



Advice and guidelines to the educational sector for the re-opening of kindergartens in Malta

September 2020



Preamble

These guidelines are applicable to the kindergartens thereby referred to as 'Kindergarten' in this document. Each Kindergarten should adapt these guidelines according to the specific setup of the Kindergarten itself and in line with other guidelines as issued from time to time by the Public Health authorities.

These guidelines are meant to mitigate, as much as possible, the transmission of COVID-19. Although the risk of infection is reduced, it can never be completely eliminated. Parents/guardians need to understand that a risk of transmission will still exist even if these guidelines are rigorously followed and implemented.



Executive Summary

1. The smaller the cohort size for in-person learning the lower the risk to students, staff and their families. Schools are strongly advised to keep the size of each bubble or cohort as small as is feasible.
2. Maximum efforts should be made to keep the minimum number of children in each cohort as small as possible. The number of children in the classroom should be the result of a calculation of a 1.5 metre distance between one child and another and a 2-meter distance from the Kindergarten Educator and the children according to the particular room size. In any case, maximum efforts should be made such that the total number of children as established using the calculation of distances as indicated above will not exceed 15 for Kinder 1 and 19 for Kinder 2 .
3. Due to the nature of the educational programme and learning experience at Kindergarten level, children and their Kindergarten Educator in the classroom can be at a closer distance from each other in a typical kindergarten setup. Educators shall wear a mask or visor at all times when in contact with children.
4. In order for Learning Support Educators to be able to provide the service required of them, they may need to work at a close distance to the students they are supporting, however, the distance may vary as it depends on each individual case. The LSE should always wear a mask or visor.
5. No mixing from different bubbles/cohorts both indoors and outdoors.
6. Respiratory hygiene, hand hygiene and enhanced cleaning are measures which need to be meticulously adhered to.



7. Children over 3 years of age should be advised to wear masks and/or visors in the common areas and on school transport but this is not necessary within their own classrooms or when they are in the presence of the members of the same bubble/cluster or when students are exercising. Refer to latest Public Health guidance on the use of masks and visors.
8. Staff members are required to wear a face mask and/or visor at all times when in the presence of others (both other staff/ students) and avoid unnecessary contact with others.
9. Similarly carrying out lessons outdoors dilutes the presence of the viral particles thus contact tracing would consider this as a mitigating factor against spread when deciding on which contacts shall be placed in quarantine.
10. Enforce the policy of staying home if unwell for both students and staff members.
11. In such a situation of sustained community spread of coronavirus, one must view the guidance for kindergartens as being bi-directional, on occasion partial/full school closures may need to be instituted until it is possible to resume in-person learning again.



General Information on COVID-19

Coronaviruses are viruses which cause respiratory symptoms ranging from the common cold to more serious illnesses such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). They are a family of viruses which are present both in humans and in animals. They are spread from one person to another through:

1. Coughing and sneezing (via droplets)
2. Hands which have become contaminated with the virus after touching contaminated surfaces or
3. Through direct contact with a person infected with the coronavirus (such as caring for a sick person)

For further information on how the virus is transmitted, the symptoms of the illness and what to do if sick or have symptoms, refer to:

<https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/covid-19/Pages/symptoms.aspx>

<https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/covid-19/Pages/resources.aspx>



Structure

Proper indoor ventilation is essential. In order to ensure adequate circulation of air, and to reduce the level of pathogens in the air, windows should be kept open throughout the day to allow for cross ventilation.

If air-conditioning is to be used, this should be used in accordance with the [guidelines](#) issued by Public Health . Filters should always be cleaned well and maintained properly.

All precautions must be taken to ensure that water systems are safe to prevent the risk of infections derived from water such as Legionnaire’s disease. If it is a small school and the water supply is directly from mains, flushing of the water system by opening all taps for a few minutes should suffice. In this case, there is no need to take samples and get approval from the Environmental Health Directorate prior re-opening.

For all other schools that the supply of water is through a roof tank, the procedures in Annex 1 – Water Systems shall be followed. Schools may consult the Environmental Health Directorate for further information and advice⁷.



