

To: All Local authorities in England

## **Opening Children's Playgrounds during current lockdown**

The government's guidance for owners and operators of children's playgrounds clearly states that children's playgrounds can remain open during the current lockdown ([COVID-19: Guidance for managing playgrounds and outdoor gyms - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-playgrounds-and-outdoor-gyms)).

Despite this we know that some local authorities have chosen to close their playgrounds. We are writing to urge you to keep your playgrounds open or to reopen them if they are closed.

Psychologists, academics, paediatricians, play experts, doctors and scientists have highlighted the evidence that play is vital for the health and wellbeing of children – particularly at a time of unprecedented restrictions on children's daily lives. ([Coronavirus: just letting children play will help them, and their parents, cope \(theconversation.com\)](https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-just-letting-children-play-will-help-them-and-their-parents-cope))

Children and young people are making sacrifices every day during lockdown and the impact is starting to become apparent with increases in mental and physical health issues.

For children, playing outdoors is a form of exercise and exercise is allowed under the rules. We have written to the Government asking for this to be made explicit in the guidelines so that parents, councils and the police can all feel confident that outdoor play is an allowed activity. [Dear PM, outdoor play is essential for children's health and wellbeing \(playingout.net\)](https://playingout.net/dear-pm-outdoor-play-is-essential-for-childrens-health-and-wellbeing)

Unfortunately, children's voices are too often overlooked by policy makers, and their needs and wishes ignored, as they are drowned out by a small number of vocal local residents.

The impact of lockdown is particularly severe for the most disadvantaged children – those growing up in poverty, who may have limited space at home and no garden. Families with disabled children and young people have been particularly hard hit by the lockdown restrictions. For these families, access to playgrounds is often a lifeline. ["It's the only thing keeping us sane!" - Association of Play Industries \(api-play.org\)](https://api-play.org)

We understand that this is not easy, especially if you have pressure from residents complaining about parents gathering, fears about COVID infections and worries around liability.

The government guidance requires that owners and operators of children's playgrounds carry out a COVID-19 risk assessment.

The Health & Safety Executive recommends that owners and operators take a balanced approach – balancing benefits to children against the risks. [Children's play and leisure: promoting a balanced approach \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/childrens-play/)

Experts agree that the risk of COVID transmission outdoors, in areas such as children's playgrounds, is much lower than indoors. [COVID-19 and Children's Play – Play Safety Forum \(wordpress.com\)](#)

Play England has a network of professionals who can support and help you with allaying fears, presenting the facts and spelling out the dire effects of stopping outside play for children. Please get in touch if we can help.

It is vital for children that they get access to outside play. It is low risk and allowed under the current government guidance.

Play England is therefore calling on all local authorities in England to keep playgrounds open to reduce the catastrophic impact of COVID and lockdown on children's physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Yours sincerely,

Anita Grant

Chair of Trustees, Play England

Other Signatories:

Professor David Ball- Middlesex University

Helen Dodd – Professor of Child Psychology

David Yearley- Head of Play Safety Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents

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