

**INTERIM GUIDANCE REGARDING THE VISUALLY RECORDED INTERVIEWS OF CHILDREN DURING CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) PANDEMIC**

The new strain of COVID-19 is highly transmissible and the most recent Police Scotland guidance to officers is to strongly adhere to, and encourage, physical distancing, wearing of face-coverings and self-hygiene to reduce the risks of infection.

In addition, where an officer or member of staff believe they will be unable to maintain 2m distancing from a member of the public, priority should be given to wearing an FFP3 mask, goggles and gloves, regardless of whether or not there is any indication of a possible risk of infection.

It is acknowledged that this guidance and the use of face masks poses a practical issue when conducting visually recorded interviews (VRI) of children in terms of communicating clearly with the child, the sound quality of the recording and the ability to read facial expressions. This may have an impact on the ability to conduct comprehensive risk assessments for that child and any other identified and the suitability of the recorded interview to be later used in court proceedings.

The protection of children is a priority for Police Scotland and continues to be during the pandemic. However, this needs to be balanced with the health and wellbeing of officers required to undertake this role.

**MITIGATION ACTIONS**

Whilst acknowledging that we cannot plan for every situation, the following guidance has been developed to mitigate risk to officers undertaking VRI’s of children and should be implemented immediately.

PRE-INTERVIEW

* Every effort should be made to establish the risk of exposure posed by the child to the interviewing team prior to interview.
* Where appropriate to do so, contact to be made with the child’s family to establish if anyone in the household is displaying symptoms or may have been in close contact with anyone with Covid-19.
* The Interagency Referral Discussion (IRD) should record who will be responsible for undertaking this risk assessment task.
* Transport of the child to interview, where possible, should be undertaken by the child’s family. Where this is not possible, then FFP3 face coverings must be worn when in the same vehicle as the child.
* Whilst it is recognised that a Category A/Fixed Interview Site is the preferred option for conducting JIIs of children, if it is not sufficiently large enough to allow 2m distancing between the interviewer and the child, then another space should be identified and used that does provide this protection.
* All equipment and the interview space will be sanitised before every interview and recorded in the interview record.
* A Joint pre-interview discussion to agree the interview strategy including lead interviewer, to consider Police / Social work roles in the context of separate PPE and risk-assessment methodologies.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

* Removal of face-covering is permissible for the lead interview officer, subject to the completion and consideration of ‘Pre-Interview’ checks.
* At all times (where possible), 2 metre distance should be maintained between the interviewer(s) and the child.
* The child should be encouraged to remain seated throughout the interview, however, it is acknowledged that for younger children this is very difficult to manage.
* If available and suitable to do so, open a window in the interview room to allow air flow – again, acknowledging that outside noise can interfere with sound quality and may cause distraction for the child.
* If a separate viewing room is available for the second interviewer, then this should be used to limit the number of people in the interview and allow for greater social distance.
* If a separate room is not available, the second interviewer will wear a face-covering throughout and should make efforts to create as great a distance between themselves and the child whilst still being able to competently undertake their role.

AFTER INTERVIEW

* Face-coverings should be worn again, as per general guidance.
* Interview space and equipment must be sanitised.
* Vehicles used to transport the child to be sanitised after use.
* Link in with most suitable partner agency or family (if appropriate) in the days after the interview to assess if anyone in the family have subsequently tested positive for Covid or have developed symptoms.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

* In the event Social Work cannot provide a worker to undertake an interview due to concerns around risk of Covid-19 infection, but the risk posed to the child is considered significant then the interview’s progression should be carefully considered. Recourse to using two police officers to allow progression might be appropriate as a last resort. Full rationale to be recorded on the IRD.
* Where the Covid-19 risk assessment (Pre-interview) identifies that a child poses a risk of infection to officers, then all effort should be made to delay the interview until a suitable period of isolation has passed. The interview should take place as soon a reasonably practicable thereafter.
* If, in the aforementioned circumstances, a delay is not suitable then all previous suggested precautions should be undertaken and thereafter consideration of a period of isolation taken by the interviewing officer to assess development of symptoms and prevent potential further infection to colleagues.