General hygiene recommendations

- ✓ **Masks:** Staff members must wear masks and/or visors at ALL times.
- ✓ Children over 3 years of age should be advised to wear masks and/or visors in the common areas and on school transport but this is not necessary within their own classrooms or when they are in the presence of the members of the same bubble/cluster.
- ✓ The recommended masks for use in this setting are surgical masks or cloth masks. Further information on the use of masks, visors and how they are of benefit in controlling spread of coronavirus can be found [here](#).
- ✓ **Physical distancing:** Staff must avoid unnecessary contact from others. Where contact is essential and where nature of work permits, they should keep a distance of 2 metres between each other (between staff) and between clusters/groups of students and observe the recommended hygiene recommendations:
 - No unnecessary touching, hugging or shaking hands between staff members
 - Avoid unnecessary physical contact with children
 - Hand hygiene: wash hands with soap and water regularly and carefully for at least 20 seconds,
 - If possible, do not touch the face i.e. do not touch the mouth, eyes and nose,
 - If possible, do not touch publicly accessible objects such as door handles or elevator buttons with the full hand or fingers
- ✓ **Respiratory hygiene-** Disposable handkerchiefs should be used for sneezing/coughing , which shall then be disposed of immediately in closed and lined bins. Otherwise, sneezing and coughing shall be in the crook of the arm (not in the hand).The greatest possible distance shall be kept when coughing or sneezing, and it is best to face away from other persons.
- ✓ **Hand hygiene:** Hands shall be washed regularly and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, (posters of correct handwashing with visuals should be



attached in kitchens and bathrooms). Hand sanitizer shall be used if water and soap are not immediately available. Washing of hands and use of sanitisers at the Kindergarten shall be rigorously monitored and performed at regular intervals helping students to model this behaviour.



Daily Operations

- ✓ The smaller the cohort size for in-person learning, the lower the risk to students, staff and their families. Schools are strongly advised to keep the size of each bubble or cohort as small as is feasible.
- ✓ Maximum efforts should be made to keep the minimum number of children in each cohort as small as possible. The number of children in the classroom should be the result of a calculation of a 1.5 metre distance between one child and another and a 2-meter distance from the Kindergarten Educator and the children according to the particular room size. In any case, maximum efforts should be made such that the total number of children as established using the calculation of distances as indicated above will not exceed 15 for Kinder 1 and 19 for Kinder 2 .
- ✓ Due to the nature of the educational programme and learning experience at Kindergarten level, children and their Kindergarten Educator in the classroom can be at a closer distance from each other in a typical kindergarten setup. Educators shall wear a mask or visor at all times when in contact with children.
- ✓ In order for Learning Support Educators to be able to provide the service required of them, they may need to work at a close distance to the students they are supporting, however, the distance may vary as it depends on each individual case. The LSE should always wear a mask or visor.
- ✓ Staff, Kindergarten Educators are to work in the same kindergarten. They should avoid as much as possible to work in other establishments or institutions.
- ✓ Parents of children who have been previously shielded for an underlying medical condition (vulnerable) should discuss the child's attendance at the kindergarten with their doctor and also with the Management of the School/Kindergarten, in order to assess the level of risk of in-person attendance. The decision to attend rests with the parents/guardians of the child.
- ✓ Parents shall take the temperature of their children in the morning prior to sending them to kindergarten. If there are signs of illness, the children should not be taken to the kindergarten. If parents are also sick or have temperature, they should not send



their children to kindergarten. Parents shall screen their children on a daily basis for any potential symptoms- a check list can be found in Annex 2.

