

P-05-1037 Allow children to enter lockdown areas to continue to train with their existing sports clubs, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 25.10.20

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24th October 2020.

Janet Finch-Saunders MS
Chair, Petitions Committee.

Dear Ms Finch-Saunders

Re: Petition P-05-1037- Children Lockdown Training

Thank you for your letter asking for my views on the Deputy Minister for Culture, Sports and Tourism's response to my petition.

I am pleased that the Senedd has recognised the importance of sport and activities to children's mental and physical well-being at this difficult time and that as from 16 October they could return to their organised activities.

As far as I am aware, there have been very few (if any) reported transmissions of Covid 19 which have taken place in organised sports activities, and I understand that the highest risk of transmission is from people socialising indoors and not maintaining social distances without any precautions. Not a situation that occurs during organised children's activities. The reason for this may be because of the tight regulations that govern organised sporting activities and that are overseen by organisations such as Sport Wales who have ensured that the sports clubs operate in "Covid safe" environments.

It also seems to be universally accepted that taking part in organised sport after school helps children with their mental health by releasing endorphins, expelling pent up energies, and seeing their friends. In addition to this is the benefit of forming a habit of exercising at a young age that will hopefully continue into their adult years, thus assisting in the fight against obesity and other health problems in their adult years. Indeed I note that as part of the "Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales" strategy that was launched by Vaughn Gething on 6 February 2020, two of the eight priority areas identified in the plan were "investment in cycle and walking routes" and "increase access to outdoor recreation" and the strategy also stated that there should be "action focussed on enabling people to have easy access to healthy food choices and physical activity".

The NHS website states that "children and young people aged 5-18 should aim for an average of at least 60 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity a day across the week; take part in a variety of types and intensities of physical activity across the week to develop movement skills, muscles and

bones and should reduce the time spent sitting or lying down and break up long periods of not moving with some activity”.

Unfortunately, due to the national 17 day firebreak, the children were only able to return to their activities for 7 days before they were prevented from doing so once again.

During these 17 days the clocks return to Greenwich Meantime and the evenings will draw in, making it more difficult for children to exercise in the evening when they get home from school. Many parents are working from home and will be unable to take their children to exercise until after they have finished work at 5-6pm by which time it will be dark. Even with the best intentions, children are not going to be as motivated to exercise on their own in the dark as they would be with a group of friends in an organised activity. There is also a safety issue when children are having to exercise alone without the expertise or care of their coaches in unlit areas instead of purpose-built floodlit facilities. There is therefore a risk that if they cannot exercise in their organised groups, they will get out of the habit of exercise over the winter months and will not return to their sport. Alternatives to sport in the winter months will inevitably be more sedentary activities such as watching TV and playing computer games.

In his televised briefing on Monday 19th October, the First Minister gave assurances that the “firebreak” lockdown will come to an end on 9th November 2020. At the time of writing, he has not given any details about what restrictions will be put in its place other than saying that the local lockdowns will be replaced by a Wales wide lockdown.

At the moment, there is a great deal of uncertainty about what the Wales wide lockdown will entail, and I do therefore have a number of questions in response to the Minister’s reply to the petitions committee.

Firstly, will everyone under 18 be allowed to immediately resume training with their clubs on 9th November in keeping with the spirit of the regulations that were issued on 16th October (and are referred to in the Minister’s reply)? If so, will this be without any further restrictions on numbers (which effectively prevent many children from participating regularly).

Secondly, if any travel restrictions are put in place, will travel for sport activities be exempt, and will children attending their existing clubs to train continue to be a “reasonable excuse” to travel further if necessary to train with their existing clubs in accordance with the spirit of the regulations that came into force on 16th October?

Finally, if any further lockdown becomes necessary, will sport be permitted as a reasonable excuse to leave the home and classed alongside childcare and education in its importance for children’s health and well-being at these difficult times?

I appreciate that we are living in unprecedented times and that difficult decisions have to be made to protect the public from Coronavirus, but in view of the low level of risk to children in the Covid safe environments that the sports clubs have worked hard to introduce, and the long term physical and mental health benefits that participating in sport will give children, I respectfully request that allowing children to train with their sports clubs is treated as a priority in future decision-making by the Senedd.

Yours faithfully,