

Potential measures to facilitate social distancing include:

- if an enclosed area, owners and operators should identify an advisory limit on the maximum number of users able to use a playground or outdoor gym area at any one time and use signs to communicate this
- where practicable, owners/operators could implement a booking system so that users can book a slot to use the equipment
- limiting the number of users able to use a particular piece of equipment to minimise the transmission risk of COVID-19. Potential measures include:
 - signs to communicate maximum number of users at one time
 - request those using the play area to only have 1 family member accompanying a child
 - limiting the available number of seats on equipment or numbers of swings available to promote social distancing, including for parents, carers or guardians who might push children on swings for example
 - setting a time limit and using signs to communicate this to users, parents, guardians or carers
 - using adjacent space for queues or waiting areas for users, parents, guardians and carers using barriers, markings or signs where it is safe to do so. When implementing a queue or waiting area, consideration must be taken of its impact on the surrounding space and ensure it does not impede other users or pedestrians, particularly considering those with visual or hearing impairments, mobility problems and invisible disabilities

Cleaning and hygiene

Scientific advice suggests that the virus can survive for up to several days on some hard surfaces, particularly when indoors. These risks are reduced when outdoors, where surfaces may be subject to UV light and/or rain. This guidance applies to outdoor playgrounds and

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outdoor gyms but the virus could survive long enough on frequently used/touched outdoor surfaces to facilitate transmission.

Owners and operators are advised to manage any potential risk, cleaning high traffic touch points frequently. This could include cleaning regimes for:

- playground equipment for children, usually up to age 14, such as slides monkey bars and climbing frames
- semi enclosed playhouses or huts for small children
- enclosed crawl through 'tunnels' or tube slides
- exercise bars and machine handles on outdoor gym equipment
- entry and exit points such as gates
- seating areas such as benches and picnic tables
- refuse areas/bins

Owners and operators should encourage effective sanitation by users, parents, guardians and carers.

Consideration should be given to:

- using signs and posters:
 - to promote cleaning of equipment by users, parents, guardians and carers, particularly where there are clear touch points such as swing rockers, see saws, machine handles or exercise bars
 - encouraging outdoor gym users to bring their own towel and hygiene products and wipe down equipment after use
 - encouraging parents to bring hand sanitiser gel or wipes to clean their children's hands
 - to encourage hand hygiene with including washing/sanitising hands more often than usual, for 20 seconds using soap and water or approved gel and foam sanitiser, particularly at the beginning and end of play
 - to advise users (or parents of users) not to touch their faces, and to cough or sneeze into a tissue or arm when a tissue is not available
 - to remind adults and children not to put their mouths on equipment or their hands in their mouths

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- to promote and remind users, parents, guardians and carers of the need for social distancing
- when communicating safety messages owners/operators should ensure they are able to reach those with hearing or vision impairments. Consideration should also be given on how to assist those with disabilities with complying with the changes
- providing more waste facilities and more frequent rubbish collection
- where practicable, providing hand sanitiser (automated where possible) or hand washing facilities at the entry and exit points, in addition to public toilets/washrooms
- using disposable paper towels in handwashing facilities where possible

Face coverings

The government has produced guidance on [Staying safe outside your home](#) that includes rules and recommendations on the use of face coverings. Face coverings must be worn at all times on public transport ([except if an individual meets one of a range of disability, health, equality and age exemptions](#)) or when attending a hospital as a visitor or outpatient.

If possible, a face covering should also be worn in other enclosed public spaces where social distancing isn't possible and where the public may come into contact with people they do not normally meet. This is most relevant for periods indoors in crowded areas. Face coverings are optional for all those with disabilities or health conditions for whom it is problematic, on public transport and elsewhere.

Current government guidance states that face coverings should not be used by children under the age of 3 or those who may find it difficult to manage them correctly. Parents should be aware that wearing a face covering in a playground setting could pose an additional safety risk and should use their judgement on whether their children wear a face covering.

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It is important to use face coverings properly and that signs promote their use appropriately and make it clear users should wash their hands before putting them on and taking them off.

Additional measures and communicating with parents

Additional measures that can minimise the risk COVID-19 transmission in playgrounds and outdoor gyms focus on promoting responsible behaviour by children, parents, carers and guardians.

For example, owners and operators should consider putting up signs to make clear to users, parents, guardians and carers that:

- consumption of food or drink on play equipment or in the playground area is banned
- parents, guardians or carers should dispose of all litter including any used protective wear such as face coverings or gloves properly in litter bins, taking it home where a bin is not provided. Disposable face coverings and gloves cannot be recycled

Owners and operators should provide clear information to parents to set clear expectations about how children should behave when using playgrounds during COVID-19. This may be through one or more of: signs adjacent to the playground, online (e.g. operator websites or community message boards), or through leafletting.

Owners and operators may wish to consider reminding parents of the owner/operator's legal obligations towards the playground users such as signs stating that allowing children to use playground equipment is done at their own risk where appropriate.

Considering children with additional needs

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

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Issues that are likely to be specific to this group include:

- an understanding that many need frequent reminders about rules of behaviour in playground settings
- changes to familiar environments are likely to require longer periods of adjustment
- children with physical and sensory disabilities may need assistance with moving from one place to the next
- some children with additional needs such as autism find it difficult to adjust to particular clothing requirements, and therefore may be less willing to use face coverings or similar if requested
- some additional needs are not evident, such as hearing loss, and may therefore account for non-responsiveness to verbal instruction
- queuing for apparatus or toilets can be a source of frustration, and the cause of agitation
- at higher risk of being involved in bullying incidents