- ✓ Staff who feel or are sick are not to report for work. They should call the Public Health helpline (111) if they have any symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 in order to book a swab and these should self-isolate and not attend school until the result of this test has been given to them. In the event of a negative result they should only resume their duties when they are completely well.
- ✓ Parents/guardians and children are to have their temperature examined outside the premises during drop-off. If a parent and/or child has temperature of over 37.2° C, or appears sick, the child shall not to be admitted to the kindergarten.
- ✓ Hand hygiene stations should be set up at the entrance of the facility, so that children can clean their hands before they enter. If a sink with soap and water is not available, hand sanitizer shall be provided with at least 70% alcohol at reception.
- ✓ Keep hand sanitizer out of the children's reach and supervise appropriate use.
- ✓ Consider staggering arrival and drop off times and direct contact with parents should be limited as much as possible.
- ✓ Availability of kinder staff should be ensured to greet children outside as they arrive or at the reception area of the centre. Children need to be escorted straight to their classroom.
- ✓ Pushchairs or any kind of infant carriers will not be allowed in kindergarten. Children with disabilities or special needs who use specifically made carriers or other equipment will be exempted and are thus allowed in the kindergarten.
- ✓ Unauthorized personnel are not allowed in the kindergarten except children, authorised staff and management. No parents or guardians are to be allowed in the kindergarten at any time (including in reception).
- ✓ Non-essential belongings such as personal toys etc shall also be prohibited apart from toys or educational material which are specifically designed to stimulate children with disabilities or special needs and can be easily cleaned/wiped.
- ✓ Food containers and water bottles are to be cleaned and wiped down on removing them from their school bag before use. There will be no return of any unused food. Where possible disposable containers should be used, and they will not be returned.



- ✓ Water dispensers are to be used only by staff.
- ✓ There should be a designated system where the teaching staff takes care of the same children in a cluster or bubble over a period of time.
Children and educators/practitioners must remain within the same cluster/group, which composition must remain constant. This applies both for the children and staff. The designated clusters/groups shall only stay in the room/s intended for the care of the children.
- ✓ Common functional rooms should not be used simultaneously by children from different groups. This also applies to dining rooms, nappy-changing and rest areas and other common areas.
- ✓ If common functional rooms are going to be used by different groups of children at different times in the day, the room must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected including all the toys and furniture between each new group using the room.
- ✓ Limit the mixing of children, such as staggering playground/outdoor areas times and keeping groups separate for other activities such as art, music, and exercising. It is advisable that these activities take place outdoors where possible for additional mitigation since upon exertion, loud speech or singing or activities which increase the tidal volume of air exchanged there is an increased risk of viral transmission.
- ✓ If possible, at nap time if applicable, ensure that children's naptime mats are spaced out as much as possible, ideally 2 metres apart. Consider placing children head to toe in order to further reduce the potential for viral spread.
- ✓ No outings from the confines of the centre are to be held by centres.
- ✓ No special events such as festivals, holiday events, special performances, Open Days, Moving-On Ceremonies and visits by guests should be held.
- ✓ Shared food such as birthday cakes should be avoided as much as possible or provided within a separate package to each child. Avoid sharing of lunches.
- ✓ Children's developmental progress should be provided in digital format and not on paper.
- ✓ Communication with kindergarten staff and management for day to day necessities can only be done through online services.



Sanitisation of premises

- ✓ In general, the infectivity of coronaviruses on inanimate surfaces (such as wood, metal, fabrics and plastic) decreases rapidly depending on the material and environmental conditions such as temperature, humidity and UV radiation. The cleaning of surfaces remains an important measure to ensure hygienic conditions.

- ✓ Premises including outdoor play areas and resources will be sanitised daily using approved products that are suitable for children. A combination of cleaning and disinfection will be most effective in removing the COVID-19 virus. Both cleaning and disinfection is most effective, using a combination of household detergents and disinfectants. A detergent is designed to break up oil and grease with the use of water. Anything labelled as a detergent will work. Cleaning should start with the cleanest surface first, progressively moving towards the dirtiest surface. When surfaces are cleaned, they should be left as dry as possible to reduce the risk of slips and falls, as well as spreading of viruses and bacteria through droplets. Disinfecting means using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces. It is important to clean before disinfecting because dirt and grime can reduce the ability of disinfectants to kill germs. Disinfectants containing $\geq 70\%$ alcohol, ammonium compounds, chlorine bleach or oxygen bleach are suitable for use on hard surfaces (surfaces where liquids pool, and do not soak in). The packaging or manufacturer's instructions will outline the correct way to use disinfectant. Disinfectants require time to be effective at killing viruses. If no time is specified, the disinfectant should be left for ten minutes before removing.

- ✓ Toilets and changing areas must be cleaned regularly, at least three times a day. Toilet seats, fittings, washbasins and floors must be cleaned. In case of contamination with faeces, blood or vomit, prophylactic wipe disinfection is required after removal of the contamination with a disposable cloth soaked in disinfectant. Protective gloves and mouth and nose protection must be worn by members of staff.



