

Adventure playgrounds and the Covid 19 pandemic

Guidance on infection risk reduction

21 April 2020

Introduction

Some adventure playground settings are now considering opening for single family groups, in particular for families with children who have additional needs. There are, of course, important safety considerations at play – this briefing aims to help playgrounds address these.

What are the risks?

Although the evidence so far is that COVID 19 is predominantly spread through airborne droplets rather than via contaminated surfaces, it is possible that someone who is sick could deposit the virus on a surface which is then touched by someone else, who then touches their face and becomes infected.

The New England Journal of Medicine has [published a study](#) that tested how long the virus can remain stable on different kinds of surfaces. It found that it was still detectable on copper for up to four hours, on cardboard for up to 24 hours, and on plastic and steel for up to 72 hours. [Another source](#) suggested that it may survive on wood for up to 4 days.

The amount of virus does decrease rapidly over time on these surfaces so it is also likely that the risk of infection from touching them would also decrease over time.

In any case it is clear that playgrounds which are open in any capacity must act to minimise the risk of surface-borne transmission between different family groups – and staff or volunteers – using their facilities.

Reducing the risks – minimise, monitor and mitigate

In consultation with playground groups, London Play has put together this briefing as an aid for play settings considering how to minimise the risks to staff and users when opening on a limited basis. Please note that this is for guidance only and all organisations will need to carry out their own risk assessments, specific to their setting.

We propose a three-step approach to minimise, monitor and mitigate the risk of spreading infection between family groups and between staff or volunteers and users.

1 Minimise: the potential for contamination

- Family groups should use the playground at separate times. Note: If any family member is displaying symptoms of Covid 19, the whole family must [self-isolate in accordance with government guidelines](#). Under no circumstances must anyone from the family attend the playground during the isolation period.

- As each family group arrives, all adults, children and staff should wash their hands thoroughly. Ensure there is plenty of soap and water and disposable hand towels available for use.
- Social distancing measures should be observed by anyone present who does not need to be in closer contact with the family group – maintaining a 2m physical distance where possible.
- Provide gloves (and if possible, masks too) for children and carers to wear for the duration of their stay.
- Limit the duration of playground stays to an hour at a time.

2 Monitor: sites of potential contamination

- Ask adult carers to pay attention to areas that they and/or children are in contact with during the play session.
- Provide antiseptic cleaning wipes for adult carers to wipe down any surfaces that have been touched once children move on from them.
- Staff or should check with adult carers on departure that this procedure has been followed.

3 Mitigate: the potential for onward transmission

- Collect and double bag gloves (and masks if used) from departing groups and leave in a secure area for 72 hours prior to disposal.
- Ensure adequate time is allowed between groups to allow for cleaning – staff to wear disposable gloves and use disposable cleaning cloths
- Use a spray disinfectant to clean areas of the playground that have been used by groups, following government guidelines on decontamination in non-healthcare settings and paying particular attention to high touch areas like handrails, door handles and grab points on play equipment including ropes.
- Double bag all gloves and cleaning cloths etc and leave in a secure area for 72 hours before disposing of in general rubbish.

Conclusion

Clearly it is not practical or possible to wash down an entire adventure playground after each and every use. Many of the surfaces in adventure playgrounds are rough and difficult to disinfect effectively. It is also important to understand that like any risk, it is not possible to completely eliminate the risk of transmission of Covid 19. But the benefits to certain families of being able to have access to adventure play facilities will be significant and by following the guidelines above and carrying out your own risk assessment in relation to your specific setting, we believe that it should be possible to strike a happy balance.

Links for further reading

[Government guidelines on decontamination in non-healthcare settings](#)

[Self-isolation advice](#)

[How long Covid 19 lives on surfaces](#) (WebMD article)

[How long does coronavirus live on different surfaces](#) (Guardian article)

[New England Journal of Medicine study](#)