



**COVID-19**  
**A GUIDE TO**  
**PLAYGROUND RISK ASSESSMENT**

Cornwall Association of Local Councils

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## LOCAL COUNCIL RUN PLAYGROUNDS

### MANAGING THE COVID-19 RISKS

#### Introduction

The Government has announced that playgrounds and outdoor gyms will reopen from July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Unlike other buildings, outdoor play equipment does not always exist within confined areas and it may have been very difficult to restrict access during the lockdown. The approach to risk assessment will need to place a great emphasis on changing the user's own behaviour so that they take responsibility for maintaining social distancing and cleanliness.

The CALC has been working with Cornwall Council and Public Health England to pull together all of the available guidance on the management of risk when reopening playgrounds. The processes outlined in this guide should enable your council to identify what is needed to reopen the play areas and whether this can be achieved safely.

#### The Principles

The purpose of a risk assessment is to identify hazards, who might be affected, the likelihood of an event occurring and any measures you can put in place to reduce the severity. Unfortunately, there is no standard template for risk assessing playgrounds and play areas but the table below demonstrates a hierarchy of risk which you may find useful.



## The Action Plan

Develop an action plan for re-opening play areas safely including :

- Preparing the site for reopening including arrangements for any regular safety/site inspections and maintenance.
- Carry out your normal risk assessment (RA) checks but include managing the additional risks related to Covid-19 for all user groups and contractors/staff.
- Use the RA to develop a safe management plan for each play area. Create a checklist for keeping the equipment and surrounding area safe including :
  - Clearing the area of unnecessary furniture
  - Reconfiguration of the area to avoid pinch points
  - Encouraging time limited visits
  - Managing waste
  - Signage
  - Inspections
- Engage with contractors to discuss the risks and ensure you have copies of external risk assessments.
- Consider PPE and other equipment requirements for staff.
- Develop clear and appropriate signage.
- Communications and building public confidence: - let the public know what steps you have taken to manage risks and ensure public safety (i.e. enhanced cleaning, design etc.)
- Publish guidance for users.

**This is not a definitive guide – there are no minimum standards or criteria except that you must meet the 3 Covid-19 tests on social distancing, personal hygiene and the cleanliness of hard surfaces.**

**Risks change, guidance changes and so your risk assessment must be kept under review and rechecked against government guidance.**

## Steps to Risk Assessment

Play is important to physical and mental health but playgrounds and play equipment are hard to keep safe. The space is often crowded, making social distancing hard. The virus spreads easily when people touch contaminated surfaces and then touch their eyes, nose or mouth and it can be difficult to keep surfaces clean and disinfected.

The Covid-19 risk assessment is looking at specific concerns related to public health which are in addition to your normal measures.

It is important that the council promotes a very clear message about the actions which users can adopt to keep themselves safe. **Changing user behaviour is critical to managing the risks associated with Covid-19.**

### Step 1 : The key factors

Before starting your risk assessment, take time to consider the individual circumstances of each play area :

- **Who** : what age groups are the main users of the equipment. Is your equipment only used by local people or does it attract users from the surrounding areas? Is the equipment used by other groups i.e preschool, after school clubs, youth clubs etc. Don't forget those who manage and maintain the area on behalf of the council.
- **How** : Is it normally used under parental supervision or is it open to all ages. Does the usage change at weekends and what will happen in school holidays?
- **Where** : where are the play areas in relation to usage points – car parks, open space, beaches, shops, main roads. Does this make any difference to how it might be used
- **Other matters** : what else is around the play area which would encourage people to gather and use the area for other activities i.e. picnic tables and benches.

### Step 2 : What are the Risks?

#### Maintaining social distancing

- What works for your setting
- Signage
- Managing pinch points
- Partial closure or removal of equipment
- Encouraging time limits for visits
- Limiting the number of users at any one time
- Physical guides in queuing areas and exit points

- Promoting use of face masks
- Reconfigure seating to promote side by side contact

Good signage is important, and you should make sure this is as clear and as visible as possible – promotion on wider social media would also be recommended. The council can use its website and local magazines, newsletters, social media and local notices around the parish to let residents know of the importance of maintaining social distancing and using the equipment responsibly.

### **Cleaning protocols and frequency**

It is difficult to ensure cleaning in an outdoor setting, especially where the equipment encourages play and socialising. The council should consider whether it is possible to take any actions to ensure the cleanliness of hard and soft surfaces.

If your site has a high volume of users at any one time you may need to consider a cleaning routine for touch points. You can encourage users to bring their own cleaning wipes to clean touch points before and after use.

There may be some pieces of equipment where it is impossible to ensure cleanliness i.e. enclosed crawl through areas, playhouses and tunnels and it may be necessary for some enhanced signage or closure.

