



RPII Statement

Re-opening of playgrounds and government guidance



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Introduction

With the recent government announcement that playgrounds and outdoor gyms can reopen on the 4th July, understandably there have been a lot of questions and concerns arising from owners/operators of these kinds of facilities and members of the general public with regards to specific requirements and risk assessments that need to be in place.

The government has produced some specific guidance which is available here:
[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-playgrounds-and-outdoor-gyms](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-playgrounds-and-outdoor-gyms/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-playgrounds-and-outdoor-gyms)



The RPII would like to remind owner/operators and members of the general public that just because the government has stated that playgrounds can open, this does not mean that they have to or that they will necessarily all be open on the 4th July.

If you are an owner/operator of one of these types of facilities then you have a legal responsibility to produce a site specific risk assessment and put measures in place, using the guidance provided as a tool to assist. It should be noted that not every play area is the same and that individual risk assessments will be required for each and every play area that you manage.

Failure to complete a risk assessment which takes account of COVID-19 or completing a risk assessment but failing to put in place sufficient measures to manage the risk of COVID-19, could constitute a breach of health and safety law.

The actions the enforcing authority can take include the provision of specific advice to employers to support them to achieve the required standard, through to issuing

enforcement notices to help secure improvements. Serious breaches and failure to comply with enforcement notices can constitute a criminal offence, with serious fines and even imprisonment for up to 2 years. There is also a wider system of enforcement, which includes specific obligations and conditions for licensed premises.

The RPII have identified what we believe to be some of the key information and have provided some comments throughout this document **highlighted in blue**. However we must remind owners/operators that you will need to read the full guidance information provided for yourselves in order to inform your own decisions and make judgements based on your own site conditions.

Purpose of Guidance

The following information is very important as it sets out the purpose of the information provided



Owners and operators responsible for playgrounds and outdoor gyms will have discretion over when they consider it safe to open for activity permitted by legislation, and **may decide to keep these areas closed should they feel they are not able to facilitate their safe use**. It is recognised that owners and operators will require time to prepare for the safe reopening of playgrounds/outdoor gyms.



Each owner/operator will need to apply this guidance to the facility or facilities they are responsible for, depending on the circumstances, layout and design. This will include taking account of factors including size, equipment, and how it is organised, operated, and managed. **They will need to consider implementing processes to protect the users of the equipment and the staff responsible for its maintenance and cleaning.**



To help owners and operators decide what actions to take, and to ensure the equipment in their playground and outdoor gym is safe, they must carry out an appropriate **COVID-19 risk assessment**, just as they would for other health and safety related hazards. **This risk assessment must be completed in consultation with unions or workers.**

Key principles for safely re-opening playgrounds and outdoor gyms

The following information outlines key things that need to be in place / considered prior to re-opening these kinds of facilities



Owners and operators of playgrounds or outdoor gyms are reminded that in addition to preparations to ensure they are COVID-19 Secure, there will be general maintenance requirements. Owners/operators must ensure playground and/or exercise equipment is safe to use and that risks from damaged or defective equipment are addressed before opening.

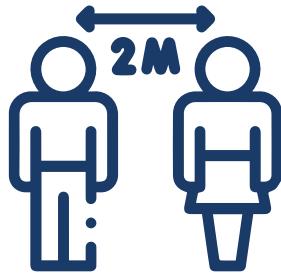
The RPII released a statement last week covering this issue. We are aware that many organisations have halted or reduced the frequency of inspections of these sites – it is very important that sites are thoroughly inspected and maintenance issues that affect the safety or safe operation of the equipment are addressed prior to re-opening any facility.



All owners or operators of playgrounds and outdoor gyms should consider how to put in place measures to support social distancing such as signs to remind users of the need for and adherence to social distancing in accordance with existing government guidance. In implementing measures, owners and operators should acknowledge that adults and children with certain conditions will find social distancing difficult.

With this the guidance provided gives some ideas that could be considered and we have commented against each of these below. Many of the ideas provided appear to centre around providing information to users to enable them to make their own decisions, rather than physical measures to control users.

