

GL345 - Guidance for science departments returning to school after an extended period of closure, version 1.4, 01/08/20

This guidance is **additional** to all standard operating procedures across your school, any guidance from your employer, and CLEAPSS' general advice. It is based on guidance from the UK Government and Public Health England, and is intended for use from September 2020 onwards

This is a list of things to consider when returning to school after an extended period of closure or non-use. For guidance on the management of practical work please refer to CLEAPSS [Guide GL343](#). *Guide to doing practical work during the COVID-19 Pandemic; science*

This guide is likely to be updated frequently. Regularly check that the version number in the title above is the same as that in the version on the website. Details of any significant changes made are listed on the final page of this document.

Checking the chemical store

Make sure you do this with a colleague and having read [Guide GL246](#) *Checking bottles in the chemical store* **before** entering the store. Use your chemical stocklist to check the quantities of chemicals are as you left them. Refer to [Guide GL247](#) *The shelf life of chemicals*, to see which chemicals you need to make checks on. If you notice anything unexpected e.g. unusual smells or signs of leakages or breakages, evacuate and call the CLEAPSS Helpline.

Radioactive sources

We have reviewed the risk assessments of the acceptable school sources (as listed in the guide L093), and, assuming that these have been stored following the guidance in L093, our advice (as an RPA Body) is:

On the first day of the school opening in September, carry out a check against your inventory of radioactive materials, to ensure that all the sources are present. At the same time, check visually that the sources look in good condition. This would also count as the first monthly store check. The routine monthly store checks should be re-instated.

If you have one or more protactinium generators, check carefully that there has been no leak of liquid. Wear eye protection, a lab coat, and disposable gloves. There should be no strong smell of organic solvent, and no signs of corrosive hydrochloric acid in the outer container. Be particularly careful when checking 'home-made' generators that are being held under the two-year extension before disposal.

If you have sources other than those listed in L093 as suitable for school science, contact us by email for advice.

If the last formal leak test (sealed sources) and formal inspection of your sources was over a year ago, carry out the leak tests and inspection, as described in L093, as soon as is practicable after the school has opened in September (but within the first month of opening) and **before** any of the sources are used in teaching. Make a note in your records to say the extended period was due to COVID-19 pandemic.

Fridges & freezers

Check these have not been switched off or tampered with. If you find any that have been switched off (your nose will soon tell you!) or you suspect may have been switched off for some time but are now back on again, contact the CLEAPSS Helpline for further guidance.

Equipment that needs testing

1. Fume cupboard(s), pressure cookers / autoclaves, steam engines

These must all be within their testing cycle. If any of these have elapsed then these item(s) cannot be used until they have passed the required tests. Activities which require their use will, therefore, need to be postponed until a new test has been passed. Note: there are no exemptions for these tests like there has been for car MOTs.

For more advice on these items please refer to the relevant CLEAPSS Guides:

[CLEAPSS Guide G9 Fume Cupboards in Schools](#)

[CLEAPSS Guide G214a Examining Autoclaves, Pressure Cookers and Model Steam Engines - Guidance for employers](#)

2. Mains electrical items (Portable appliance testing PAT)

These may have missed their yearly test. It is not however a legal requirement to test this equipment every year. The regulations require **periodic** testing, and allow employers to make a risk-based judgment about how often this should be.

After a visual inspection for any obvious damage these items can be returned back to normal use and then arrange for any items to be PAT tested as soon as possible. You should check that your employer is content to allow the equipment to be used with delayed testing before returning items back into use.

3. Water supply

In each lab and prep room(s) run **all** taps for at least 10mins to run water through the system and refill and drains.

4. Gas supply

Test the gas supply works in each lab and prep room(s). You may find the gas system has been switched off further back in the 'system' by school maintenance teams.

5. Emergency cut off systems (gas and electricity)

Check that **all** emergency cut off systems in labs and prep room(s) work effectively.

6. Fire extinguishers

Check any fire extinguishers you have in labs and prep room(s) are in date, any which are out of date will need testing / replacing.

7. Eye wash

If you have eye wash bottles in your labs check these have not gone out of date. Note that CLEAPSS advises against the use of these. Refer to [Guide GL238 Top twenty hazards in science](#) for more details.

8. Lighting

Check all lights work as expected.

9. Ventilation

Open all windows and run any ventilation systems at maximum (including fume cupboards) for about an hour.

10. Eye Protection

Check stocks of eye protection. Teachers should not attempt practicals where eye protection is required but is not available in school. This may initially limit the practical work that schools can do.

Where schools have stocks of suitable safety specs and goggles, these will need sanitising before and after **every** use or quarantined for 72hrs. Refer to CLEAPSS Guide [GL343 Guide to doing practical work during the COVID-19 Pandemic; science](#), for more guidance on this.

What if you have the time to do more?

If you return to school before the pupils use this time to check over your labs and prep room(s) using one of our self-audit guides. These give you more things to consider when checking labs.

Our longer self-audit guide is [G271](#) and our quicker top 20 hazards audit guide [GL238](#). For further more detailed lists of items to check in labs refer to [Guide L248b](#) which has a number of weekly/termly/yearly check lists.

Revision log

- Version 1.1 (13th May) changes:
Added details about radioactive source checking, following new HSE guidance
- Version 1.2 (18th May) changes:
Minor typo corrections
- Version 1.3 (26th June) changes:
Minor layout changes
Added initial statement to align this guide with GL343
Added more detail to the PAT testing section
- Version 1.4 (10th August) changes:
Various updates for a return to school in September
Some layout changes