



Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance on preparing for the start of the new school term in August 2020

To: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts and APSE Contacts in Scotland. For information only: England, Northern Ireland and Wales

Key Points

On 30th July 2020, Scottish Government published guidance to support a safe return to school for all children, young people and staff. All children and young people are expected to be back in full time education by 18 August.

The guidance document can be accessed using [this link](#)

1.0 Introduction

Scottish Government released guidance associated with preparing for the start of the new school term, with advice from the scientific community, the Education Recovery Group and other key stakeholders.

The guidance includes sections on:

- Risk assessments (which should be carried out or updated prior to the return of pupils)
- Personal hygiene
- Enhanced environmental cleaning

- Ventilation
- Minimising contact between individuals and groups
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) / Face coverings
- Staying vigilant and responding to COVID-19 symptoms
- Enhanced surveillance, testing and outbreak management
- Special considerations for certain groups (e.g. clinically vulnerable)
- School and public transport

2.0 Summary

None of the guidance document affects any of the legal obligations of local authorities with regards to health and safety, public health or their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. Local authorities and schools should exercise their judgement when implementing this guidance. Where it is stated that they “should” do something, there is a clear expectation this should be done; and where it is stated they “may or may wish” to do something, these measures can be considered where appropriate. Local authorities should also ensure that any external organisations delivering any services to schools also follow this guidance. Local authorities should also be ready and able to adapt to local issues, such as local outbreaks of COVID-19.

Risk assessments

Risk assessments should be undertaken and/or updated prior to return. They should be produced in consultation with appropriate unions and professional associations. All stakeholders (e.g. children, staff, parents) should be informed of risk assessment plans, and the assessments should be kept under review. Risk assessments should include measures for vulnerable groups, and all staff/contractors should be included in risk assessments. This is a legal requirement, with all aspects of the return to school being considered (transport, school cleaning, use of school kitchens, etc). The [Health and Safety Executive](#) have produced a separate guide on working safely during the coronavirus outbreak.

Personal hygiene

Children, young people, staff and any others should be encouraged to maintain their personal hygiene. The key basic measures for COVID-secure personal hygiene are “frequent washing/sanitising of hands for 20 seconds and drying thoroughly, and always when entering/leaving the building, before/after eating and after using the toilet”. All should also be discouraged from touching their faces and using tissues or elbows to cough or sneeze. Facilities for hand hygiene should be made available, with outdoor hand basins/hand sanitisers at entry/exit points. School uniforms and staff clothing should be washed as normal.

Enhanced environmental cleaning

Local authorities should ensure that an enhanced environmental cleaning regime is in place which is in line with the guidelines by [Health Protection Scotland](#). This includes: regular detergent cleaning schedules and procedures which include active products against bacteria and viruses, at least twice daily cleaning of commonly touched objects and surfaces, minimising the movement of individuals between workstations, providing adequate disposal facilities, wedging doors open where appropriate with an exception for fire doors, setting clear use/cleaning guidance for toilets and cleaning work vehicles as appropriate. Other measures noted that there should be: more frequent cleaning of rooms/areas used by different groups, movement of people between rooms should be reduced and cleaning regimes for specialist equipment. Books should be quarantined for 72 hours upon return, and children should only be provided with toys/equipment that is easy to clean.

Ventilation

Adequate levels of ventilation should be provided, with systems adjusted to full fresh air if possible. Doors and windows should be kept open to increase natural ventilation where it is safe to do so.

Minimising contact between individuals and groups

The COVID-19 advisory sub-group on education and children's issues advises that large gatherings and crowded spaces should be avoided where possible, and keeping children within the same groups for the duration of the school day is preferable. There is no requirement for physical distancing between children in primary schools, and there is no requirement for young people in secondary schools to physically distance to ensure a safe return to schools, though for secondary school pupils, they should undertake distancing where possible as part of a precautionary approach. For adults in schools, two metre distancing should be maintained, or if not possible and they are interacting closer than 2m for 15 minutes or more, face coverings should be worn.