### **Personal Hygiene**

- Prohibit eating and drinking around the play area
- Good signage to promote user responsibility for hand washing
- Encourage users to bring their own PPE including face coverings
- Encourage users to take their used PPE home
- Encourage users to take responsibility for leaving the area clean and tidy
- Limiting the number of users at any one time

Good signage will remind users of the need to maintain personal hygiene including hand washing and wearing a mask. It can also be used to ask users to avoid crowded areas and emphasise the need to avoid hand to face contact.

### **Staff/Contractor safety and care**

Whether using councillors, staff or a contractor, everyone should be fully briefed and understand the council's new approach to playground maintenance and what to look for during site inspections.

External contractors, either for long term contracts or single pieces of work will also need to provide risk assessments before starting any work.

### Step 3 : Carry out a risk assessment for each play area

The CALC has published a Guide to Risk Assessment which is available to download from our website [www.cornwallalc.org.uk](http://www.cornwallalc.org.uk). Working with Cornwall Council and Public Health England, we have now compiled a template which is **the start** of your risk assessment of each set of public play areas run by your council.

The template is only a guide and you must consider the local circumstances and needs.

- 1) Complete the header – it is important to know where the play area is, when it was assessed, who assessed it and when the assessment will be reviewed. This document is a key part of your audit trail and should be retained.
- 2) Identify the Site Status level in accordance with the risk assessment guide. Cornwall Council has identified a hierarchy for its own sites which will also help you identify the level of importance of the playground in your area and assist in setting the levels of risk management required.

1 – Regional	A large 'destination' facility that attracts year-round visitors from outside of immediate town/parish. In most instances they have car parking available. May be associated with other facilities such as cafes, larger parks, beaches etc.
2 – Town/Parish	These are the main 'destination' playground in the parish, normally within an open space seen as the 'jewel' of a particular town or parish. Equipped with multiple items they are still usually smaller in scale than Regional assets. They often have car parking nearby and may be associated with a range of other formal facilities: skateboarding, walks, parks, they are established sites and the standard of management is usually high.
3 - Neighbourhood 1	Local play facilities positioned to serve a specific community or population within a settlement. They are less likely to attract significant use from elsewhere in the parish. Typically comprise 3 or 4 items and limited furniture. Rarely has designated parking.
4 - Neighbourhood 2	A small, low value site with 1 or 2 smaller items serving a small parish or immediate area.

- 3) Identify the nature of the hazards and the existing control measures you can put in place to manage these risks. Be honest – it is important that these are practical and achievable measures based on what you can do.

- 4) Score the likelihood of something happening and the severity of the impact if it did, using the matrix provided on the template. The template requires you to identify a value for each criteria (the chance of something happening and the severity of the impact if it did) to give a risk rating.
- 5) Having established the likelihood and the severity, you will be able to multiply the two numbers to get a Risk Rating for users and cleaners.
- 6) The total score is the Risk Value for that set of play areas which will allow you to decide whether you have sufficient measures in place for your play areas to reopen them.

#### **Step 4 : Managing and monitoring**

Once you have established the Risk Rating for your play areas, compare against the chart below to establish whether you are able to reopen each block of play areas. You may find it helpful to reflect on those basic facts established at step 1 as these may help you prioritise a single set, a better way of cleaning or joint working with another provider to ensure some play provision in the parish.

<b>Risk Rating (combined users/cleaner score)</b>	<b>Action</b>
15 – 25 Very High	The play area should not be opened without significantly reducing the risk
10 – 12 High	As above
8 – 9 Moderate	Able to open the play area but additional measures should be considered
4 – 6 Low	Able to open the play area with existing measures
1 – 3 Very low	As above

#### **Step 5 : Publicising your decision**

Once you have reached a decision on the future opening of the play area it is important that this is publicised as widely as possible. If you have to keep a play area closed or partially closed it is vital that you let everyone know why and when this decision will be reviewed.

If you are able to reopen some or all of the play areas, then it is important that everyone knows which play areas are open and your 'ask' for keeping everyone safe. It is helpful to have notices outside the play areas and at the entrance to playing fields to maintain the public message about the importance of using the play areas responsibly.

## **Guidance and useful links**

This guide has been prepared for local councils managing play areas and playgrounds. It is based on UK Government guidance and draws on good practice from a number of other websites from around the world. Links to all of the documents are found below :

### **1. HM Government**

[Government guide on managing playgrounds and outdoor gyms](#)

[Covid-10 Decontamination in non-healthcare settings](#)

### **2. Centre for Disease Control and Prevention**

[Guidance for administrators of parks and recreational facilities](#)

### **3. National Program for Playground Safety**

[Visitor Guide](#)

[Management guide](#)

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