

30 June 2020



Dear London borough play street leaders

The time is right to restart play streets

We are writing to leaders in all London boroughs that offer residents the opportunity to open their streets for play, to recommend that you allow play streets to restart in your borough from July 4th. This is in line with government directives on playgrounds, community centres and many other aspects of life which will return to some version of 'normal' on the same day.

We hope you agree that this should be an uncontroversial decision to make, but should you need to provide additional justification or reassurance to colleagues in coming to this conclusion, here we outline five reasons why play streets should restart now:

- **Restarting play streets is in line with government guidance on playgrounds**

A play street is legally designated as a public playground for the duration of the session. Playgrounds are opening on July 4th and if play streets follow suit, this will effectively open additional public space for the purpose of play.

- **Play streets are low risk for Covid-19 transmission**

Play streets offer children the opportunity to play outside and be physically active, while presenting a lower risk than public playgrounds. For example, there is no need for children or adults to travel to take part. Nor is there any high-touch fixed play equipment to risk surface transmission of the virus. Equipment which is used can be easily cleaned and/or sharing minimised; and most street games tend to be low-contact or can be easily adapted to improve social distancing. All those taking part can use their own kitchen and toilet facilities. Finally, parents are on hand to monitor interactions and intervene to minimise risk (as they will be in municipal playgrounds); while adults themselves are more than capable of maintaining a distance from one another.

- **Harness community spirit built during lockdown**

Community spirit has grown during the pandemic as neighbours have self-organised to support one another through lockdown. Many of these new street-based groups currently exist in a largely 'virtual' sense, through WhatsApp groups and the like. We believe that people want to come together – as shown by the enthusiasm for the NHS clapping etc. – and London Play is receiving enquiries from people who are interested in starting or restarting play streets. Now is the time to consolidate this and play streets offer a simple and cheap way to do this. The benefits in terms of improved community cohesion and better mental and physical health for both adults and children are indisputable. Older people and those who have been shielding have been particularly isolated during the

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lockdown; and will appreciate the opportunity to be able to chat to neighbours from the safe distance of their doorstep or front garden too.

- **The benefits of children playing outside together generally outweigh the risks**

The risk of children playing together outside is minimal – this is a view supported by the chairman of the British Safety Council. Children are less likely to catch coronavirus and rarely get seriously ill when they do. Mounting evidence suggests that children’s role in transmitting the virus is also limited. Transmission in outdoor settings is known to be far less than it is indoors. Unless children are themselves vulnerable or living with vulnerable family members, we believe that the risks of them playing outdoors together are outweighed by the myriad benefits of play.

Children have been the invisible victims of this pandemic and the ensuing lockdown. Many are still not back at school and they have been unable to play with their friends for three long months. Studies point to a growing mental health crisis among young people. Opportunities to play and socialise together safely will go some way towards alleviating this.

- **Guidance issued by London Play is available to you and residents**

We enclose our risk benefit guidance, which will aid organisers in further minimising the risks of transmission of Covid-19 through play street activity – both during playing out sessions and during the period of consultation for new play streets. As we stress in this guidance, it will not be ‘business as usual’ on play streets, but they are easily adapted to the ‘new normal’ that we are facing in all aspects of life over coming months. We hope that this will give organisers and councils the confidence to go ahead with play streets this summer.

Finally, a note about Car Free Day. In the past two years, Car Free Day has been an opportunity for people across London to trial a play street and ‘swap their car for a spacehopper’. This year planned larger events in central London and in borough centres may have to be curtailed or cancelled. But one positive aspect of lockdown that has been appreciated by many has been quieter, safer, cleaner streets and the opportunity to see the potential for using them differently. We believe that play streets are a ‘responsible’ way of marking Car Free Day and of promoting the opportunity for people to try out a play street before committing to a more permanent arrangement. We will let you know more about this when conditions allow.

But in the meantime, we are here to help should you need any additional support or guidance. Please let us know when you agree to reinstate play streets and we can share the good news.

Yours sincerely,

Fiona Sutherland

Deputy director
For and on behalf of London Play trustees