

# **The CEREPS consensus statement of physical education and school sport for recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe**

## **-Recommendations for Actions**

Authors on behalf of CEREPS:

Roland Naul, Siobhán O`Neill, Francis Ries & Fiona Chambers



Münster, Cork, Seville, August 2022

Copyright: CEREPS Luxembourg 2022

## **Introduction**

According to the results of the empirical outcome of COVID-19 studies across Europe by CEREPS on children, adolescence and young adults and their related care takers in family life, schools and sport clubs, the CEREPS scientific background paper documented at least ten recommendations for actions to take for recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Six of the ten actions are related to proceeding with physical education (PE) and school sports during the ongoing pandemic and the remaining four actions are related to activities for recovering and building better PE and school sports after the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper documents the consensus statement on recommendations for actions as a part of COVID-19 studies reviewed in the scientific background paper. For each action special stakeholders are selected and addressed for whom the actions concern. In total ten target groups are identified: *children, adolescents, young adults, parents, school principals, PE teachers, volunteers, coaches, scholars, and policy makers.*

## **Actions to take during the COVID-19 pandemic**

### **Infrastructure and social context of the school environment**

#### ***School principals, PE teachers, coaches, scholars, and politicians***

Class sizes, age demographics and layout of buildings and facilities including open spaces at school (school yard) and in the vicinity of the school environment should be considered for teaching PE and school sports during the pandemic. Scholars should support school principals and PE teachers in implementing the recommendations for adequate infrastructure to offer and to teach physical activities according to the different levels of alert in place nationally. Local politicians should take actions to support access to and availability of public parks and other movement-friendly places to utilize the school environment for formal teaching and informal physical activities outside.

### **Communication and social distancing in practising PE and school sport**

#### ***Children, adolescents, young adults, parents, PE teachers, volunteers, and coaches***

Communication between school principals, PE teachers, coaches, students and their parents is essential to ensure social distancing guidelines are adhered to: in school life, when teaching PE, school sports, offering individual physical activities during recess and as a part of afternoon programmes. Special small cohort groups of students should be organized and maintained, i.e. students should not be moved between these groups. If necessary, class sizes should be reduced and one-way systems to enter and to leave facilities should be marked.

### **Importance of regular time allocation of PE with inclusive PE classes and qualified PE teachers**

### ***Parents, school principals, PE teachers, scholars, and policy makers***

Taking social distancing rules and hygiene standards into consideration, time allocation of teaching PE and school sport should be completely maintained during the COVID-19 pandemic, at a minimum, to pre-pandemic levels. Inclusive teaching of PE should be conducted as much as possible. Only specially trained PE teachers, either as specialist or generalist teachers, should deliver PE and school sport lessons. If coaches offer physical activities in recess or after school programmes, a licence in sport pedagogies is demanded. School principals and qualified PE teachers should take care for proper offers for their students and access to safe and clean sport facilities. PE teachers should advise their students on how to continue physical activities at home, in their living environment and during holidays. National PE teacher associations should strongly support regular time allocation of PE and school sport during the COVID-19 pandemic and should intervene if governments or school boards or administration offices cancel PE classes.

### **Hygiene standards for practising physical activities, use of facilities and equipment**

#### ***Children, adolescents, young adults, parents, school principals, PE teachers, volunteers, and coaches***

PE and school sport must be delivered in an environment where local, national, and international public health guidelines are fulfilled and followed in teaching and learning. Safe practices of sanitation, personal hygiene of students, teachers, and coaches, including proper handwashing, and disinfection of rooms, gyms, and equipment before and after use must be implemented. Sharing of personal items (water bottles and towels) should be prohibited. Furthermore, students should be allowed to attend school in their PE clothes, not to use any locker or changing rooms before or after PE classes. Non-contact sports are required. To improve emotional and physical wellbeing, relaxation techniques and conscious breathing should be offered. Individual physical activities like running, throwing, cycling, endurance movements, yoga and contactless sports and games (e.g. racket sports) should be selected for teaching and exercises.

