

Summary of Association of Play Industries' position on COVID-19: Guidance for managing playgrounds and outdoor gyms



On Tuesday 23 June, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced the next stage of the relaxation of lockdown restrictions which included the re-opening of public playgrounds in England on 04 July.

The previous day the API had been consulted on our opinion on the practicalities of this relaxation and the possible guidance we would recommend. Our position now remains the same as our position then, that placing the entire burden of responsibility on the owner/operators is unworkable and that in our opinion this should largely be a matter for personal/parental responsibility. We believe our position is supported by the evidence contained within the paper **COVID and Children's Play** recently commissioned by the Play Safety Forum (PSF) which concluded that:

- The benefits to children of playing outside bring a host of social, emotional and physical rewards. These have long been undervalued and at this time appear to have been completely ignored. Consequently, children are suffering harm.
- The evidence is that the risks posed by COVID-19 to children playing in outdoor spaces is very low.

On Friday 26 June the Government published its **guidance for managing playgrounds and outdoor gyms**. The API has since been inundated with queries and comments upon the practical applicability of these guidelines; our member companies are eager to help while operators are largely frustrated and concerned that the guidelines may not be workable. We therefore agreed to discuss the concerns directly with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). With direct feedback from operators themselves, we shared specific issues and more general concerns about the wording of the document which implied adherence to the guidelines was mandatory.

We have been having positive discussions with MHCLG in the last 24 hours but we are acutely aware of the timescales that operators are working towards and therefore wish to issue our own view and interpretation on the current guidance.

We believe certain aspects of the guidance, specifically the potential to implement booking systems and the possibility of moving items of equipment, is largely unfeasible. We believe that some of the language used within the guidance would be better changed to reflect the true intent. It is our view that there are two fundamental points:

1. The need for a COVID-19 Risk Assessment (RA) approach is an absolute requirement. However, the RA must consider the practicalities of operating an open use play or fitness facility. The outputs and conclusions of the RA remain the responsibility of the operator.
2. The guidance is not mandatory, and it is for each operator to make their own judgements on what is practical to implement whilst keeping the risk to a minimum.

In recent days we have seen examples where operators have taken a very pragmatic approach to the guidelines and with the impending approach of the 04 July re-opening date, we have decided to share some of these solutions so that other operators could follow suit and enable play areas to re-open on Saturday, as expected by the public.

In the cases cited below, the operators have approached the problem in a similar manner, conducting a Risk Assessment which has determined which elements of the guidelines can be followed and which cannot. The operators have then focused on what is possible within their remit.

Sevenoaks Town Council have reported their approach as follows:

The government public health guidelines are a considerable challenge not only to Sevenoaks Town Council but also all operators of these facilities. The Town Council also needs to be aware of its duty of care both to public and its staff.

The Town Clerk is therefore recommending that a pragmatic approach with clear information to the public about risks is followed – like the approach undertaken for keeping public toilets open. This is subject to the Town Council's insurance company agreeing.

It is not feasible for Sevenoaks Town Council to provide the following:

- Provision of Stewards
- Arrange a booking system
- Relocate equipment for social distancing
- Clean equipment daily
- Provide cleaning equipment
- Create entrance and exits – most play areas have only one gate

Sevenoaks Town Council will carry out the following in relation to the re-opening of Play Areas and Open-Air Gyms:

1. Carry out Risk Assessments including COVID-19 risks
2. Prior to opening carry out safety checks on all sites
3. Prior to opening arrange cleaning and repairs where necessary
4. Produce signage to include the following:

Playground COVID-19 Signage

Scientific advice suggests that the COVID-19 virus can survive for up to several days on some hard surfaces. The risks are reduced when outdoors, where surfaces may be subject to UV light and/or rain. Whilst all possible practical measures have been put in place the user of this equipment does so at their own choice and risk.

- Under 14 years only
- The maximum number of users will be ??
- 1 family member to accompany 1 child
- Please retain 1m distance from other users e.g. pushing swings
- To enable as many children as possible to use the equipment please limit use to ?? minutes
- Please use one-way system
- Use of hand sanitiser gel or wipes is advised when using the equipment
- When using equipment do not touch face
- Consumption of food and drink within play areas is not permitted
- Please use bins provided or take litter home

Outdoor Gym COVID-19 Signage

Scientific advice suggests that the COVID-19 virus can survive for up to several days on some hard surfaces. The risks are reduced when outdoors, where surfaces may be subject to UV light and/or rain. Whilst all possible practical measures have been put in place the user of this equipment does so at their own choice and risk.

- Please retain 1m distance from other users
- To enable as many people as possible to use the equipment please limit use to 30 minutes
- Please use one-way system
- Use of hand sanitiser gel or wipes is advised when using the equipment
- When using equipment do not touch face
- Users are encouraged to bring their own towel and hygiene products to wipe down equipment – please dispose of considerately
- Consumption of food and drink is not permitted
- Please use bins provided or take litter home

Other operators have been able to ascertain details such as suggested area capacity and have added this guidance to signage.

There are examples below of signage produced by Weymouth and Shrewsbury Town Councils:



We believe these to be practical solutions that will allow Play Areas to re-open at the weekend and would urge operators to follow a similar approach.

We are also continuing discussions with MHCLG over the published guidance and will advise further as soon as possible.

We hope this summary is of use. It is not the API's role to provide formal guidance but we hope we have managed to facilitate a useful dialogue that will enable a more reasonable approach.