- ✓ Where applicable, linen must be changed daily. The use of disposable towelling is encouraged.

- ✓ Common resources used by children have to be sanitised between one use and another and at the beginning and at the end of the day.

- ✓ Toys and other resources need to be cleaned and sanitized regularly and certainly before another cluster/group uses these toys and resources. Only toys that can be easily cleaned should be used. Certain smaller toys, soft toys and possibly ball pits should be avoided unless one can be certain that they are adequately cleaned between one group of children and another. Playdough/sand should not be shared between children. It would be ideal if children had their own craft accessories which would not be shared between them.

- ✓ Due to its heavy use as a play and exercise area for children, floor cleaning should be carried out more regularly and frequently throughout the day, and as necessary and as required in the case of spillages. Soft flooring should be wiped down by detergents in between use of different groups and washed properly at the end of each day.

- ✓ The following areas should be cleaned particularly thoroughly and, if possible, several times a day in heavily frequented areas including in the outdoor play areas:
 - Door handles and any other handles on drawers, windows, etc.
 - Stairs and handrails,
 - Light switches,
 - Tables, phones,
 - and all other grip areas.



The kindergarten is to hold accurate and timely records (time-in and time-out) of attendances and composition of groups and staff attending all times. The requirement for submission of any data to the Public Health authorities is in line with the Public Health Act.



Plan if someone is or becomes sick.

- ✓ Plan to have an isolation room (such as office) within the school or area that can be used to isolate a sick child.
- ✓ Disinfect the rooms where the adult and/or child were sick.
- ✓ If a sick child has been isolated clean and disinfect surfaces in your isolation room or area after the sick child has gone home.
- ✓ If COVID-19 is confirmed in a child or staff member, the Centre will be contacted by Public Health and direction will be provided:
 - Close off areas used by the person who is sick.
 - Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the areas.
 - Clean and disinfect all areas used by the person who is sick, such as offices, bathrooms, and common areas using protective personal equipment

Guidance to educators and parents with sick children

As is normally the case, children tend to get sick often whilst at school. This would be more pronounced once winter sets in and influenza season starts. It is the prerogative of each attending doctor to review the status of a sick child.

Measures for staff

- ✓ A Training and Information Pack should be produced by the schools for all staff working in schools.
- ✓ Staff members are required to wear a face mask and/or visor at all times when in the presence of others (both other staff/ students).
- ✓ Staff are to maintain a distance of at least 2m between themselves and with students. Due to the nature of the service provided children and their Kindergarten Educator and Learning Support Educator within the same cohort can be at a closer distance from each other in their classroom provided a mask/visor is worn by staff.



- ✓ In case of staffroom use by Kindergarten staff, considerations must be made for all staff members in staff rooms to keep an adequate physical distance of two metres from other staff members. It must be ensured that in staff rooms, adequate care is taken to avoid mixing of staff members and where desks are used, persons should always maintain the requisite social distance. If a system of 'hot desking' is in operation, each person should be responsible to clean the surfaces and shared electronics with suitable agents before and after use. Meetings should be held virtually wherever possible.
- ✓ School management may wish to consider shielding staff who have been certified by their caring medical specialist as having a serious underlying medical condition which would make them more susceptible to severe illness if infected by COVID-19. Alternative working arrangements may need to be considered on a case by case basis in line with the individual's circumstances and working arrangements.

Transport

The following recommendations should be considered for school transport:

1. Increase the frequency of transport services
2. Keep journeys as short as possible
3. Retaining the same cohort/cluster of students on every journey. This is essential to allow for proper contact tracing
4. Keeping accurate records of all students on each trip
5. Keep vehicles well ventilated, keeping windows open and no air recirculation
6. Maintain safe physical distancing between students to decrease the number of occupants in the vehicle
7. All students and staff are to wear masks and/or visors at all times.



8. Availability of sanitizers in the vehicle

9. Proper cleaning of the vehicle between journeys

10. Parents of students to take temperature of their children in the morning before attending School. If there are signs of illness, the students should not be sent to school

COVID-19 Liaison Officer

A COVID-19 liaison officer should be designated in each School/Kindergarten. The Ministry for Education and Employment, the Secretariat for Catholic Education and private Independent Kindergartens centres will collect respectively a list of these persons and their contact details for their respective schools for onward transmission to the Public Health authorities.

