

Mitigations in schools – approach to post-summer planning

Introduction

1. This advice note is to support schools and local authorities to plan for the approach to COVID risk-reduction mitigations in the period following the summer holidays. It should be read in conjunction with the main [Reducing Risks in Schools Guidance](#). It should also be used by grant-aided schools and independent schools to support their recovery efforts.
2. This note aims to provide as much certainty as is possible for schools and local authorities ahead of the school holidays, so that they can communicate clearly with school communities. It must, however, be recognised that the COVID situation remains inherently uncertain, and there may be a need for guidance to be updated in the event of any significant unexpected developments during the summer holiday period. In these circumstances, the Scottish Government will work with stakeholders to consider how best to provide schools with the time required to make any significant necessary adjustments to mitigations at the start of term (including any enhancements should these be judged necessary and proportionate to ensure safety at that time).
3. Separate guidance is being produced for early learning and childcare settings. This reflects the fact that many such settings will remain open during the summer holiday period, and it is expected they will be able to ease mitigations more gradually as local authorities step down through protection levels. The approach set out in this guidance note is broadly aligned with the approach set out in the ELC guidance, although the latter focuses on mitigations that impact on capacity to deliver high quality and flexible statutory ELC.

Expected approach to mitigations post-summer

4. The approach to mitigations in schools in the period after the summer holidays reflects the following broad principles/assumptions:
 - At the time of writing, progress on the vaccination programme and early data suggesting that vaccines may be weakening the link between case numbers and hospitalisation, intensive care and deaths, are providing hope that by the time schools return after the summer holidays, we can move beyond the very restrictive approach to dealing with COVID that has been necessary to date.
 - However, the approach to planning for mitigations in schools post-summer must reflect the current uncertainty around the path of the virus, and in particular remaining uncertainty around variants of concern, the impact of the easing of restrictions in wider society on transmission within schools, and the effects of vaccination on case numbers in staff and children and young people.
 - Mitigations that are necessary and proportionate to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of staff, children and young people should be maintained in schools.
 - Any negative impacts of mitigations on children and young people's educational experiences should be minimised at the earliest opportunity when it is safe to do so. As restrictions are eased in wider society, the expectation is that comparable restrictions may be eased in schools unless there is a clear justification for not doing so.
 - The organisational and operational challenges that schools face in implementing and removing mitigations in the period immediately after return should be taken into account. This is an important driver of the approach set out in this note. Removal of some mitigations is relatively simple; reintroduction can be complex and time consuming. Requiring schools to remove mitigations too early, and to then reinstate them, would have a detrimental impact on their ability to focus on the delivery of education to children and young people. This approach takes account of the fact that current mitigations do not restrict attendance capacity in school buildings.
5. Against this background, the approach that schools should take to planning for mitigations after the school holidays is as follows:
 - **Mitigations are not expected to change materially prior to the end of this (summer) term.** This reflects the advice of the Advisory Sub-group on Education and Children's Issues that a precautionary approach should be taken to easing key risk mitigations (such as physical distancing and face coverings) in view of the Delta variant and current levels of vaccination amongst staff and children and young people.

- In the run up to the next school session, an assessment will be made by the advisory sub-group and the COVID Education Recovery Group (CERG) of the public health situation in both wider society and as it relates to schools and children and young people. **Advice will then be provided to local authorities** regarding retention, enhancement or phased removal of specific mitigations (this advice will also be relevant to grant-aided and independent schools). **Local authorities will draw on this advice to support schools to implement the appropriate course of action following the return to school.** In the event that the advice supports removal of mitigations, the following approaches will be adopted:
 - Provided the public health situation permits mitigations to be eased in schools at the time of return, advice will set out which mitigations should be removed first, and any baseline mitigations that should be retained. Schools should in general expect to prioritise for early removal those mitigations that are less logistically challenging than others to remove/reinstate, or that have a greater impact on curriculum and education (e.g. face coverings in classrooms, remaining restrictions on physical education or expressive arts, etc.).
 - Phased removal will allow schools the organisational leeway they need to remove mitigations in a manner that is least disruptive to school teams and children and young people's education, and which reflects the public health situation post-summer holidays. Provided the advice is that it is safe to do so, schools will be asked to remove relevant mitigations as quickly as is operationally feasible.
 - **Mitigations should not be removed until this advice/assessment has been provided**, unless current guidance already supports a protection levels-based approach (e.g. for physical education and expressive arts) and a local authority area has moved up or down the protection levels.
6. The COVID Education Recovery Group (CERG) will continue to monitor relevant data over the summer holiday period. A working group of CERG will continue work to develop a contingency planning framework that we expect will support the management of any school outbreaks in the next school session, aligned with Scotland's wider strategic framework.

Preparations for Lateral Flow Device testing

7. Schools should continue to offer testing to any staff who are still in school buildings during the summer holidays, and to secondary pupils who are attending school buildings for summer camps, etc. It is also possible to make use of the [universal testing offer](#) to support these circumstances, in the event of any logistical challenges around supply of test kits.
8. The programme may be paused for staff and pupils who are not attending school buildings over the summer. However, schools should promote the universal testing offer to staff and pupils prior to the summer holidays, and encourage them to continue testing at home over the summer period, in line with advice to wider society.
9. Schools should plan to be able to continue the at-home testing offer for school staff and secondary pupils in the period immediately following the summer holidays. To support this, schools should:
- provide all staff and pupils with a pack of test kits before going on leave, which they can use to restart testing in the week prior to return;
 - for P7 pupils who are transitioning into S1, secondary schools can either provide test kits directly to pupils (e.g. during transition experiences) or, if this is not logistically possible, make clear that the families of P7 pupils should order their initial test kits in advance of the new term via the universal testing offer;
 - ensure they have in place sufficient stock to support testing during the first few weeks after the return (more kits may of course be ordered during those initial weeks on return if required); and
 - continue to promote the importance of testing and recording results (whether positive, negative or void) to staff and secondary pupils at the start of the next school session. Schools should consider reissuing electronic consent forms (guidance is available to school testing leads on Objective Connect) to pupils/staff who are not currently participating, and engaging with school communities to emphasise the importance of testing in preventing COVID from entering schools.