

GL336 – CLEAPSS Advice during the COVID-19 / Coronavirus Pandemic

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Advice for planning for a school closure

If you are planning for your school to be closed, treat this like the end of the school year.

There are some specific things to consider with microbiology, and a sudden school closure. Please refer to the new CLEAPSS Guide GL337 about this.

Apart from the above there are **NO** specific special measures you need to take over and above ensuring good security of the labs, prep room(s) and chemical store(s). This should ensure only staff with permission can access labs, prep rooms etc...

If other agencies need access to your labs, prep rooms etc.. this should be discussed with the school SLT and the agencies in advance and contact us via the Helpline for further guidance. It should not be routine procedure to give access to labs, prep rooms etc... to outside agencies and staff.

Ensure all supplies to the labs / prep room(s) are switched off i.e. gas, electricity and water (the latter two where possible). Though be aware don't turn off power to fridges / freezers!

Orders of chemicals, supplies etc....

If you have placed an order for chemicals and other supplies. It would make sense to contact the supplier to find out when it will likely be delivered. You should avoid chemicals and science equipment being delivered when the school is closed.

Electrical supply: Ensure all fridges and freezers in the department are left switched ON. Place notes on or near the relevant sockets so they are not switched off by accident. Speak to the school premises team / caretaker(s) to ensure they are aware of this, and to ensure they don't turn off the electrical supply to the science area(s).

Schools **MUST not** allow chemicals and/or science equipment to be taken home by anyone (pupils and staff).

Staff in DT department should refer to the End of term arrangements guide on the CLEAPSS DT website.

Advice for practical work

To support schools who are closing or will be operating with greatly reduced staff and pupil numbers we have created two new guides :-

GL338 - Practical activities for pupils attending school during extended periods of closure.
This guide covers which practical activities are and are not suitable in schools operating with a small number of pupils and staff.

GL339 - Practical activities for pupils at home during extended periods of school closure.
This guide covers which practical activities you can set for your pupils to do remotely at home

Please take into account the below points about practical work for those who remain in schools.

As schools start to close and pupil / staff numbers are reduced, 'traditional' Science lessons are going to become increasingly difficult to teach. Large class sizes will bring additional risks to any practical work.

Great care must be taken to avoid lone working. Practical work must not be undertaken in lone working* conditions, either arrange for a colleague to be present or alter the method you are following, or leave the practical for a later time.

You **MUST** not be tempted to do practical lessons designed to be done in a lab outside of a lab i.e. in the hall, you will also need to take into account technician support (or lack of it). For clarity all secondary science practical activities are designed to be done in a lab.

Lessons that do happen should still follow the national curriculum / exam specs. Staff **MUST** avoid the temptation to do 'science shows' or 'off piste' activities.

***Lone Working**

Our definition of lone working is :-

'Lone working occurs when there is no other employee nearby (on the same floor). During these times, hazardous activities such as handling hazardous materials, diluting concentrated acids and moving heavy objects should not take place. When working alone, someone in the building should be aware that a technician is working in a particular location even though she/he may not be undertaking work of a hazardous nature.'

Good 'housekeeping' activities

Whilst schools are open but with greatly reduced numbers of pupils, this is a chance to get those 'housekeeping' jobs done. Here are some suggested activities for teachers / technicians.

Please note staff should **not** come specifically to carry these out, this should be seen as something that can be done whilst working in school as required by your employer. Also please take note of the above guidance on lone working, do **NOT** carry these activities out alone. :-

- Check the chemical store for effective ventilation and the condition of the bottles, read [guide GL246](#) **BEFORE** entering the chemical store
- Carry out a stocktake of chemicals, paying special attention to all the 'check' chemicals in our [stocklist E233](#).
- Check the lab benches for excessive movement see [this video](#) for an example of the issue.
- Clearing out old books, equipment etc.. This process has an added H&S benefit as we often hear of schools finding dangerous, leaking or unsuitable chemicals / radioactive sources / microbiology samples / things they should never have stored etc... when having a clear out. Therefore always do this with caution.