The role of this COVID-19 Contact Person would be to:

- ✓ Familiarise oneself with this guidance document and ensure this is implemented within the School;
- ✓ Organise the training of staff in COVID related mitigation measures
- ✓ Act as a contact point for staff, students and parents who may have queries with respect to the COVID mitigation measures implemented within the Kindergarten;
- ✓ Ensure that when children are unwell, they are appropriately isolated as per mitigation plan and arrangements are made for collection by parent/guardian;
- ✓ In conjunction with the Education and Public Health authorities, collaborate on the development of an 'Early Warning System' which aims to look at trends in sick leave amongst staff and absenteeism amongst students to be able to predict or detect potential clusters of cases
- ✓ Serve as the designated person for liaison with Public Health authorities



Other Guidance Documents

Other documents issued by Public Health Authorities which may be applicable to some activities which could take place during these classes.

- ✓ Guidance document for [Indoor](#) & [Outdoor Swimming Pools](#)
- ✓ [Guidelines for return to Sport as part of the COVID-19 transition in Malta](#)
- ✓ [Guidance for Use of Masks](#)



Annex 1

Note:

This annex should apply to those Schools/Kindergarten centres as referred to in page 5 of this document that have not been in use for more than 4 weeks

Consult the Environmental Health Directorate¹ for further information and advice.

The following are the legal requirements to be carried out on the water systems prior re-opening of schools:

1. Carry out a full system disinfection of the cold-water system, flushing through to all outlets to achieve 50 mg/l free chlorine for at least an hour checking that this level is achieved at the furthest outlets. This may be also achieved by making uses e.g. 5 mg/l for 10 hours (this all depends on the water piping system condition). It is important to top up when required throughout this process;
2. Flush out and refill the system to achieve maximum normal operating target levels of disinfection (equivalent to at least 0.2 mg/l free chlorine);
3. Refill and carry out a thermal shock by raising the temperature of the whole of the contents of the hot water storage heater from 70°C to 80°C then circulating this water throughout the system for up to three days. To be effective, the capacity and temperature of the hot water storage heater should be sufficient to ensure that the temperatures at the taps and appliances do not fall below 65°C. Each tap and appliance should be run sequentially for at least five minutes at the full temperature, taking appropriate precautions to minimise the risk of scalding;
4. Monitor temperatures and biocide levels where applicable, adjust where necessary, for at least 48-72 hours and then take Legionella samples from sentinel outlets (microbiological samples taken before 48 hours following disinfection may give false negative results);

¹ mhi@gov.mt; Tel: 21337333



5. Ensure you keep all documentation for inspection by the Competent Authority, including the review and update of the risk assessment manual including monitoring data, etc., with evidence of who carried out the monitoring, add time, date and signature;
6. Laboratory results for Legionella analysis which have to be carried out at an accredited laboratory, together with all the necessary documentation referred to in point 5 above and a declaration from the private water consultant under whom this water system treatment has been carried out are to be sent to the Water Regulatory and Auditing Unit within the Environmental Health Directorate prior reopening of the establishment;
7. Once it is found that your systems of the hot and cold water are under control then the establishment can reopen.



Annex 2 – Daily checklist for parents/guardians

It is expected that parents carry out this assessment of symptoms and signs on their child every day. If your child display any of these symptoms/ signs below he/she may possibly have an infectious illness and should not be sent to school since this illness may be transmissible.

