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**Recess Solutions: How to offer a safe recess during a pandemic**

by Dr. Melinda Bossenmeyer

Webb City, Missouri, August 20, 2020

Schools across the nation are returning to classrooms, lunchrooms and playgrounds to find that much has changed since school closed in March.

One of the most challenging environments, the playground, children’s favorite activity at school, can still be a safe place to play albeit with a few changes, according to Dr. Melinda Bossenmeyer, nationally recognized playground designer and educator.

To understand how to make recess safe during the Coronavirus pandemic it is important to understand the risks that must be mitigated to reduce exposure spread.

High risk factors for the spread of the virus are:

1. Number of Kids
2. Length of Exposure
3. Sharing Equipment
4. Not maintaining a safe distance

In order to offer a safe recess experience for students, 4 guidelines should be implemented, according to Dr. Bossenmeyer.

1. **ACTIVITY ZONES**- In order to reduce the number of children students come in contact with it is important to develop cohorts or groups of children who remain together during recess. These students go to an “Activity Zone” and stay in that assigned Activity Zone for the duration of the recess period. Another way to reduce exposure to students is to stagger recess periods so that an entire grade level would not go to recess at the same time but recess would be planned and scheduled so the fewest number of classes would be on the playground for recess at one time.
2. **SOCIAL DISTANCING**- A second guideline to reduce the spread is to maintain the recommended 6 feet of social distancing. Outdoor markings much like game court markings, like 4 square or hopscotch, can help designate Activity Zones or areas. Markings can serve a number of purposes. In order to designate markings specific to COVID-19 social distancing, a school can paint dots or outline an Activity Zone for students to remain inside of during recess. These markings can designate spots for actively playing in an activity and dots for waiting in line and maintaining social distancing. A freeze bell is also recommended so that each Activity Zone participant can be dismissed to maintain social distancing.
3. **SUPERVISION AND CONTROL**- We have talked about a number of these strategies already. One is the freeze bell where students freeze at each Activity Zone and wait to be dismissed back to class. Another strategy for Supervision is the recommendation of reducing the number of students in each Activity Zone so that it makes it easier for an adult supervisor to observe all students in their Activity Zone to insure social distancing is maintained. Wearing a mask, students and Supervisors both, is also recommended.
4. **NO SHARED EQUIPMENT**- It is thought that the virus can be spread through touch, ie. sharing equipment and classroom supplies. It is for that reason that equipment is not recommended at recess. Peaceful Playgrounds, Inc. has developed a set of outdoor activities that can be used with Google classrooms and digital learning and also for indoor brain break activities. These “No Equipment COVID-10 Activity Sets” do not require equipment, and thus reduce the likelihood of spread.

With these guidelines in place schools can mitigated the spread of the virus so that recess can be a safe place to play.

Peaceful Playgrounds, Inc. offers weekly free [“Recess Solutions Webinars: How to Offer a Safe Recess During the Pandemic.”](https://bit.ly/34iRRzt)  and provides information on how to support recess in schools.

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[Peaceful Playgrounds, Inc.](http://www.peacefulplaygrounds.com/covid-19-distancing-playground/)

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