Potential measures to facilitate social distancing



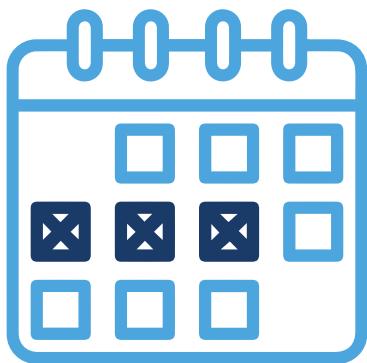
To include:

1

If an enclosed area, owners and operators should identify an advisory limit on the maximum number of users able to use a playground or outdoor gym area at any one time and use signs to communicate this. RPII - signage can be provided however this is not something that can be managed on unstaffed sites; in terms of numbers we recommend calculating this based on one active user per individual equipment item and one supervisor.



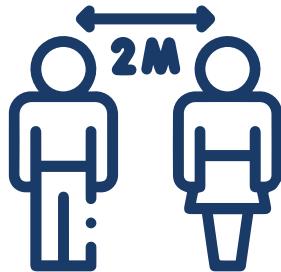
Introduce a Booking System



2

Where practicable, owners/operators could implement a booking system so that users can book a slot to use the equipment. RPII – This is something that can only be achieved on staffed / supervised sites; this is most likely intended for commercial sites such as farm parks where there will be staff present on site.

Potential measures to facilitate social distancing

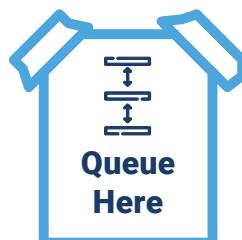


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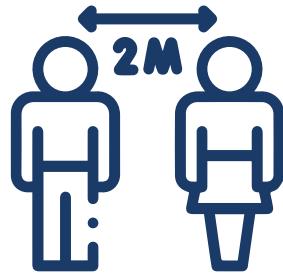
3

Limiting the number of users able to use a piece of equipment to minimise the transmission risk of COVID-19.
Potential measures include:

- Signs to communicate maximum number of users at one time.
RPII – this is not really feasible for individual items and we recommend it is covered with the general site signage.
- Request those using the play area to only have 1 family member accompanying a child.
RPII – this can be covered by general site signage and utilising social media outlets to make the public aware.
- Limiting the available number of seats on equipment or numbers of swings available to promote social distancing, including for parents, carers or guardians who might push children on swings for example.
RPII – we recommend one seat per swing bay. This can be achieved quite easily however it will be quite time consuming for larger operators with multiple sites.
- Setting a time limit and using signs to communicate this to users, parents, guardians or carers.
RPII – this can be covered by general site signage on unstaffed sites however it cannot be enforced for anything other than a staffed site.
- Using adjacent space for queues or waiting areas for users, parents, guardians and carers using barriers, markings or signs where it is safe to do so. When implementing a queue or waiting area, consideration must be taken of its impact on the surrounding space and ensure it does not impede other users or pedestrians, particularly considering those with visual or hearing impairments, mobility problems and invisible disabilities.
RPII – this is something that can only really be achieved on staffed/supervised sites; this is most likely intended for commercial sites such as farm parks where there will be staff present on site.



Potential measures to facilitate social distancing



To include:



4

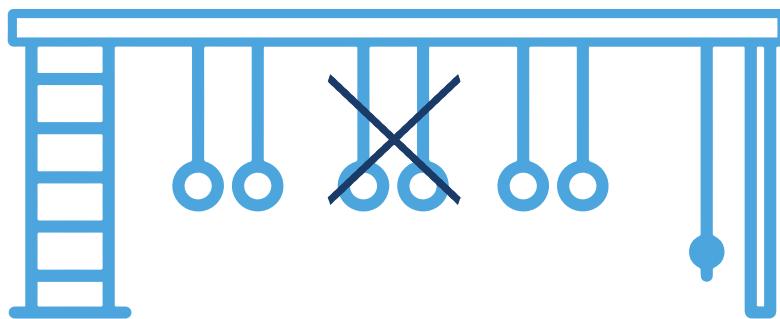
For outdoor gyms, the introduction of a clearly marked one way system around the fixtures/ machines, to help prevent users from coming into close contact with each other.

