

## **Re-opening Village and Community Halls Step 2 – Opening for Pre-Schools**

**This guidance is provided for village hall management committees. It is not a substitute for Government guidance or professional or legal advice. It should be read in conjunction with the information provided in the links below.**

[The COVID-19 Secure guidelines are contained in the Government Roadmap.](#)

The Department of Education guidance is provided in 2 documents:

[Actions for Educational and Childcare Settings](#) and [Safe Working in Educational and Childcare Settings](#)

Other Government and HSE Guidance:

[Government Guidance for employers](#)

[Posters for Employers and Businesses](#)

[Poster certifying steps have been taken to ensure premises are COVID-19 secure](#)

[Working Safely Guide](#)

[Talking with your Workers](#)

["Catch it, Bin it, Kill it" Poster](#)

Legionella risk:

[Document 1](#)

[Document 2](#)

This Guidance will be kept under review please ensure you are using the most up to date version.

## 1. The Step by Step approach

The Government has laid out its recovery plans in 'Our Plans to Rebuild' (see link at end). These plans are contingent on the "R" rate of CV 19 infection not increasing. They may be adjusted or rescinded either nationally or, possibly, in certain parts of the country in the light of the situation.

In order for Steps 2 and 3 to be implemented the Public Health Regulations also need to be amended, which currently stipulate that a Community Centre must remain closed "except where it is used to provide essential voluntary activities or urgent public support services". A Pre-school in a community hall which serves only the families of key workers and vulnerable children falls into this exception, serving other families does not.

This information is being issued in anticipation that it is likely that the Regulations will be amended by 1<sup>st</sup> June, when the Government's aim is that nurseries and Pre-schools will re-open to more children. It is based on information available at 19<sup>th</sup> May 2020. However, new Government guidance is emerging regularly so this information may be updated in accordance with changes to that guidance. Please note that any advice or information provided here should not be taken as a substitute for professional legal or other advice.

It is anticipated that information about re-opening halls for wider activity (Step 3) should be available by mid-June.

Those responsible for managing halls are advised to make sure they are on the mailing or social media list for their ACRE Network member so that they are alerted to any changes, to keep monitoring their ACRE Network member website for any updates or check the gov.uk coronavirus website.

**Step 1:** From 13<sup>th</sup> May certain outdoor facilities can be used by members of the same household and one other person, e.g. tennis courts and bowling greens. Public play equipment must remain closed and will not be available to Pre-Schools.

**Step 2:** The Government aim is that nurseries and Pre-Schools open from 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020, providing the infection rate does not increase. **This information covers only Step 2.**

**Step 3:** The aim is that public buildings can open from, at the earliest, 4<sup>th</sup> July but it is unlikely crowded events e.g. theatrical productions, wedding receptions will be permitted until later. ACRE will issue separate guidance, in consultation with Government.

## 2. Government guidance re-opening Pre-Schools – Step 2

**From 1<sup>st</sup> June – The Government is asking Preschools and nurseries to re-open and begin welcoming back all children below statutory school age.** Where a setting does not allow small groups of children to be kept at a safe distance apart, Pre-school managers may have to introduce a temporary cap on numbers to ensure safety is prioritised. In this case the focus first has to be given to priority groups i.e. vulnerable children and children of key workers, then to 3- and 4-year olds, followed by younger age groups.

Government guidance is that children should be encouraged to attend where there are no shielding concerns for the child or their household, so that they can gain the

educational and wellbeing benefits of attending. If, however, a young child or staff member lives in a household with someone who is clinically vulnerable, they are advised not to attend.

Every Pre-school has been advised to carry out a Covid-19 Risk Assessment before opening so that sensible measures can be put in place to control the risks associated with Covid-19 for children and staff. Pre-schools will be expected to consult their staff.

**Hall committees need to be aware that 4 key points of the Covid-19 Secure Guidelines apply to both Pre-School and Village Hall: They are:**

- **Minimising contact with individuals who are unwell:** Pre-School staff and children should not attend if they have symptoms or are self-isolating due to symptoms in their household. The same applies to hall cleaners or volunteers.
- **Clean your hands often:** Sanitiser should be provided at entry and exit points, sanitiser and/or running water, soap and paper towels in toilets and kitchens.
- **Respiratory hygiene (catch it, bin it, kill it):** Everyone needs to be encouraged to avoid touching their mouth, eyes, and nose. Tissues need to be provided and disposed of into a disposable rubbish bag, then hands cleaned. A poster is available. See opening section for link.
- **Regular cleaning of surfaces that are touched frequently:** including door handles, handrails, tabletops, play equipment, toys, electronic devices e.g. phones, keyboards, sinks, toilet areas, kitchen surfaces. Ordinary domestic products can be used. Use of toys which are difficult to clean should be avoided.