### **Digital indoor teaching of PE and blended learning**

#### ***Children, adolescents, young adults, parents, school principals, PE teachers, coaches, scholars, and policy makers***

School closures and home schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic turned strong interest to the need for more, and better, digital teaching for students offered by teachers for all school subjects. For the subject of PE, however, digitalization is an important new challenge for both, the competence and qualification profile of PE teachers and for their students to become familiar with digital tools as a new (distance) learning strategy in PE and school sport. Digital tools for sports and physical activities developed for outside school exercises should be carefully evaluated before implementation into the regular teaching of PE. The tools must fit into the educational/pedagogical aims and objectives of the subject. New digital tools, particularly for teaching strategies in PE, should be developed by scholars and applied by qualified PE teachers as a new part of the curriculum structure. Crash courses and

further education activities are necessary for PE teachers to apply existing tools for online teaching, learning, and evaluation. PE students should be informed on the use of digital tools for self-monitoring of physical activities and learning outcomes of physical education classes.

### **Importance of integrated outdoor physical education and physical activities**

***Children, adolescents, young adults, parents, school principals, PE teachers, volunteers, coaches, and scholars***

In recent years there has been, for various reasons, a clear shift to teach PE and school sport almost exclusively as a subject of indoor physical activities. With the development of the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing and hygiene regulations became compulsory in school life and in teaching lessons. For PE classes, indoor teaching became more difficult because of class sizes and the need to use 1.5 to 2 metres of physical distances between students in gyms and classrooms to avoid spreading the virus. Outdoor teaching in the school yard, teaching PE on playgrounds in the school environment and in public spaces close to school became recommended and more popular. All physical activities offered for indoor PE can be offered under the same conditions outdoors. However, teaching physical activities on bigger courts and fields outdoors are associated with better protection against the virus. When a full PE class size may participate in integrated outdoor PE, any contact team sport (football, handball, basketball, field hockey) should be replaced by traditional games and small aside games (3:3, 4:4) on extended outdoor pitches with distance rules and protection of non-body contact. The use of extended outdoor facilities may also support the increase of bigger groups for individual physical fitness workouts and more partners/teams in racket games.

### **Actions to take after the COVID-19 pandemic**

Some of the recommendations for PE and school sport during the COVID-19 pandemic are also essential and beneficial in times after the pandemic (e.g. hygiene regulations, digital teaching and learning in PE, new efforts to increase outdoor physical activities, small games a-side). But there are special actions to be taken after the COVID-19 pandemic in order to restore lost quality in PE and school sport and to recover the design and structure of the subject on a higher level of teaching and learning. A challenge for all identified target groups and stakeholders in PE and school sport is to build a better design and structure than in pre-COVID-19 times.

### **Networking of schools with different groups of stakeholders in the local community**

***Parents, school principals, PE teachers, volunteers, coaches, scholars, and policy makers***

Continued and increased networking of schools to safeguard PE and to increase physical activity for a whole active school approach developed in many European countries prior of the COVID-19 crisis is recommended. Often school principals and

PE teachers supported by parents have built partnerships with sport clubs and other stakeholders, sometimes also linked with community offices for health, education and sport. With school closures, lockdowns of sport clubs and home confinement, network structures of schools weakened, and local partnerships decreased and ceased altogether. For the recovery of PE and school sport new efforts are necessary to rebuild networks and to re-establish former partnerships even more and better than in pre-COVID-19 times. As far as possible, a local network between schools and different groups of stakeholders should be supported and managed by a “network coordinator” to balance needs and demands between the partners. Policy makers from local governments should join the network with administrative help for recovery.

### **Further professional training in PE and school sport for teachers and coaches**

#### ***School principals, PE teachers, coaches, and scholars***

Continuing professional development (CPD) in PE and school sport has been implemented across Europe in pre-COVID-19 times. The lockdowns set up new challenges for delivering teaching and learning of the subject. Social distancing and hygiene standards led to new formats in practising indoor and outdoor PE and school sport. One of the most current challenges is linked with the ongoing digitalization process of the subject. Teachers must become more familiar with different digitalization formats in teaching and assessment of learning outcome, because of distance-teaching during the pandemic and teaching PE classes at school in post-COVID times. As digitalization turns traditional schooling and learning into new practises, there is a challenge for scholars to further develop and provide digital tools to apply to the further education and training of PE teachers and coaches. Currently, many schools in European countries are still lacking electronic equipment to support digital teaching and learning for students. When the transformation process of more, and better, electronic infrastructure at school facilities goes on, the needs and demands of PE and school sport as an important subject in education should not be neglected.

