

## Madingley playground during the Covid19 pandemic – January 19, 2021

The purpose of this document is firstly to outline our understanding of the public health guidance issued by the Government with respect to the ongoing Covid19 pandemic and the risks of transmission of the virus. Secondly, we set out guidelines for when the playground should be open - and with what restrictions - and when it should be closed.

### The current situation

The UK is in the midst of a health crisis greater than any experienced in our lifetime. To quote from the GOV.UK website,

*“The government has today (15 January 2021) announced emergency border measures to prevent the spread of concerning new variants of coronavirus (COVID-19) into the UK, such as those first identified in Brazil and South America, and to protect us against the risk of as yet unidentified new strains. - - - This urgent action is in response to increasing concern over the transmissibility and virulence of new strains evolving internationally. It will also ensure that the government is able to protect the progress being made on the country’s vaccination programme.”*

Furthermore, it is now clear that the virus can be transmitted by people, including children, who are not showing any symptoms.

### Background

In the early stages of the pandemic, we were led to believe that touching surfaces contaminated by the virus was a significant route of transmission. Therefore, any shared equipment or other objects could spread the virus if used by someone who was infected and then used by another person at a different time. Other routes considered important were droplet spread, e.g. being coughed or sneezed over and possible aerosol transmission (breathing in tiny particles containing virus in the air). This led the PC to debate whether the playground should be open or remain closed after the end of the first lockdown (after the government was permitting playgrounds in general to re-open). We agreed that it could be opened provided that the metal and plastic surfaces on the play equipment were cleaned weekly. (Just before the recent lockdown we changed to a fortnightly clean during the quieter winter months.) Six teams of volunteers have undertaken this task in order that children from the village and surrounding area could play as safely as possible. Notices were put up beforehand with regulations -- for example that a maximum of ten people could be in the playground at any one time -- and clear advice was given about the importance of hand cleansing before and after playing.

Subsequent evidence and scientific discussion, much of which has been covered in the mainstream media, has suggested that major routes of Covid19 transmission are droplet and aerosol. This means that gathering in indoor environments without adequate ventilation is the highest risk scenario for virus transmission. Many studies have effectively shown how, without effective ventilation and the wearing of masks, a build-up of virus particles indoors makes infection likely. (If we think about the build-up of smoke in pubs before smoking was banned and think of the smoke as a Covid19-contaminated aerosol, this

it is easy to imagine.) There is still a risk of transmission from touching contaminated surfaces, but in real world settings this does not seem to be a major route of transmission.

### **At present**

The current Government Covid19 website emphasises the importance of fresh air and ventilation to disperse any airborne particles. Official advice about exercising no longer includes an instruction that playgrounds should close:

*'You should minimise time spent outside your home, but you can leave your home to exercise. This should be limited to once per day, and you should not travel outside your local area... You can exercise in a public outdoor place.... Public outdoor places include..... playgrounds.'*

*'This should be limited to once per day, and you should not travel outside your local area. You should maintain [social distancing](#).*

*See [exercising](#): Playgrounds are primarily open for use by children who do not have access to private outdoor space, like their own garden. Although you can take your children to a playground for exercise, you must not socialise with other people while there.'*

(last up-dated 14 Jan 2021)

Plainly, if it is a right for adults to exercise in so many ways it would be wrong to prohibit children from exercising appropriately in a fenced off space which is exclusively for their use. In permitting this we are acting in line with Government guidance. Toddlers can safely run and go on the swings; older children can let off steam with a football. Parents don't have to worry about traffic or deep water.

It remains for the Parish Council to determine appropriate permissions and restrictions depending on the prevalence of Covid19 in the local community at any one time. In this context, it is necessary to consider a number of possible scenarios and the decisions that should be taken in each case.

### **Scenario 1 (Open for one Madingley family/child-support bubble)**

During government lockdowns, when Covid19 rates are rising in Cambridgeshire and the government is requesting people to exercise locally, we should exclude children and families from outside the village and restrict the use of the playground to one Madingley family or support bubble at a time, with a request to limit the period of exercise to half an hour if another family is waiting. (Alternatively, families could arrange a rota between themselves.)

### **Scenario 2 (Open for two Madingley families/bubbles)**

When the infection curve is flattening, we can permit a maximum of two Madingley families at a time but continue to exclude families from outside the village.

### **Scenario 3 (Open to all children with a maximum of ten people altogether)**

When infection rates are falling, and the Government permits wider movement for exercising, we can open the playground to families from round about and children attending

the Stephen Perse School, but restrict the numbers to a maximum of ten people in total. If these restrictions are seen to be flouted we would revert to Scenario 2.

**Scenario 4 (Playground closed)**

If for any reason we believe that the restrictions set out in Scenarios 1 and 2 are being flouted, we should close the playground. It should also be closed if the Government orders playgrounds to close (as during the first lockdown in March 2020).

In scenarios 1,2 and 3 the fortnightly cleaning regime should continue and we should continue to promote and advise good hygiene practice, such as using hand sanitiser before and after playground use, via notices in the playground.

Whatever the decision at any one time, appropriate signage will be clearly displayed to avoid any confusion. If necessary, we can use a coded lock at the gate during the periods when only Madingley families use the grounds.

The Parish Council  
January 19, 2021