**Committees also need to be aware that Pre-schools will need to comply with the following requirements:**

- **Minimise contact and mixing,** through ensuring children and staff mix in small groups where possible, which may mean placing a limit on numbers. If possible, avoid cleaners and others entering the premises when Pre-school is open. The usual safeguarding procedures also apply.
- **Ensure areas are well ventilated:** keeping windows and doors open and/or using outdoor spaces where possible.
- **Prepare and serve drinks and meals safely:** access to the usual kitchen facilities will be required.
- **Settings are encouraged to reduce "pinch points":** e.g. by staggering mealtimes and times when parents drop and collect children at the start and end of the day. As far as possible parents and carers should not enter early years premises.
- **Disposal of PPE:** Sometimes Pre-School staff or children may need to wear PPE or disposable face coverings e.g. where children spit. This can be disposed of as normal domestic waste unless the wearer has, or has been in close contact with someone with, Covid-19 symptoms, in which case it needs to be double-bagged, marked and stored securely for 72 hours before disposal.

### **3. Information for hall committees**

For hall committees who hire to preschools and nurseries within the building, this will mean a planned, limited re-opening of the hall. It does not mean the hall will be open

for any other use or to any other hirer except for essential services such as distribution of medicines.

As part of opening after lockdown, businesses will have to display self-certification that they are complying with re-opening guidance. This is likely to be required of Village Halls and will help users feel confident about using the premises, so it is advisable to start using it when Pre-school re-opens. See opening section for link.

**Close working with the Pre-School is advisable to ensure that each party understand their own responsibilities.** It is not possible to set out here arrangements for every situation. It would be wise to check whether any of the usual terms (including charges) of the Occupation Licence or Hiring Agreement need to be temporarily adjusted, perhaps until the hall opens to other users, and any adjustment agreed in writing e.g. relating to locking/unlocking, storage of equipment, cleaning. It is also recommended that hall trustees and Pre-School share their Risk Assessments with each other, to reduce anxiety and help avoid any misunderstandings.

Village hall trustees must consider the 4 Key Points of Covid-19 Secure guidelines in 2. above and should undertake their own Risk Assessment to ensure that their staff (cleaner, caretaker) and trustees are safe. If this cannot be done because hall officers or staff are shielding or otherwise not available the responsibility for risk assessment and implementation of actions can be delegated to Pre-school Managers if, following discussion, they are willing to take this on. Alternatively, the services of a competent individual or company can be engaged to carry this out.

In addition to their ordinary risk assessment, the hall committee should follow HSE advice for an employer's Risk Assessment for Covid-19, which involves:

- Identifying what work activity or situations might cause transmission of the virus.
- Thinking about who could be at risk.
- Deciding how likely it is that someone could be exposed.
- Acting to remove the activity or situation, or if this is not possible, control the risk.

## **4. Frequently Asked Questions:**

**Q: Will our hall have to allow a Pre-School to use the premises?**

**A:** The expectation is that a village hall will use its best endeavors to allow a Pre-School to re-open, but it is not compulsory. If it will not be possible for trustees or staff to implement any of the practical actions listed above, discuss the situation with Pre-school Managers. If they are willing to carry them out, agree this in writing. If not, the hall may have to remain closed until suitable arrangements can be made.

**Q: If an outbreak of Covid-19 is traced to our hall, will we, trustees, or staff, be held liable?**

**A:** If those responsible for managing the hall use reasonable endeavours to ensure the hall is cleaned and maintained in accordance with the 4 key points of the Covid-19 Secure Guidelines given in Section 2 above this should reduce very substantially the risk of being held liable. Providing this is the case any liability should be addressed in the usual way by the hall's public liability cover and any associated requirements as to Risk Assessment.

**Q: Pre-school want to use the hall but pay a reduced fee because their numbers will be lower, and they will have more cleaning. We cannot**

**afford this because we have fixed costs to pay and we have additional cleaning. Do we have to allow it to open at agree a reduced fee if it is going to cost us more than the income?**

**A:** While a charitable hall would normally only be able to subsidise a charitable Pre-school, not a Pre-school operated as a private business, Government guidance encourages the sharing of any uplift in rate relief with Pre-school operators, who would be entitled to it if in their own premises. That aside, it is up to trustees or committees responsible for managing charitable halls to determine what is in the best interests of their hall charity in the light of these exceptional circumstances and predicted financial situation. See also Section 6 as to grants and funding.