Please check your child daily for these symptoms

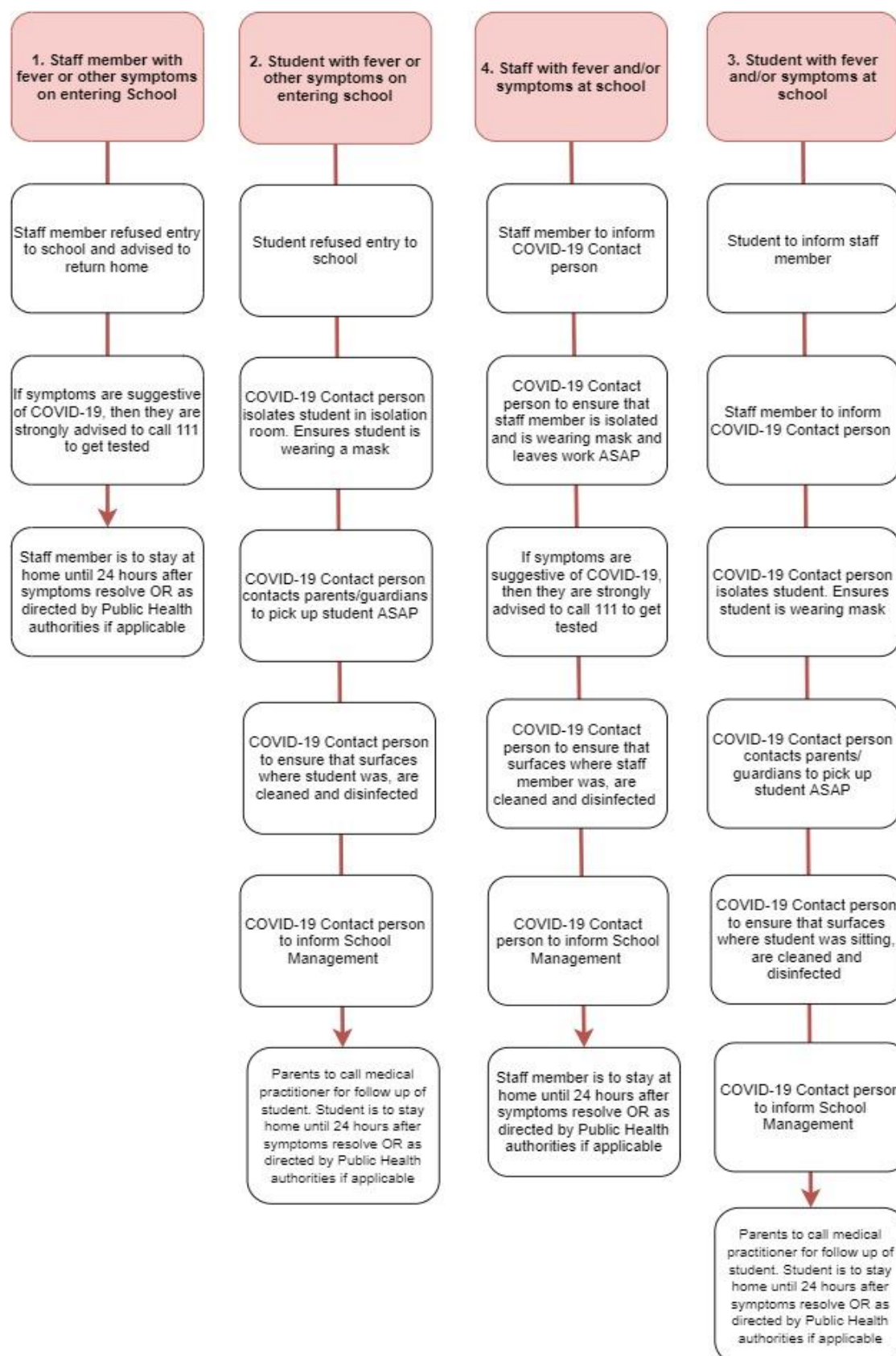
- A temperature of 37.2°C or higher
- Sore Throat
- New uncontrolled cough (for students with a chronic allergic/asthmatic cough, a change in their 'usual' cough)
- Diarrhoea, vomiting, abdominal pain
- New onset of severe headache, especially with a fever

History of exposure

- Has the child been in contact with anyone who was confirmed as a case of COVID-19 in the last 2 weeks?
- Has the child travelled from a non-corridor country or a country on the amber list in the last 14 days?



Annex 3 - Health Procedures





- A doctor's certificate may be requested by the educational institution before a child or member of staff returns to school. This may vary depending on the kindergarten management and general epidemiological situation.
- The Kindergarten is to hold accurate and timely records (time-in and time-out) of attendances and composition of groups of children and staff attending all times to provide, on request, the Public Health Authorities with any information related to the operations of the School, including personal details of the staff, parents/guardians and students attending the School. The requirement for submission of any data to the Public Health authorities is in line with the Public Health Act.