

A photograph of a grassy football pitch with three green cones and one red cone arranged in a line. The cones are in the foreground, and the background is a blurred green field.

COVID 19 – GUIDANCE ON RE-STARTING FOOTBALL ACTIVITY

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**FOR PROVIDERS OF OUTDOOR FOOTBALL
FACILITIES, INCLUDING CLUBS**



INTRODUCTION

These guidelines have been produced in line with the Government guidance issued on 1 June 2020, which means that outdoor football facilities, including football clubs, are now permitted to re-open, if they can do so safely and in accordance with the latest Governance guidance. The Government guidance is published **here**.

As a facility provider, it's your decision as to when you consider your facility ready to re-open. You should only re-open when you feel able to do so safely. Until you feel it is safe – especially for vulnerable groups, children and their families – and responsible to re-open, your facility should remain closed.

The purpose of this guide is to help you to plan and prepare your facility for a safe re-opening and the phased return to grassroots football. In producing this guide, we have reflected current Government guidance in a football facility context and provided you with practical tools to apply the guidelines.

However, we know that each facility is different, and it is not possible to cover every scenario. As such, you should use this guide as a starting point to develop and implement your **own Covid-19 risk assessment**. This will ensure that the safety measures you choose to adopt meet your facility's particular circumstances and conditions.

You should also check any insurance you have in place (e.g. personal accident and public liability), to ensure it remains adequate and in place during the pandemic and if so, you are not breaking any of its terms.

Above all, your facility must be able to operate **consistently with Government guidance regarding health, social distancing and hygiene**. That currently means:

- All users can maintain a safe two-metre distance;
- Good hygiene practices are in place;
- Equipment is disinfected regularly;
- It is clear that anyone who is symptomatic or suspects they have been exposed to the virus does not take part and remains at home..

Due to the changeable nature of Government guidance, we strongly recommend you review your current measures regularly and update your COVID-19 risk assessment accordingly. The current guidelines from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport can be found **here**. When Government guidance changes, The Football Association (The FA) will update the permitted formats of grassroots football **here**.

However, for the remainder of this guide, we will focus on how to prepare a safe football facility.

IN SUMMARY:

- **Always follow the latest Government guidance;**
- **Be aware of any football-specific protocols, which should be in line with Government guidance;**
- **Complete a thorough risk assessment;**
- **Check your insurance cover;**
- **If in doubt, or you're not comfortable re-opening, don't.**

PLAN AND PREPARE

There are many reasons why you should start to plan and prepare for the safe re-opening of your facility. Whenever you choose to re-open, getting ready now gives you time to plan carefully and give due consideration to the requirements of opening day.

It also enables you the time to put in place any required actions. For example, you may need to make repairs, order equipment, deep-clean the clubhouse, or hire an outside contractor to get your pitch ready. The earlier you plan, the better.

Consider establishing a Covid-19 group to be responsible for producing and implementing your Covid-19 risk assessment and to oversee the safe re-opening of your facilities. This will allow you to work as a team while also providing a clear focus on the tasks required to re-open your facility safely.

It is the responsibility of the Health & Safety Director and/or Board to implement these changes, even if a team of people are co-opted into a Covid-19 group.



'ON THE PITCH'

Getting your pitches ready for use is an important task and pitch maintenance activity can now take place if social-distancing and hygiene measures are implemented and observed. Making the right plans now will set you up for success when football can safely resume. You can get all the advice and guidance you need by joining the Football Foundation Groundskeeping Community [here](#).

If your artificial grass pitch is used for match-play, ensure that its test certificate is still valid so it remains on the 3G pitch register for the forthcoming season. The FA has allowed all pitches whose test reports have expired over summer 2020 a period of grace to complete the testing process. Please check with your County FA if this applies to your facility. You can find the contact details of your County FA [here](#).

PROMOTING GOOD HYGIENE

Provide hand sanitisers at the entrance and exit of your pitches and advise users to bring their own hand sanitiser, marked with their own name. Provide additional waste facilities and more frequent rubbish collection.

If maintenance equipment or machinery is used by multiple operators/personnel you will need to ensure that thorough cleaning procedures are in place after use.

If external contractors are used, you should ensure they are fully briefed on your Covid-19 risk assessment and they agree to observe these along with their own company guidelines.

AVOIDING CONGESTION

If your pitches have peak-use times, review your programme to stagger activities throughout the week to avoid congestion as much as possible.

Programme all activities with sufficient space (e.g. a minimum 10 minute window) in between bookings to avoid clustering of groups on pitch-side or in the car park before/after sessions. All users should be encouraged to arrive and leave punctually.

When match-play is permitted (in the future), this must include weekend use. You should speak to your local leagues about applying flexible kick-off times to accommodate this.

If your new programme of use requires longer operating hours, timings must still fall within those permitted by your Local Planning Authority.