## **5. Before re-opening the hall for preschool, go through the following checklist:**

	<b>Task</b>	<b>Done</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Advise the hall's insurers</b> when the premises will be re-opening	
<b>2.</b>	<b>Discuss with the Pre-School any adjustments to hire arrangements eg the hours they are likely to be open and subsequent cleaning arrangements:</b> Who will undertake regular cleaning where? Timing/frequency pending return of other hirers? If the hall cleaner will be attending, arrangements for moving or stowing any Pre-School equipment need to be discussed, which might be left in situ in the absence of other hires. Note that where a child/staff fall unwell on the premises with a suspected case, additional PHE guidance on cleaning for non-healthcare settings should be followed (requiring disposable PPE, double bagging): Will the PS do this or alert the hall cleaner? Agree any changes in writing.	
<b>3.</b>	<b>Flush through the water system, five minutes for each tap or shower head,</b> to remove any risk of legionella or other bacterial build up and ensure U bends are full. Keep clear of spray and wipe up afterwards with household disinfectant.	
<b>4.</b>	<b>Carry out both the routine health and safety risk assessment</b> of the whole premises, and a risk assessment to ensure the hall complies with Covid-19 Secure Guidelines (above). Ensure PAT <b>testing</b> is up to date and visually check leads, ensure fridge/freezer is working at correct temperature, heating, and hot water system operational. Ensure internet is working. Cut grass. Identify and address any items requiring attention e.g. light bulbs failed, trip hazards.	
<b>5.</b>	<b>Ensure the Fire Safety Risk Assessment and routine fire safety checks are up to date</b> (eg fire exit doors are clear, not sticking, fire extinguishers serviced, any alarm system working).	
<b>6.</b>	<b>Ensure the caretaker/cleaner has appropriate PPE</b> (ordinary overalls which can be taken off on leaving and washed, plus plastic gloves, are usually sufficient) to undertake a deep clean of the hall before it re-opens and for the subsequent cleaning regime to follow. Ordinary household products can be used. Contractors should use their own but an employee should be provided with the necessary equipment.	
<b>7.</b>	<b>Arrange to clean all parts of the premises likely to be</b>	

	<b>accessed by the Pre-School.</b>	
<b>8.</b>	<b>Discuss with your caretaker/cleaner/contractor any changes in work patterns</b> required to ensure the hall meets the Covid 19 Secure guidelines. HSE provides a leaflet of things to discuss with an employee.	
<b>9.</b>	<b>Provide hand wash facilities and paper towels:</b> (hand dryers are not recommended for use at the present time as they could disperse droplets containing the virus into the air). Liaise with the Pre-School about which organisation provides hand sanitiser at the entrance and exit routes, tissues, soap, toilet rolls, cleaning products. Contact surfaces will need to be regularly cleaned by PS during opening.	
<b>10.</b>	<b>Consider "Engaged/vacant" signage</b> at the entrance to male and female toilets to limit the number of people within these areas at any one time.	
<b>11.</b>	<b>Provide signage:</b> Both the certificate that the premises comply with Covid 19 secure guidelines and posters encouraging everyone to increase awareness of good handwashing techniques and hygiene – samples are available on the HSE and PHE websites.	
<b>12.</b>	<b>Think about social distancing arrangements in corridors and at entrance and exits:</b> Discuss with Pre-School plans for encouraging social distancing at drop off and collection. Consider using tape to mark out a 2m distance outside and inside the entrance, and outside fire exits, to encourage parents, children, and staff to wait their turn to enter and exit the hall. This will be useful when the hall re-opens for other hirers.	

## 6. Resources and further help

The Retail, Hospitality & Leisure Grant of £10,000 (£25,000 for premises with a rateable value over £15,000) available from your Local Authority can be used against costs incurred in re-opening. A hall which is ineligible for this e.g. a church hall may seek Discretionary Grant support from their local authority. Under the Extended Retail Discount (ERD) most halls should also receive 100% rate relief for 2020/21. Please contact your ACRE Network member if you have any queries about accessing such support.

Some charities are using Crowdfunding campaigns to raise funds to keep going. Financial support may also be available from parish and town councils or from local charitable or National Lottery funds where a charity is facing financial hardship and risk of closure because of Covid-19.

### And finally:

We are grateful to ACRE Board Member, Louise Beaton, for monitoring the current situation for village halls and her assistance in guiding the ACRE Network. Also to Sue Gibson, RCC Essex, for her contribution to this guidance and to all the hall advisers across the ACRE Network for comments and suggests on what is needed at this time.

If your hall has suggestions or experience to share about re-opening a Pre-School on hall premises, please let your ACRE Network member know.

**Deborah Clarke, Village Halls and Rural Evidence Manager, ACRE**