



Guidelines on the organisation, restriction and suspension of leisure activities for children and young people (including basic education in the arts) in the different tiers of the epidemic referred to in the government resolution of 26 January 2021

1. Introduction

The Government adopted a resolution on 26 January 2021 to supplement the action plan implementing the hybrid strategy to combat COVID-19. It describes three tiers to prevent the epidemic from rapidly accelerating and the risk of it reaching the community transmission phase across the country in different situations:

1. implementation of all measures during the community transmission phase in areas in the community transmission phase
2. guidance for measures and the introduction of fixed-term and large-scale measures in the community transmission phase
3. declaration of a state of emergency and introduction of restrictions on movement.

In tier 1 in areas that are in the community transmission phase, it is recommended that adult group leisure activities and participation in them be temporarily suspended altogether. Special consideration should be given to group leisure activities for children and young people under 18 years of age.

In tier 2, it may be recommended that children's and young people's indoor group activities that are considered to cause high risk of infection be temporarily suspended and, where possible, be organised remotely.

Based on the supplement to the action plan, it is important to seriously consider the negative social, educational and cultural impacts of restricting children's and young people's leisure activities, including basic education in the arts, and those of population groups with limited functional capacity, and to assess the options or measures that can be introduced to mitigate the negative impacts of restrictions in such situations.

The Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare drew up these guidelines on organising, restricting and suspending children's and young people's (under 18 years of age)

group leisure activities (incl. basic education in the arts) at the different epidemic levels specified in the government resolution. Instead of fully discontinuing children's and young people's indoor group leisure activities (including basic education in the arts), the activities would be suspended unless the criteria for safe and secure leisure activities referred to in these guidelines are met.

Leisure activities are an essential part of the lives of children and young people. The School Health Survey of 2019 shows that over 90 per cent of respondents took part in leisure activities on a weekly basis, and 128,000 students participate in basic education in the arts. This is why enabling leisure activities impacts children and young people widely. The purpose of these guidelines is to shed light on practices and situations that affect the children's and young people's leisure activities from the point of view of health security. Thus, at least the age of the children, how unchangeable the composition of the group is, the content of the activities, the size of the facilities, the size of the leisure group and whether the activities are carried out indoors or outdoors must be examined.

2. Age of children

The guiding principle of the government resolution is that group leisure activities for children under 12 years of age should not be restricted. Thus, the recommendations of these guidelines mainly apply to indoor group leisure activities for 12-18-year-olds. However, in tier 2, it is recommended that indoor leisure activities for those under 12 years of age comply with the criteria laid down in these guidelines for safe and secure leisure activities.

3. Constancy of the composition of leisure activity groups

To prevent and trace the spread of COVID-19, it is important that each leisure activity group always meets in the same composition. If the leisure activities of children and young people take place during the community transmission phase, it is crucial that it happens only in the group's composition and only in the form of the group's own sessions and training. This means that the group should not take part in competitions, concerts, performances, shows or other situations in which the group comes into contact with other leisure activity groups. Teachers, instructors and coaches should also always be the same ones. Parents may not spend time in their children's leisure activities and changing rooms.

4. Content of the activities

The content of the activities plays a major role in the risk of infection. Research shows that the risk of infection is highest in team activities and contact sports as well as in other activities that involve close contact and strenuous use of voice. However, for reasons of impartiality, it is not justified to prohibit activities such as group leisure activities altogether, as individual training sessions can also take place in such a way that no close contacts are formed. In such cases, team sports can focus on improving

personal performance or muscle tone, for example. If children's and young people's indoor leisure activities are allowed during the community transmission phase, all teachers, instructors and coaches, as well as parents and guardians, should pledge to comply with these principles and wear masks. National organisations should also pledge to instruct, guide and self-monitor their member organisations. The organisers of the leisure activities or instruction are always responsible for instructing and supervising the compliance of the guidelines by those taking part in the leisure activities, the personnel and all stakeholders.

5. Size of facilities and leisure activity groups

From the point of view of the risk of infection and also of tracing, it is important that the group is as small as possible. However, the size of the leisure activity facilities is also important, because in a big space it is possible for several groups to operate without being in contact with each other. In the community transmission phase, the restrictions on assembly have recently limited group sizes to a maximum number of 10 people. The activities of tight-knit leisure activity groups are neither a public event nor a general meeting, but, for the sake of consistency and clarity, it would be appropriate to follow the 10-person restriction in indoor leisure activities, as appropriate, in the community transmission phase, taking into account the size of the facilities. In big gyms and other large spaces, it is possible for separate groups of 10 people to exercise without any actual contact between the groups. In large cultural and sports facilities that have several different spaces and rooms, the restrictions on the number of participants could also be applied separately for each space and taking into account the size of each space.

6. Leisure activities outdoors and in restricted outdoor areas

The risk of infection is much lower outdoors than indoors. For this reason, even in the community transmission phase in tier 1 of the epidemic, there are no grounds for restricting group leisure activities outdoors or in restricted outdoor areas. However, when tier 2 is reached, group leisure activities in restricted areas outdoors should follow the recommended procedures described below.

7. Recommended procedures to be followed

In tier 2, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare recommend that children's and young people's indoor group leisure activities (including basic education in the arts) be fully discontinued only if the leisure activities cannot comply with all of the following principles:

- the group always meets in the same composition and the attendees are recorded for each session

- competitions, matches, concerts, performances, shows and any other form of activities where groups come into contact with other groups are not organised
- parents and other outsiders are not allowed to spend time in the children's and young people's leisure activities or changing rooms
- each group's teachers, instructors and coaches are the same ones for each session
- all forms of leisure activities must be arranged in a way that prevents close contact between participants, meaning that games and practice matches, for instance, must not be organised
- the activities are organised in such a way that there is a safety distance of 2 metres between each participant in group-based leisure activities for children over 12 years of age
- the participants are instructed on proper hand hygiene and cough hygiene and how to take the right course of action for going to a coronavirus test when symptoms occur
- teachers, instructors and coaches must always wear a mask during the activities
- the leisure activities are arranged in groups with a maximum of 10 participants; however, so that separate groups of 10 people can simultaneously operate in big gyms and other large spaces if there is no actual contact between the groups
- in large cultural and sports facilities with several different spaces and rooms, the limits on the number of participants applies separately for each space and room.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare recommend that, in parts of the country that are in the community transmission phase, the above principles on safe and secure leisure activities be followed in indoor group leisure activities already at tier 1, and when moving to tier 2, also in outdoor group leisure activities arranged in restricted outdoor areas. If contact instruction and guidance are put on hold in the leisure activities, it is advisable to switch to distance instruction and guidance whenever possible.