'OFF THE PITCH'

Government guidance permits the re-opening of outdoor sports facilities such as playing fields. It also allows facility operators to open buildings for:

- Access to pitches;
- Use of toilets;
- Purchase of take-away food and drink.

If you choose to open for these purposes, there are a number of things you can do to help minimise risks, avoid accidental gatherings and achieve a safe re-opening. For example:

PROMOTING GOOD HYGIENE

Your clubhouse should create an environment that encourages and allows all users to maintain good levels of hygiene through handwashing, sanitisation facilities and toilets. Consider what steps you will need to take to educate users to be responsible for their own hygiene and to ensure you minimise the chance of transmission of Covid-19 within your facility.

Consideration should be given to:

- Additional hand sanitisers throughout the clubhouse;
- Signs clearly directing people to where they can wash their hands;
- Ensuring all handwashing stations are in good working order and provide soap, hot water and hand sanitiser;
- Providing hygiene standards' promotional posters and signage throughout the clubhouse;
- Supplying disposable paper towels in handwashing facilities;
- Minimising the use of portable toilets;
- Carrying out 'trial runs' to test and adapt your plans.

KEEPING YOUR CLUBHOUSE AND EQUIPMENT CLEAN

Keeping your clubhouse clean will reduce the risk of passing the infection onto other people. To achieve this, your cleaning procedures should be thorough and rigorous.

Depending on the scale of your facility, you may consider having a dedicated cleaning team, so that the cleaning is done by a small group of trained people.

A cleaning schedule could include:

- Daily cleaning throughout the clubhouse;
- Identifying high-contact touch points for more regular cleaning (e.g. door handles, grab rails, vending machines);
- Frequent cleaning of work areas and equipment between use;
- Cleaning of shared training equipment after each individual use;
- Having waste facilities and more frequent rubbish collection;
- Removing any non-essential items that may be difficult to clean;

If a Covid-19 case is reported in your facility, you should follow the Public Health England guidance to reduce the risk of passing the infection on to other people. See [here](#).

You should also have a designated person who is responsible for checking that all the cleaning has taken place as planned.

MAINTAINING SOCIAL DISTANCING AND AVOIDING CONGESTION

Adapting your clubhouse will help maintain social distancing and avoid congestion. Achieving this may require some creative thinking. Please consider:

- Clear signage so people can find their destination quickly;
- Reviewing how people walk through your clubhouse and adjust if necessary to reduce congestion and contact between users;
- Regulating entry to your clubhouse to avoid overcrowding;
- Applying two-metre markings where necessary to manage queues, e.g. outside the entrance/toilets/catering facility;

'OFF THE PITCH' (CONTINUED)

- One-way arrow markings to help footflow management;
- Single-use doorways to avoid congestion i.e. one-way only entrances/exits;
- Single or limited use of toilet facilities to avoid congestion in confined spaces;
- Using outside areas for queueing;
- Carrying out 'trial runs' to test and adapt your plans.

RE-OPENING BARS AND CATERING

Current Government guidelines state that bars must stay closed until further notice. However, if you are able to serve take-away food and drinks, then hot and cold food may be served for consumption off the premises (i.e. outside the building).

Catering facilities commonly have high levels of usage and contact between workers and users. Therefore, extra consideration must be given to ensure that social distancing remains in place. For example:

- Utilise serving hatches, where they exist, to minimise customers entering the building;
- Where serving hatches do not exist, consider using screening to limiting user contact with workers;
- At till points, encourage the use of contactless payments to avoid handling cash;
- Apply two-metre markings to ensure social distancing when queueing;
- Use outside areas for queueing;
- Use clear signage to inform users that food and drinks must be consumed in outdoor spaces and give thought to where these people might congregate in bad weather;
- Clean vending machines regularly as they are a high touch point area;
- Use disposable utensils to help minimise the risk of infection, but ensure appropriate bin locations and regular collections.

CHANGING ROOMS

To maintain social distancing, all changing rooms should be kept closed until further notice. Keep changing rooms locked and use signage to clearly notify users.

Communicate clearly with all users before they visit your facility that changing rooms will be unavailable and request all users arrive and leave in their kit.



OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

COMMUNICATING CLEARLY AND REGULARLY

Before you re-open, provide clear communications with all user groups – before they attend your facility – about the steps you have taken to make your facility safe. This will allow them to familiarise themselves with the procedures before entering the facility. This could also include your expectation of users when they arrive. To avoid confusion, also highlight key dates, opening times and any other important changes to the way your facility will operate.

While users are at your facility, use posters and signage throughout all areas to promote your new protocols. For example:

- Social distancing (two-metre spacing);
- Hygiene (hand washing/sanitisers);
- Traffic flow (entrance/exits);
- Restricted areas.

