

03rd June 2020

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
House of Commons
London, SW1A 0AA

Dear Prime Minister,

In light of your recent decision to be “much more interventionist” on tackling obesity as part of the fight against coronavirus, I write to urge you not to overlook the essential role that public playgrounds have in tackling the childhood obesity crisis. Public play provision is a key factor in tackling obesity and therefore, in tackling Covid-19. Solid investment in playgrounds is an easy ‘win’ for Government in this fight, so can I ask:

- 1. When can children play in playgrounds again?**
- 2. Will public playgrounds be adequately funded going forward?**

Children’s need for play must not be airbrushed out of the lockdown roadmap. Millions of children will not have played outdoors for months now and, with the current emphasis on outdoor activities for everyone except children, their needs are being neglected. Parents up and down the UK want to know when their children can use local their playgrounds again and cannot understand why they have not been prioritised as lockdown eases.

1 in 8 UK households do not have a garden^{*1} so for many children, playgrounds are their only opportunity to maintain fitness through outdoor play. A recent survey of 1100 parents showed that 72% of parents of children with health issues such as obesity said that the lack of outdoor play facilities in their area has played a role in their children’s problems and 90% of parents without a local playground said that having access would make their child play outside more.^{*2}

This follows several years where playground closures have gone into freefall^{*3} leaving many children, particularly the most disadvantaged, with nowhere to play. Outdoor play is the precursor to an active lifestyle and a love of fitness is forged through a love of play.

As Chair of The Association of Play Industries, the UK trade body for providers of playground equipment, we are warning of the catastrophic impact on children’s health unless there is targeted support for our small but vital industry. There is increasing evidence that Local Authority budgets for public playgrounds will be slashed^{*4} even further with devastating, irreversible consequences and significant job losses in the sector. The industry needs to be fit for purpose post-pandemic but so far it has slipped through the gaps of specific government support by not falling under entertainment, sports or retail.



Association of Play Industries

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Under the auspices of the Federation of Sports and Play Associations Ltd. Registered at the above address Registration No. 216719

A recent survey of API members showed that:

- Members' sales since the start of lockdown are **down over 70%** versus 2019
- **Over 95%** of members predict **further reductions** in revenue for the remainder of the year

We are therefore urging the Government to:

1. Pledge a **new Government funding stream specifically for public outdoor play and activity provision** (our research estimates £100m is needed to offset the decline seen in recent years).
2. Provide guidelines for **when and how playgrounds will be brought back** into use.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I hope I have your support in this to help secure the health of children now and in the future.

Yours sincerely,



Mark Hardy
Chairman, Association of Play Industries

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1. [Office for National Statistics, Access to garden spaces: England, May 2020](#)
 2. [Mumsnet and API, Play Must Stay playground closures, 2019.](#)
 3. [Association of Play Industries \(API\), Nowhere to Play Study, 2016](#)
 4. [The Times, Councils threaten bankruptcy as coronavirus crisis tears £10bn hole in finances, May 2020](#)