



National
Guidance
oeapng.info

Coronavirus

This document provides guidance for planning and managing outdoor learning, off-site visits and learning outside the classroom during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. It must be read within the context of current government guidance, which is likely to change as the situation develops.

You must also follow any guidance issued by your employer.

The Importance of Outdoor Learning during the Pandemic

Learning outdoors has many educational and health benefits in normal times. In addition, during the pandemic:

- The risk of infection is reduced outdoors;
- 'Social distancing' is often easier to maintain outside;
- Being outdoors in natural settings has a positive impact on mental health and well-being.

Research commissioned by Natural England has found that coronavirus has had a negative impact on children's mental health and wellbeing, and demonstrates the positive role of nature in supporting children's well-being:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-people-and-nature-survey-for-england-child-data-wave-1-experimental-statistics/the-people-and-nature-survey-for-england-childrens-survey-experimental-statistics.

Establishments should therefore consider how they can maximise the amount of time that children and young people spend outdoors.

Government Guidance

It is essential that current government guidance is followed. It should therefore be monitored for any changes.

If you are planning a visit to a different country in the UK (England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland), you should check current government guidance for that country, as well as for your own country.

The latest government advice and information about Coronavirus is available at:

www.gov.uk/coronavirus (England);

gov.wales/coronavirus (Wales);

www.gov.scot/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance (Scotland);

www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19 (Northern Ireland).

Guidance applying in England

The Department for Education (DfE) has issued a range of guidance for education, universities and childcare, at: www.gov.uk/coronavirus/education-and-childcare

This includes guidance for schools, at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak

and for Further Education providers including sixth-form colleges, at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision

and for Higher Education providers, at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campus

and for providers of community activities, holiday or after-school clubs and other out-of-school settings, at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/protective-measures-for-holiday-or-after-school-clubs-and-other-out-of-school-settings-for-children-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak

These currently state that domestic educational day visits are allowed. They advise against all residential and overseas educational visits, but give the following dates for when these may be resumed in line with the government's 'roadmap':

- domestic residential visits – no earlier than 17th May;
- overseas visits – no date is currently given, and updated advice will be provided after 12th April.

The dates given are indicative and might change, so current guidance should be checked before resuming visits. DfE advises that establishments should not enter into any new financial or contractual commitments at this stage.

The guidance states that visits must be conducted in line with relevant COVID guidance and regulations in place at the time, and that further advice will be provided on managing residential visits.

DfE refers youth work settings to the National Youth Agency guidance (see below).

Guidance applying in Wales

The Welsh Government has issued a range of guidance for teachers, school leaders, carers, parents and students at:

gov.wales/education-coronavirus

This includes guidance for schools, at:

gov.wales/schools-coronavirus-guidance

and guidance for post-16 settings at:

gov.wales/guidance-safe-operation-post-16-learning

and travel guidance for educational settings, at:

gov.wales/coronavirus-travel-guidance-education-settings-and-students

The travel guidance advises against domestic and overseas educational visits for children under 18 for the time being.

The Welsh Government has issued guidance for youth work services at:

gov.wales/youth-work-services-guidance-coronavirus

Other Guidance

The National Youth Agency has issued guidance for managing youth sector activities and spaces during COVID-19, at nya.org.uk/guidance. This includes guidance on outdoor learning including camping and other residential experiences, and travel.

The Scottish Government has published an advisory note about visits which include an overnight stay. Although this does not officially apply in England or Wales, it includes some potentially useful information for forward planning:

www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-advisory-sub-group-on-education-and-childrens-issues---advisory-note-on-school-trips-which-include-an-overnight-stay

The COVID Symptom Study for School Communities

The COVID Symptom Study is a not-for-profit initiative run by health science company Zoe with scientific analysis provided by King's College London, endorsed by the UK, Welsh and Scottish Governments. It includes a COVID Symptom Study for School Communities. Involvement in this has the following benefits:

- schools receive daily Covid insights for their students that enable more informed and rapid decision-making to help keep them safe;
- information is shared with children and their parents, reassuring parents and helping children to complete their education safely;
- the data contributes to critical national scientific research into the impact of COVID on children and younger people.

