

GL353 - Guidance for schools where pupils spend all day in a lab (COVID-19 Pandemic)

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 COVID-19 supplement and should be read in conjunction with our main guide to non-specialist teachers using labs [Guide PS082](#)

As schools return in September 2020 we know of schools, where the pupils will be spending all day in one location be it a classroom or a lab. Basing groups of pupils all day in a lab will present many additional challenges which will need to be managed by **all** the staff involved.

The two ways in which these challenges can be managed, are covered below.

Note, school laboratories were never designed for groups of pupils to remain in them all day. Pupils and staff may find them uncomfortable, and the many items of fixed furniture may limit the teaching opportunities for non-science subjects. Complaints of back pain arising from poor posture will likely arise from this way of organising pupils' time.

Option 1 – Dual use (Lab available for practical science)

This option allows the lab to still be used as a lab by science teachers when they are teaching science lessons. However, it does bring increased pupil management issues.

Required actions:

- Remove **all** equipment, chemicals, and science items from the lab, these should be securely stored in the prep room or other secure storage area.
- Train all staff involved on the hazards of working in a science lab (see CLEAPSS [Guide PS082](#) for more information)
- The gas **must** be switched off when the lab is not be used by a science teacher. The gas valve / switch in the lab is acceptable for this.
- The electricity and water should be switched off (where possible) when the lab is not be used by a science teacher.
- Pupils **must** be supervised at **ALL** times.
- The lab **must** be locked when no member of staff is present.
- There **must be NO** eating or drinking in the lab at any time. This is required under the COSHH regulations (law), not just guidance.
- **No** science equipment or chemicals to be left out except when a science teacher is present.
- Science lessons when a science teacher is present can continue as normal, although they will take more planning and management as equipment and chemicals cannot be left out in the lab before or after lessons, which would be the normal method of operation.

Option 2 – ‘Decommissioning’ (Lab **not** available for ‘traditional’ practical science)

This option does **not** allow the lab to be used for practical science by anyone.

In this option, the lab is, essentially, converted into a classroom. This brings some benefits but is harder to set up, and removes the ability to teach science normally. As a consequence, this approach may impact on the schools’ ability to deliver the broad, balanced and aspirational curriculum referred to by the DfE in its guidance to schools.

Required actions:

- Remove **all** equipment, chemicals, and science items from the labs, these should be securely stored in the prep room or other secure storage area.
- The gas, electricity (to **all** sockets apart from teachers bench and projector), and water **must** be switched off. This cannot just be at the valve / switch in the room as these can be easily turned back on by pupils or staff. The services **must** be switched off further back in the system ie remove circuit breakers and shut off the gas supply to the lab(s) in the supply pipe.
- Power to any fume cupboard(s) must be switched off, and a large sign must be clearly displayed on each fume cupboard saying this must **not** be used.
- All benches and work surfaces will need a deep clean to remove chemical and biological residues.
- Pupils can be left unattended following the same rules across the school for this practice. Note the HSE would expect there to be a certain level of supervision of pupils at all times during the school day regardless of the type of room used.
- Please remember all normal lab rules will apply whilst carrying out any practical activity.
- Eating and drinking in the room, can now follow the same rules as any classroom in the school, taking the above bullet point into account.
- Since the lab is now not a lab, this **greatly** reduces the amount of science practical work that can take place. Science teachers will now be restricted as to the practical’s they can carry out. Refer to [Guide GL352](#) for more information on practical’s which are possible in non-lab environments.
- The lab(s) affected **must** not be used for any preparation or practicing of practical science lessons. Refer to [Guide GL352](#) for more information on practicals which are possible in non-lab environments.
- Senior school leaders, heads of science and technicians will have to actively ensure that the activities carried out in these decommissioned labs are suitable. It is likely that science teachers will be tempted to carry out practicals which are not suitable now the lab has been decommissioned. Refer to the section titled ‘Examples of potentially unsuitable activities’ in [Guide GL352](#) for examples of practical’s which shouldn’t be taking place in a decommissioned lab.
- The school will need to think about how to respond to any concerns from pupils, staff & parents arising from the restriction of the practical dimension of the science curriculum.