

Recess & COVID-19

Position Statement

The Importance of Recess

It is important to ensure that students have time and space in the school day to connect with others in activities that allow for meaningful and playful engagement.¹

Recess is a necessary break in the day for optimizing a child's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development.¹ It is important to keep recess as normal as possible to balance infection prevention with overall mental and physical health of students.

During outdoor activities, such as recess, physical distancing is likely not practical to enforce in elementary school children, especially during periods of play², but should be encouraged as much as possible. Cohorting and staggered group access to playgrounds are an additional strategy that can be used to facilitate interactions, while minimizing the number of potential exposures. Interaction, such as playing and socializing, is central to child development and should be encouraged.²

Given the many physical, social and emotional benefits of recess, withholding recess for any reason (e.g. as a consequence for missed school work or poor classroom or lunchroom behavior) should not be used as a disciplinary tool.¹

All children should feel safe, included, and able to experience meaningful connections during the school day.¹

Safe Recess Practices¹

- If physical distancing (2m or 6ft) cannot be maintained outdoors, face coverings are required⁴
- Face coverings are required for all students in Grades 1-12. Reasonable exceptions will apply. Students in Kindergarten will continue to be encouraged but will not be required to wear masks.⁴
- Allocate separate bins of equipment for each class to be used only during recess. Clean equipment after each cohort or twice daily. More in-depth cleaning at the beginning or end of day is recommended.
- Do not allow children to bring equipment from home.
- Offer a variety of outside spaces where different activities can take place, including quiet, creative, and solo activity spaces.
- Create areas or zones as a way to help organize the space by activity type, such as skipping, chalking, creative free play, dancing or sports. This will help with equipment management and cleaning, provide comfort to children who may be feeling socially anxious, and minimize crowding.
- Minimize contact activity during recess to encourage physical distancing.
- Add handwashing stations to be used before, during and after each recess and model their use.

- Playground structures do not need to be cleaned or disinfected between uses, but it is recommended that they be used by one cohort at a time.⁵ (*Verify if your board is allowing playground structure use - see guidelines for cleaning/disinfecting.*)
- It is not advisable to wear a mask during intense cardio vascular endurance activities. Plan accordingly to ensure that vigorous intensity activities are only done in areas where masks would not be required such as when physically distant outdoors.⁵

Supporting a Safe and Healthy Recess¹

- Students may be more energetic, aggressive, or withdrawn, and they may have less capacity to self-regulate, resolve their own conflicts, or figure out how to play together.
- Some students will need help getting connected (for example, some may need help to create meaningful connections with other students, staff and their environment; some may need help to feel a sense of belonging). Advise recess staff so they are prepared to support students.
- Structured or sedentary activities, like watching movies or activity break videos, do not provide students free choice and peer interactions.
- Provide leadership opportunities for students or involve students in the planning and organizing of recess games, inclusion, equipment management, fair play, physical distancing and hygiene practices to minimize the spread of COVID-19.

Traditional Recess Games Modified

- For games where multiple students would touch the same object (e.g. four-square where students are all touching the same ball, skipping where students take turns spinning the rope, or soccer), ensure students wash their hands afterwards, and regularly disinfect the equipment.
- Stencil games such as hopscotch (where students would each have their own rock/object) could be allowed, with physical distancing encouraged.
- Tag is not recommended as children have to be in close proximity to another person. (A typical adaptation like using pool noodles would not be recommended as they are difficult to clean due to their porous surfaces.)

Recess Game Resources and Links

- [CIRA: Fair & Square](#) and [Bare Naked Games](#)
- Playworks [Safe Return to Play Guide](#)
- [Asphalt Green: Rep It Out! Games for Social Distancing](#)
- [21 Social Distancing Games and Safe Activities for Kids to Do This Summer](#)
- PHE Canada: [Initiate Recess](#) and [Return to School PHE Guidelines](#) and [Physical Education Activities](#)

References

¹[Global Statement on Recess](#) (Global Recess Alliance)

²[Sick Kids Guidance for Schools Reopening](#) (July 29, 2020)

³[Guide to reopening Ontario Schools](#) (Ministry of Education)

⁴[COVID-19: reopening schools](#) (Ministry of Education)

⁵Toronto Public Health [Guidance for RE-Opening Schools Jk to Grade 12](#) Revised Feb252021