Schools can register at covid.joinzoe.com/schoolnetwork

Planning and Managing Outdoor Learning

In addition to using their own playgrounds and gardens, many schools routinely use outdoor areas adjacent to and nearby the school for educational activities, sometimes designated as a 'Local Learning Area'. It should be possible to continue to use many of these venues within current limitations, especially if they are within walking or cycling distance of the establishment. It might also be possible to negotiate temporary exclusive use of an outdoor area close to an establishment, with the landowner.

Establishments should use their judgement, informed by government guidance about protective measures and safe working during the pandemic, to decide what is appropriate in their particular circumstances. In doing this, it can be helpful to make a clear distinction between 'educational visits' and local off-site activities. In making this decision, it is helpful to consider the 'SAGE' variables (Staff, Activity, Group, Environment) - see OEAP National Guidance document [1b "Foundations"](#).

There are many ideas and resources for activities available, for example:

- The following OEAP documents available in National Guidance:
["Get Outside - Taking Learning Beyond the Classroom in Support of the Recovery Curriculum"](#)
["Learning Outside the Classroom – Activity Cards"](#)
["Taking Learning Outside the Classroom – Adapting Activities"](#)

- Council for Learning Outside the Classroom
www.lotc.org.uk/resources/education-resources
- Wales Council for Outdoor Learning
www.walescouncilforoutdoorlearning.org/activity-ideas
- Learning Through Landscapes
www.ltl.org.uk/free-resources
- National Trust
www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/50-things-to-do-before-youre-11--activity-list

The following guidance for planning and managing activities is specific to operating during the COVID-19 pandemic. You should also be familiar with other National Guidance documents relevant to your role, as the normal principles of good practice still apply.

You should review your standard operating procedures to ensure that they include the measures that you need to take to reduce the risks from COVID.

It is particularly important to follow government guidance about 'social distancing', group sizes, consistent groups or 'bubbles', personal protective equipment and hygiene, whether indoors or outdoors, on-site or off-site.

You should consider avoiding activities which have a high likelihood of minor injuries, so as to reduce the need for first aid, close contact with participants, or visits to hospital.

If the planned activity is in an area open to the public, you should consider how you will ensure that your group is isolated from the public.

The same attention should be given to hygiene when outdoors as when indoors. For example:

- Regularly washing/sanitising hands including when going outside, before and after touching shared objects such as activity equipment, before eating, after using the toilet, when getting on or off transport such as a minibus, when returning inside;
- Avoiding touching objects shared by the public – for example, a member of staff could hold a gate open to avoid everyone touching it;
- Avoiding activities which involve touching each other (e.g. holding hands);
- Sanitising equipment before it is used.

Consider carrying, or having easily available, antiseptic hand gel, antiseptic wipes, tissues, bags for waste, gloves and face masks and possibly disposable aprons and eye protection, in case staff need to administer first aid or give direct support or personal care to a participant.

Be aware that antiseptic hand gel usually contains a high proportion of alcohol, and could therefore be a temptation for abuse by some young people. It should be used under close staff supervision.

During some activities, it may be possible to designate or mark out 'zones' within which individual participants work, to avoid contact between them.

It is important to keep parents informed about your plans and the precautions you are taking, both indoors and outdoors.

Planning and Managing Off-Site Visits

When planning a visit, you should take the current government guidance into account as part of your process of risk assessment, and then check it regularly in the days and weeks leading up to the visit, and during a residential visit, and make any changes necessary to your plans.

You should have contingency plans in case of changes to government guidance or, for example, staff becoming unavailable because of a requirement to self-isolate.

You should consider the ability of participants to comply with COVID safety measures at the venue.

Parents and participants may naturally be concerned, so you should discuss their concerns with them and keep them informed about the situation and how you plan to mitigate any risks.

If you are planning a visit which involves another group (perhaps a group overseas), such as an exchange visit, or if you are planning to host or work with another group (perhaps an overseas group visiting the UK), you should keep in contact with them and be aware that they might need to change or cancel the arrangement.

If you plan to visit a venue such as a museum or gallery, or to attend a public event such as a concert or sporting fixture, or to stay in accommodation such as a hostel or hotel, or if you are using a tour operator or activity provider, discuss the potential effects of COVID with them at the time of booking, and keep in touch with them during the run-up to the visit.

You should check that any provider you intend to use has assessed the risk of coronavirus and implemented control measures to prevent infection. Some providers may not have had the benefit of the advice and support available to education establishments, and so may not be fully aware of the measures that are expected. You should consider making a preliminary visit to check the measures in place and to discuss any issues with the provider. See OEAP National Guidance document [4.4g "Selecting External Providers and Facilities"](#).

