

Play

Playing helps children stay physically and mental well. It is an everyday part of a healthy and happy childhood. Play is even more important during a crisis like the current coronavirus pandemic. It helps a child manage their emotions and maintain a sense that everything is and can be ok.

Playing in a Play-Pod:

- Make the most of the outdoors – children will thrive on both the play opportunities and health benefits.
- Children lead their own play - use the Síolta & Aistear resources to support and enhance both the indoor and outdoor learning and play opportunities for all children.
- Variety is essential – provide a range of toys, natural play materials and resources to stimulate and encourage child led play in the indoor and outdoor environment.

Think abouts for play during COVID-19:

- How to make children's regular handwashing and hygiene practices playful – incorporate in the play routines of the children.
- Before and after play, children should wash their hands.
- How to keep children's soft toys/comfort blankets clean– ensure that they are machine washable and personal to the child.
- How to keep an ample supply of toys, play materials & resources clean – consider the rotation of items between play sessions within each play-pod to facilitate ease of cleaning and disinfection.
- How to maintain safe clean playful environments in shared spaces - ensure shared spaces are cleaned between sessions and separate resources used.
- How to store/deal with soiled items in a play-pod - remove all soiled items and ensure they are washed with hot soapy water as per HPSC guidelines, before returning back to the room.
- How and where to store toys/equipment/resources - store clean toys/equipment in a clean container or clean cupboard.
- Different play-pods should not share toys or resources.
- If separate toy boxes are not possible toys must be cleaned between use by different play-pods.

Remember to follow HPSC Infection Prevention and Control, guidance for settings providing childcare during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Outdoor Play:

- Children should remain within their play-pod outdoors.
- More than one play-pod can be outdoors at the same time once they do not mix.
- Trips to nearby parks and amenities can be managed with a low risk of infection if physical distance from other people is maintained.
- The ELC/SAC environment should remain a risk rich environment.
For further information see the tip-sheet on Adapting Environments.

Play

Sand Play:

- A container of sand should be allocated to one play-pod or to a limited number of play-pods and containers cleaned regularly. There is no requirement to change kinetic sand at specific intervals.
- Outdoor sand pits should be used by one play-pod of children at a time. There is no requirement to allow a specific interval between use of a sand pit by one play-pod and by a subsequent play-pod.

Some suggested ways to incorporate sand play during COVID-19 conditions:

Babies - Sensory bottles. Half fill coloured bottles with sand or half fill clear bottles with sand and food colouring, then seal the lids.

Waddlers/Toddlers – Sand art. Sand can be added to paint for textured painting.

Pre-schoolers - Small shallow trays mean children can explore sand on their own tray and is perfect for mark making and small world play too.

School-Age – Use of sand in the arts and crafts area or calming sensory play.

Children of all ages can engage in all of these type of activities with sand.

Messy/sensory play:

Messy/sensory play elements may be used once replaced regularly as per HPSC guidelines.

Some suggested ways to incorporate messy/sensory play during COVID-19 conditions:

Babies – individual containers of gloop, moon sand or playdough, finger painting as a sensory experience.

Waddlers/Toddlers – crazy foam, soft dough, slime.

Pre-schoolers – Water play, painting, playdough, mud kitchen.

School-Age – Outdoor exploring, ice excavating, sensory science.

Children of all ages can engage in all of these types of activities (e.g., pre-school and school-age children enjoy water play, outdoor exploration).

Further Play Resources:

Let's Play Ireland

NCN Play Hub

For further information/support on developing outdoor play-based learning please contact your local support organisation.