Consideration should be given to staggered drop off/pick-up times or locations. Parents should also not enter school buildings unless required.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) / Face coverings

For the majority of staff, PPE will not normally be required. If a need for PPE has been identified during the risk assessment procedures, this should be made readily available and those wearing it should be trained on its use. An example of this would be during personal care where staff may have come into contact with blood, or when required to lift pupils. There is specific guidance for [COVID-19 first responders](#). Gloves, aprons and surgical masks may be required in these instances.

Anyone wishing to wear a face covering in school should be allowed to do so, and in instances where there have been an increasing number of virus cases, schools may choose to encourage the wearing of face coverings.

Staying vigilant and responding to COVID-19 symptoms

The guidance recommends that the whole school community should stay vigilant for the symptoms of COVID-19 and of the most common symptoms, which are: new continuous cough, fever/high temperature and loss of, or change in, sense of smell of taste. Everyone must be informed that they must inform a member of staff if they feel unwell with these symptoms.

Staff and children should be supported to follow up-to-date health protection advice on isolation. Guidance on these procedures are available through [NHS Inform](#).

Schools will be able to register symptomatic staff as category 3 key workers under the employer referral portal to ensure they have access to priority testing through NHS Inform [Test and Protect](#).

Enhanced surveillance, testing and outbreak management

Arrangements are in place to monitor developments and allow for rapid responses to COVID-19 cases, with enhanced surveillance arrangements, test and protect, and outbreak management. These sources will allow regular reporting on indicators such as:

- Overall incidence and swab positivity for Scotland
- Overall incidence and swab positivity for school-age children
- Number and proportion of all cases that are among school workers
- Hot spots by local authority area
- Number of clusters or outbreaks that are under investigation within educational settings
- Antibody prevalence among children and school workers (if feasible)

Special considerations for certain groups (e.g. clinically vulnerable)

Clinically vulnerable staff are able to return to work following a risk assessment and the introduction of appropriate arrangements that reduces risk to an acceptable level. Children who were shielding will be able to return to school unless GP/healthcare provider advice says otherwise. Specific guidance has been produced for [people with specific medical conditions](#) by Scottish Government.

School and public transport

Enhanced cleaning of dedicated school transport vehicles should be undertaken. Distancing between children and young people on dedicated school transport is not required, and they are not required to wear face coverings but are able to if they wish to do so.

Children travelling by public transport should follow the requirements on face coverings and physical distancing.

Promoting attendance and reducing absence

Local authorities should engage with parents and carers to provide reassurance on any concerns that they might have about their children returning to schools.

Free school meals

The duty of local authorities to provide free school meals to those who are eligible remains, and all food provided should continue to comply with the [School Food and Drink Nutritional Standards](#).

Workforce planning and support

Local authorities in conjunction with headteachers, unions and staff should make judgements about how they can best use their available workforce capacity safely and effectively. Scottish Government states it is making additional funding available

to local authorities for the additional workforce capacity necessary to support COVID-19 recovery.

Local authorities should also ensure that support is available for professional learning and wellbeing for staff.

3.0 APSE Comment

APSE greatly commends the work of local authorities, particularly those who have faced previous reductions in their workforce, in important areas such as building cleaning, before the COVID-19 outbreak, and will now face the challenges ahead in meeting increased demands for these types of services in order to meet the new requirements outlined in the guidance document, for safely re-opening schools. APSE's membership of officers, managers and councillors have discussed and shared best practice on many of these issues in our Soft FM and our Transport and Mechanical online advisory groups in recent months, and further APSE support continues to be available through the APSE network.

APSE encourages our membership to carefully read through the guidance document, and make use of the additional sources of information contained within linked resources as well as the numerous avenues of support through the APSE Network.

Reminder: APSE has set up a COVID-19 Information Hub to deal with frontline service issues as they arise, ensuring greater resilience and learning between each other during this difficult time. You can access this hub by [clicking here](#) and you can also join our WhatsApp Support Network by [clicking here](#).

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