Take care to plan when you are doing these activities, for example; don't start checking the chemical store at 4pm on a Friday when everyone else has gone home and it is hard to raise the alarm if required.

Advice for the storage of radioactive sources during the Covid-19 shutdown

Ensure that the radioactive sources are stored securely as per our guidance in L93 (see pages 17-20 in L93 for more information). Ensure that the cabinet is locked, and the store room it is in is locked.

Note if you do have a Protactinium generator – ensure the storage as per L93 is adhered to (see page 43 for more info):

“Keep the bottle upright in a larger plastic container with a tight-fitting lid. This should also be labelled. Store the protactinium generator bottle, in its secondary container, in the steel store cabinet. If there is a leak from the generator, the secondary container will help prevent hydrochloric acid fumes damaging other sources.”

As for leak-testing and store checks, these will have to be put on hold. If may well be you would be past the annual inspection interval upon return to the school, and our advice would be to complete them as soon as practicable after return. The monthly store checks will have to be put on hold for the foreseeable future. Do a quick visual inspection to ensure that all the sources are present as soon as possible after return (which would be the first monthly store check after your school/college closure).

Supplying equipment / PPE to the NHS/Doctors/Hospitals etc...

We are aware that schools are donating PPE and other equipment to hospitals and doctors. CLEAPSS is currently awaiting further guidance from the DfE and NHS about any national schemes for this and what is required in terms of specifications and equipment.

At the moment, we would **not** advise schools approaching individual hospitals and staff with donations, however if a request for such equipment is made to your school then you must discuss with them what you have, what it has been used for, and the specification(s) of the equipment.

Public Health England have made us aware of this link for those wanting to donate their equipment :-
<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-support-from-business>

You **must** ensure any donated equipment is actually going to a hospital / doctors, you are liable for ensuring it is going to be used in an appropriate manner. Do not give away all of your PPE as this would mean you are unable to do any practical work when you return to 'normal' school life.

It would be prudent to get a signed receipt for the items you are donating a) to record what you have donated and b) to help for when you are restocking.

Schools which are part of a larger chain i.e. a MAT or Local Authority may want to discuss with them the possibility of doing a collective single donation to reduce the travel to individual hospitals.

Advice on hand washing and general hygiene

This is actually a good time to reinforce the need for good hand washing and hygiene. CLEAPSS Primary has a very good activity for teaching this, which you can find here.

Helplines about the use of alcohol based hand gels

1. They are a real fire risk in labs and thus should not be used in science labs / lessons.
2. They are less effect than washing with soap, water and drying with paper towels.
3. Schools must not make their own gels as the chemicals schools have or are able to buy are not safe for use on the skin, nor are school labs designed or clean enough to produce cleaning products for the skin.

Useful links to further advice and guidance

[DfE Guidance for Schools on COVID-19](#)

[UK Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Strategy 2011](#)

[DfE Guidance for schools, childcare providers, colleges and local authorities in England on maintaining educational provision](#)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): UK government response](#)

[NHS COVID-19 Guidance](#)

[Number of coronavirus \(COVID-19\) cases and risk in the UK – From GOV.UK](#)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): implementing social distancing in education and childcare settings](#)

[Guidance for employers and businesses on coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

[Coronavirus \(COVID 19\): list of online education resources for home education](#)

[School funding: exceptional costs associated with coronavirus \(COVID-19\) for the period March to July 2020](#)

The Department for Education COVID-19 helpline.

Email : DfE.coronavirushelpline@education.gov.uk

Telephone : 0800 046 8687

If you have a query about coronavirus (COVID-19), relating to schools and other educational establishments in England contact our helpline.

Lines are open Monday to Friday from 8am to 6pm and weekends 10am to 4pm.

If you work in a school, please have your unique reference number (URN or UK PRN) available when calling the hotline.