RPII – this is something that will need to be considered on a site specific basis as it will be determined by the equipment layout, however it will be quite difficult to achieve and cannot be enforced. Signage could be provided.

5

For outdoor gyms where machines and equipment are less than 2 metres apart, pieces of equipment should be moved to allow social distancing measures to be adhered to if possible. If not possible, 1 metre distance with risk mitigation is acceptable. The mitigations should be set out in the risk assessment.

RPII – it is not at all possible to move equipment that is ground fixed; signage can be provided to recommend social distancing, or some items of equipment closed to prevent use. We do not feel that there is any other way to mitigate the risk on an unstaffed site.



Cleaning and Hygiene



Owners/operators are advised to manage any potential risk, cleaning high traffic touch points frequently. This could include cleaning regimes for:

- Playground equipment for children, usually up to age 14, such as slides monkey bars and climbing frames
- Semi enclosed playhouses or huts for small children
- Enclosed crawl through 'tunnels' or tube slides
- Exercise bars and machine handles on outdoor gym equipment
- Entry and exit points such as gates
- Seating areas such as benches and picnic tables
- Refuse areas/bins



RPII – Owners and operators should encourage effective sanitation by users, parents, guardians and carers.

The above guidance is going to be very difficult to achieve for larger operators of unstaffed sites. We advise that individual and site-specific risk assessments will be necessary to cover this aspect.

RPII – For smaller more rural sites with low usage levels, it may be possible to provide a cleansing station and encourage parents / supervisors to undertake the cleaning themselves. For larger destination parks, you could consider only opening these sites on certain days and introducing an adequate cleaning programme. Bins could be covered, and signage provided encouraging the public to take their litter home.



RPII – Outdoor gyms are intended for adult use and users could be encouraged to clean these items themselves prior to using.

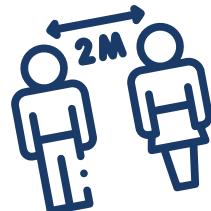


Consideration should be given to:

1

Using signs and posters:

- promote cleaning of equipment by users, parents, guardians and carers, particularly where there are clear touch points such as swing rockers, see saws, machine handles or exercise bars
- encouraging outdoor gym users to bring their own towel and hygiene products and wipe down equipment after use
- encouraging parents to bring hand sanitiser gel or wipes to clean their children's hands
- to encourage hand hygiene with including washing/sanitising hands more often than usual, for 20 seconds using soap and water or approved gel and foam sanitiser, particularly at the beginning and end of play
- to advise users (or parents of users) not to touch their faces, and to cough or sneeze into a tissue or arm when a tissue is not available
- to remind adults and children not to put their mouths on equipment or their hands in their mouths
- to promote and remind users, parents, guardians and carers of the need for social distancing



When communicating safety messages owners/operators should ensure they are able to reach those with hearing or vision impairments. Consideration should also be given on how to assist those with disabilities with complying with the changes.

RPII – with regards to vision impairments we do not see how this can be practically implemented; if braille signage is provided its presence would need to be communicated somehow and encouraging users to touch this would seem counterintuitive as it would provide a focus for transmission. Hearing impairments are not an issue if signage is provided.



Consideration should be given to:

2

Providing more waste facilities and more frequent rubbish collection RPII – this is going to be a strain for larger operators and as such, we would advise against this and encourage the public to take their litter home. It may be feasible for smaller operators or commercially operated sites with staff.



3

Where practicable, providing hand sanitiser (automated where possible) or hand washing facilities at the entry and exit points, in addition to public toilets/washrooms.
RPII – this advice appears to be aimed at staffed playgrounds - this is going to be difficult for larger operators with multiple sites and could create problems in terms of theft, vandalism and misuse in densely populated areas. For unstaffed, publicly accessible playgrounds clear advice should be given through signage to encourage users to provide their own effective handwashing and sanitising.



4

Using disposable paper towels in handwashing facilities where possible.
RPII – this appears to be most likely directed towards staffed, supervised sites such as farm parks.



NOTE 1: Where signage is mentioned above please bear in mind the following:
Signage should be visible to all users, not present a hazard in itself, and should be checked during routine inspections to ensure it remains legible and effective

NOTE 2: If the owner/operator is not confident that they can open the facility safely then it should remain closed