

Covid-19 Resilience Planning for Schools

Introduction

National guidance states that the risk of children becoming severely ill from Covid-19 is very low. The guidance provides detailed advice and mandatory controls to reduce the risk to everyone.

Managing outbreaks of Covid-19 is led by Public Health and The Highland Council, our partners in NHS Highland and other lead agencies will work together to respond to any potential incidents of this nature.

This paper sets out how we assess and mitigate risks and plan for the management and response to any outbreaks in school and early years settings in the Highlands. It also links to the detailed national guidance.

Emergency Plans

All Schools in Highland have Emergency Plans which set out planning for any emergency situation which may arise. The Council also has a General Emergency Plan which was updated in 2019 and an appendix on Covid-19 Outbreaks is currently being developed.

The Council responds to any emergency together in partnership with other Category One Responders in the Highlands and Islands Local Resilience Partnership (HILRP). NHS Highland is the lead agency for health related emergencies. The Council follows national guidance, government determination and local public health advice on the implementation of any decisions related to such matters.

Our partnership works closely together to ensure effective communication with all stakeholders.

National guidance on reopening early learning and educational settings

Coronavirus (COVID-19): [guidance on reopening early learning and childcare services](#) published: 30 July 2020 states:

We now know that young children are less likely to be affected by or transmit the virus. [Advice from the advisory sub group for education and children's issues](#) states that: "Children in the age groups accessing early learning and childcare have a low susceptibility to COVID-19 infection, they also have a low likelihood of onward transmission."

Guidance for full re-opening of schools ([update 27 July 2020](#)) contains advice on risk management and health and safety risk assessment.

The guidance states:

The risk to children themselves of becoming severely ill from coronavirus (COVID-19) is very low and there are negative health impacts of being out of school. We know that school is a vital point of contact for public health and safeguarding services that are critical to the wellbeing of children and families.

It provides public health advice to [minimize coronavirus risks](#) in the education settings. The guidance also sets out the risk in relation to adults working in schools.

In relation to working in schools, whilst it is not possible to ensure a totally risk-free environment, the Office of National Statistics' analysis on [coronavirus \(COVID-19\) related deaths linked to occupations](#) suggests that staff in educational settings tend not to be at any greater risk from the disease than many other occupations. There is no evidence that children transmit the disease any more than adults.

The guidance update also sets out contingency planning for outbreaks.

Every school must plan for the possibility of a local outbreak and how they will ensure continuity of education.

Minimising Risk

The national guidance sets out the public health advice schools **must** follow to minimise the risks of coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission. It also includes the process that should be followed if anyone develops coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms while at school.

If schools follow this advice and maximise use of control measures, they will effectively minimise risks. All elements of the system of controls are essential. All schools must cover them all, but the way different schools implement some of the requirements will differ based on their individual circumstances. There cannot be a 'one-size-fits-all' approach where the system of controls describes every scenario.

Schools must comply with health and safety law, which requires them to assess risks and put in place proportionate control measures. Essential measures include:

- a requirement that people who are ill stay at home
- robust hand and respiratory hygiene
- enhanced cleaning arrangements

- active engagement with NHS Test and Trace
- formal consideration of how to reduce contacts and maximise distancing between those in school wherever possible and minimise potential for contamination so far as is reasonably practicable

How contacts are reduced will depend on the school's circumstances and will (as much as possible) include:

- grouping children together
- avoiding contact between groups
- arranging classrooms with forward facing desks
- staff maintaining distance from pupils and other staff as much as possible

Process in the event of local outbreaks

In the event of any confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) amongst the school community, schools are required to follow local NHS health protection team advice and engage with the [NHS Test and Protect](#) process to contain any outbreak..

This may in exceptional circumstances require a school to close for a period of time, based on public health advice. In wider outbreaks with a spike in positive cases and evidence of community spread of the virus, there may be localised lockdowns involving restrictions to businesses, transport, childcare settings and schools within a defined area.

Appropriate authorities will decide which measures to implement to help contain the spread. The Department for Education will be involved in decisions at a local and national level affecting a geographical area, and will support appropriate authorities and individual settings to follow the health advice.

Any school closures or partial closures would be communicated through our usual channels including our school closures webpage and social media.

<https://www.highland.gov.uk/schoolclosures>

Local measures in place for local outbreaks can be found here:

<http://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-local-measures/>

Contingency plans for outbreaks

National guidance sets out [detailed advice on contingency planning](#) for schools.

In the event of a school or schools having to close temporarily to help control transmission due to a local outbreak, schools will have a contingency plan for this

eventuality. This may involve a return to remaining open only for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers, and providing remote education for all other pupils.

Remote education plans have been well tested in Highland during the lockdown period in April to June this year.

We have made two videos to show how this worked:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fi4A6BYN71I&t=22s> – Learning During Lockdown Part 1

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zbV5-3Lq_tE&t=22s – Learning During Lockdown Part 2

A national public sector magazine also published an article on Highland's model of remote education.

<http://mag.publicsectorexecutive.com/publication/?m=62919&i=664316&p=0>

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Remote education support

Schools in Highland are well prepared for remote education and we were the first local authority in Scotland to roll out an extensive programme of providing chrome book devices to the majority of our children and young people during 2018-19.

Our contingency planning will involve a range of measures to ensure continuity of education.

We expect further direction in the autumn term with regard to remote education and continue to monitor the latest situation regarding Covid-19 and updates in guidance and available resources.

We are also working with the government to improve access to WiFi for disadvantaged pupils and provide access to free additional data to families who rely on a mobile internet connection. Information on where to get help can be found [here](#) or contact your school for advice.

Links

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-reopening-early-learning-and-childcare-services/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>