### **Monitoring of quality PE and school sport and intervention studies**

#### ***Children, adolescents, young adults, parents, school principals, PE teachers, coaches, and scholars***

External monitoring of the quality of PE by experts and internal monitoring of outcomes and assessment of the development of skills and competencies by school teachers has been implemented in pre-COVID-19 times, but not on a compulsory level in many schools and in all countries in Europe. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused breakdowns of both monitoring approaches. Very often the assessment of motor skills and movement behaviour was focussed in order to observe age- and gender-related overweight and obesity as a part of a sedentary lifestyle concept. Weight gain, decreases of different motor skills and the decrease in psychosocial wellbeing are important outcomes of many COVID-19 studies reviewed in the scientific background paper of the CEREPS consensus statement. In this respect, monitoring of physical and health deficits, psychosocial burden, to compare discrepancies in development during periods of lockdown, are overdue in the majority of schools and in almost every

European country. For a new start of physical and personal development of children and adolescents after the COVID-19 pandemic current reference data of the “Corona cohorts” are important to collect and to set up realistic goals for further development and progression in all types of schools, but particularly in primary schools. The new start and recovery of missing monitoring should be sustained in recent years with monitoring of longitudinal intervention studies to assess how far lost skills and competencies in PE and school sport could be re-established through daily active support of physical activities.

### **Policy making with administrators on different governmental levels**

#### ***Parents, school principals, PE teachers, coaches, scholars, and policy makers***

Policy making on all levels of government (local, district, region, national) is necessary to revitalize the lost status of PE and school sport at school. One important item of engagement of policy makers will be the partnership networks of schools and local stakeholders. Evaluation studies of the success of local networks to enhance PE and school sport documented that “network care takers” who are representatives of governmental or administration offices have a greater influence on achievements of network policies. Policy-making, however, should not be restricted to schools, teachers, and formal education. During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns led to closures of kindergarten, sport clubs, youth centres and other social youth work institutions. The reopening of non-formal and informal centres for children and adolescents, with better access to facilities and with a larger staff of social workers, will be as important as the formal education settings in rebuilding emotional and psychosocial wellbeing after the COVID-19 pandemic and periods of lockdown. On the European (European Commission) and national level (Ministries) many programmes were initiated with grants to restore the breakdowns and losses of education and youth work. However, such comparable financial support with special grants is needed for extended physical and health development in all institutions where young people grow up after COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **The CEREPS Consensus Statement for Recovery of Physical Education and School Sport from COVID-19 Pandemic is endorsed by:**

ICSSPE, (requested)

AIESEP (requested)

EUPEA agreed

FIEPS (in the pipeline)

ISCA (tba)

(more)

## Matrix of Recommendations and Actions for different Stakeholders

Stakeholders/	Children	Adolescents	Young adults	Parents	School principals	PE teachers	Volunteers	Coaches	Scholars	Policy makers
<b>Recommendations &amp; Actions</b>										
During the Covid-19 pandemic										
Infrastructure and Social Context of the School Environment					X	X		X		X
Communication and Social Distancing in Practicing Physical Education and Sport	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		
Importance of regular time allocation of PE with inclusive PE classes and qualified PE teachers				X	X	X			X	X
Hygiene Standards for Equipment, Facilities, and Types of Physical Activities	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Digital Teaching of Physical Education and Blended Learning	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
The Importance of Integrated Outdoor Physical Education and Sport	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Post-Covid-19 pandemic										
Networking of schools with different groups of stakeholders in the local community				X	X	X	X	X	X	
Further professional training in physical education and school sport for teachers and coaches					X	X		X	X	X
Monitoring the Quality of Physical Education and School Sport and Related Interventions	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	
Policy making with administrators on different governmental levels				X	X	X		X	X	X