Resuming Visits and Activities

Because of the pandemic, it is likely to have been a long time since you were able to organise many types of off-site visit and activity. It is important that you recognise that things may have changed in this time, and that you will need to make careful preparations before resuming your normal provision.

Leaders may have experienced a decline in their competence, confidence or fitness, and so may need support, such as refresher training or additional preparation time. The same may apply to participants.

External providers that you have used in the past may no longer be available, or may have changed what they can offer, or may not be able to operate to the same standards as previously. You should check that they have made suitable adjustments to work safely with COVID, and it may be wise to carry out similar checks as you would with a new provider.

Young people have spent a significant amount of time indoors, away from educational settings and their peers. This may affect how they respond during activities and visits. Leaders should carefully consider what are suitable venues, activities and levels of challenge while they re-establish their understanding of participants' attitudes, behaviours and abilities.

Equipment that has been unused for a long time should be checked for damage or deterioration, particularly if it has been stored in a place where there is a possibility of water ingress or infestation by rodents, mould etc.

Activity sites may have changed. For example, there could be changes due to rockfall, growth of vegetation or erosion. Where this is a possibility, you should visit the sites to check them, before resuming activities.

You should review your risk assessments and/or operating procedures in the light of any changes you find.

Travel

In normal times, using public transport for a visit has many benefits. However, the government currently advises that public transport should be avoided if possible.

Where walking or cycling is not possible, dedicated transport (such as a minibus or coach) should therefore be used. The principles and procedures for using dedicated transport should align as far as possible with those used in the school or other setting. You should consider:

- how participants are grouped together on transport - where possible this should reflect the groupings (e.g. 'bubbles') used in the school or other setting;
- the use of hand sanitiser when getting on and off transport;
- additional cleaning of vehicles;
- ensuring that boarding and disembarkation are organised;
- distancing on transport where possible;
- the use of face coverings.

Managing the Financial Risks

If you make any bookings or financial commitments, you should make sure that you understand how the terms and conditions will apply if you, or the provider, cancel or are prevented from going ahead because of COVID or its effects – due to, for example: legal restrictions or government guidance in the UK or overseas; staff or participants testing positive for COVID or exhibiting symptoms of it, or being required to self-isolate or quarantine. You should ensure that any assurances you are given by a provider, such as a 'COVID Promise', are included in the terms and conditions of the contract with them. See OEAP National Guidance document [3.2i "Contracts and Waivers"](#).

If the visit involves any significant financial commitments, such as travel or accommodation, you should also make sure that you understand the detailed policy wording of your travel insurance. See OEAP National Guidance document [4.4c "Insurance"](#).

For visits booked after the start of the pandemic in 2020, many insurance policies do not cover the costs of cancellation, curtailment or delay due to COVID or its effects. The government has recognised this gap and is exploring the possibility of putting in place an indemnity that will give schools cover against COVID travel cancellations in the future, and allow them to book new visits with confidence.

You should ensure that participants and/or parents are clear about any financial consequences of cancellation or other effects of COVID-19, for example if you are unable to obtain insurance to cover all the risks.

The Association of British Insurers has published advice on the travel insurance implications of COVID, mainly focused on overseas travel, at www.abi.org.uk/products-and-issues/topics-and-issues/coronavirus-hub.

There have been complaints about some companies refusing to give a refund following a cancellation during the pandemic. The Competition and Markets Authority has published its views on the law, at www.gov.uk/government/news/coronavirus-covid-19-cancellation-and-refund-updates.

Overseas Visits

See also OEAP National Guidance document [7r "Overseas Visits"](#).

Current government guidance for educational settings in both England and Wales advises against all overseas visits for children under 18. You should monitor the government's foreign travel advice for any country you plan to travel to or through, at www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

Liaise closely with your travel provider about the situation in the country that you are planning to visit and consider the alternatives and options should that visit no longer be able to proceed.

Specific advice for people travelling overseas during the pandemic, and the rules for entering the UK, is at www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus

The advice given above about cancellation terms and conditions, and insurance, is particularly important for overseas visits. You should also check whether health insurance, including medical treatment and repatriation, covers anyone who contracts COVID.

The Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) has published guidance about travelling overseas at: www.abta.com/news/coronavirus-outbreak

