical education, music and drama bring many benefits to children and young people – including for health and wellbeing; social, physical and cognitive development; creativity, communication, team working, and discipline. These activities are also important routes to equity and inclusion, and are the basis of further education and employment for many. For all these reasons, it is important to find safe ways of undertaking some form of these activities wherever possible, until they can be recommenced safely in full.

At the current time, children and young people under 18 can participate in organised outdoor contact sport (i.e. organised by a sports club or other sports provider). Physical distancing does not need to be maintained during play, but normal restrictions apply before and after play. Physical education within school settings should only take place out of doors for the time being. The re-introduction of indoor physical education should be in line with the plans for allowing over 12 year olds to participate in indoor contact sports. The sub-group advises that indoor physical education in schools, for pupils of all ages, should not re-start at present. This will

¹ This advice is current on this date. The advice is reviewed periodically and may change as evidence is published and more about the virus is understood.

enable the effects of the major step of school reopening to be understood, and the necessary school-based mitigation practices to become established.

There is a lack of evidence about the role and relative risk of singing, and playing musical instruments, in the transmission of COVID-19. There are however a series of features which will reduce any risk associated with these activities. Adopting a precautionary approach, the sub-group's advice is that music and drama activities should take place only in situations where they comply with the low risk criteria set out below. Individual lessons where 2 metre physical distancing can be applied, the environment is well ventilated and equipment is not shared, carry low risk. Virtual lessons, rehearsals and performances, using digital forms of communication, carry even less risk. Choirs, orchestras and group drama performances should not recommence at this point.

Physical Education

The amount of physical activity undertaken by children and young people during lockdown will have varied significantly. While many will have enjoyed considerable freedom to walk, take bike rides and play outdoors, many others will not have had easy access to a garden, or other outdoor space, to enable them to continue exercising. Families with complex needs and children living in chaotic households will also have faced particular challenges in maintaining a good level of physical activity. These factors, together with the well-established health and learning benefits of activity, highlight the importance of supporting pupils to be active on return to school.

In addition to considerations about physical education as part of the school curriculum, attention should be paid to maximising opportunities for pupils to build activity into their daily routines. The sub-group has previously emphasised the importance of supporting active travel wherever possible, as the safest means of transport to school in light of COVID-19. The Daily Mile is another activity that has taken off in many schools in Scotland, that would be highly recommended at the current time.

Suggested mitigations

In the first instance, physical education lessons should take place out of doors. At the present time in Scotland, children and young people are permitted to participate in organised outdoor contact sport without the need for physical distancing. The same approach should be taken for physical education in schools. An enhanced focus on activities that do not involve close physical contact, such as athletics and circuit training, will contribute to further lowering of any risk involved.

Particular attention should be paid to the processes surrounding the sporting activity itself – particularly washing and changing, and food/drink consumption, where attention must be paid to good hygiene, cleaning of surfaces, no sharing of equipment or towels, no sharing of snacks/water bottles etc, and physical distancing between adults and between adults and pupils. If any sporting equipment has been shared as part of the outdoor activity, this should be sanitised carefully before next use/between each lesson. Activities which involve contact with shared equipment (e.g. balls) should be kept to a minimum. Hands should be thoroughly washed and dried at the end of the activity.

Hand-washing facilities or hand sanitiser stations should be available and easily accessible when entering or leaving a playing field, playground or (once it is permitted) a gym hall. There should be no handshakes at the beginning or end of any group sport.

Young people should be encouraged to arrive at school in their sports kit on days when physical education lessons will take place and, where possible, wait until they get home to shower and change. If the use of changing rooms and showering facilities is required, schools should ensure these are as well ventilated as possible, used only by small numbers at any point in time to maximise physical distancing, and that attention is paid to cleaning surfaces after use. Consideration should be given to the needs of children and young people with disabilities or special needs.

The introduction of indoor physical education in schools should occur in line with plans for recommencing indoor contact sports for people over 12 years old. This advice relates to school pupils of all ages and is precautionary, recognising the need to enable the impacts of school reopening to be understood, and any necessary adjustments to be made to the core guidance and approach. It takes 2-3 weeks to understand the effects on coronavirus incidence and prevalence of major changes as Scotland progresses through its route map. Given the enhanced risk of transmission associated with indoor physical education on account of the levels of expiration, close proximity, the environments of changing rooms etc, it is advised that reintroduction of indoor physical education is postponed.

Music and drama

There is limited evidence about the effects on coronavirus transmission of participation in music and drama. At the time of writing, members of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) are considering these issues, and advice is anticipated shortly. It is recommended that the advice that follows here is reviewed following clarification of the evidence from SAGE. Meantime, it is our advice that young people should not engage in drama, singing, or playing wind and brass instruments with other people, given these activities pose a potentially higher risk of transmission. However, this does not mean that these activities cannot take place at all, it simply means that a more creative approach should be taken to providing such lessons.

Suggested mitigations

Although group lessons cannot take place with everyone physically in the same room together, technology can facilitate collective participation. For example, singing and music lessons, and choir practice, can take place virtually; young people might record themselves performing and provide the recordings to the teacher.

For those young people who have chosen to undertake a Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) qualification in music or drama, it may well be necessary to record a virtual portfolio.

The risk for staff and for children and young people is also reduced if lessons take place out of doors or under an open-sided gazebo (or equivalent) with appropriate physical distancing in place where possible.

There should be no sharing of musical instruments between learners, and careful consideration should be given to the cleaning of instruments and other equipment such as music stands or props for drama. People should wash their hands before and after touching such shared equipment.

For music and drama, there is a sliding-scale of risk associated with different activities. Only when there is a combination of low-risk factors in place should the activity go ahead. Large group activities and those where no distancing can take place between adults or between adults and pupils, should not be re-introduced in the meantime.

Low risk	High risk
Outdoors or virtual activities (e.g. recorded performances, outdoor creative dance, use of awnings/gazebos)	Indoor activities in enclosed spaces (e.g. unventilated classrooms, studios)
Normal breathing and volume of speech (e.g. piano playing, mime)	Higher volume or aerosol-generating activities (e.g. singing, debating, wind/brass instruments)
Individual or small numbers involved (e.g. solo performance, string quartet)	Large group (e.g. choir or orchestra)
Any equipment is used only by one person (e.g. pupil and teacher have their own personal instruments; actors have their own costumes)	Equipment is shared (e.g. keyboards, shared percussion, shared props). Risk is lessened if equipment can be fully cleaned between each use.
Distancing possible between all participants	Physical distancing not possible

In addition, risk is reduced in environments that are well ventilated, when activities take place for a shorter period of time, and when performers (or pupil-teacher) are orientated in order that they are not face-to-face.