INSPECTING THE EXISTING CONDITION OF YOUR FACILITY

Your facility may have been unused for some time, so a thorough building inspection and walk-round will allow you to identify any issues and damage. This will help you plan what work needs to be carried out prior to re-opening your facility and should include water quality (e.g. for Legionella and other contaminants), drains, gas services, ventilation, alarms/safety systems and pest control.

MAINTAINING THE WELLBEING AND SAFETY OF WORKERS AND CUSTOMERS

The wellbeing and safety of your workers and customers is crucial. If anyone shows/has any signs of Covid-19, they must be sent home to act in accordance with Government guidance. Government cleaning protocols should then be put in place to reduce the risk of passing the infection on to other people. See [here](#).

MANAGEMENT AND SUPERVISION OF USERS

Consideration must be given to the management and supervision of facility users and their compliance with Government guidance. These preparations should be made prior to re-opening, including extra supervision in the early stages to help users to adapt to your new protocols.

Positive encouragement and reinforcement is welcomed, but repeat offenders and those who totally disregard Government guidance should be requested to leave the premises. If required, report serious offenders to the police, who have been given powers to enforce Government measures.

It is also important to ensure that your workforce is on board with everything you've done. This may include making staff or volunteers fully aware of the changes to your protocols so they are clear about any additional expectations you have of them.



OTHER CONSIDERATIONS (CONTINUED)

TEST AND LEARN

Consider a phased re-opening of your facility to provide you with an opportunity to test your new protocols in a controlled way. For example, you could limit your initial re-opening to a reduced number of timeslots or by user groups. This approach would allow you time to test, learn and adapt your new approaches to ensure they are effective and successful before re-opening to more users.

TAKING BOOKINGS AND PAYMENTS

If your facility has multiple user groups, all bookings and payments should be made in advance and via an online system or over the phone, where possible. If this is not feasible, consider contactless- only payments to avoid handling cash.

ADMINISTERING FIRST AID

First aiders should update themselves on the guidance that has been produced by their usual first-aid training provider. They should ensure that they have the appropriate PPE to be able to deal with any first-aid circumstance which may put them into conflict with social-distancing guidance. They should also be clear on any adaptations they may need to make to their usual first-aid techniques to protect themselves and others from Covid-19 infection.

First aid remains a crucial skill even as the country deals with the Covid-19. St John's Ambulance have put together advice for first aiders to help keep yourself and those who use your facility safe. This advice can be found [here](#).

ENSURING YOU HAVE THE CORRECT PERMISSIONS TO RE-OPEN

If you have a landlord (e.g. a Local Council), you must check with them to ensure you have the necessary permission to re-open.

Before you commence re-opening, check with your insurer to ensure that your personal accident and public liability insurance is still in place and adequate in light of the pandemic. Be clear on any obligations you may be required to fulfil under your insurance policies and raise any queries with your insurer.



SUPPORT TOOLS

1. COVID-19 RISK ASSESSMENT EXAMPLE

As a facility provider, you should complete **your own** COVID-19 risk assessment.

We have provided an example risk assessment below, which is for illustrative purposes only, and included some examples of things to consider. Consider how this will apply to each aspect of your operation and identify the controls you require to **meet Government guidance regarding health, social distancing and hygiene**.

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed?	Controls required	Additional controls	Action by whom?	Action by when?	Date completed
Spread on COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Users Workers Cleaners Pitch contractors 	<p>PROMOTING GOOD HYGIENE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide additional hand sanitisers throughout the clubhouse. Clearly direct people to where they can wash their hands. Ensure that all handwashing stations are in good working order and provide soap, water and hand sanitiser. Provide hygiene standards promotional poster and signage throughout the clubhouse. Use disposable paper towels in handwashing facilities. <p>KEEP FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT CLEAN:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Daily cleaning throughout the clubhouse. Identify high-contact touch points for more regular cleaning (e.g. door handles, grab rails, vending machines). Frequent cleaning of work areas and equipment between use. Provide more waste facilities. Remove any non-essential items that may be difficult to clean. Follow Public Health England guidance if a COVID-19 case is reported at the facility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hourly check process (sanitiser, soap and paper towels and handwashing stations). Daily stock check (sanitiser, soap and paper towels). Daily check (promotion posters and signage). Train all workers on new protocols and the important of good hygiene. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A responsible person to check cleaning has taken place as planned. Weekly stock check (cleaning products). Empty waste facilities regularly. Train all workers on Public Health England guidance for reported COVID-19 cases. 			

SUPPORT TOOLS (CONTINUED)

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed?	Controls required	Additional controls	Action by whom?	Action by when?	Date completed
<p>Spread on COVID-19</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Users • Workers • Cleaners • Pitch contractors 	<p>MAINTAINING SOCIAL DISTANCING AND AVOIDING CONGESTION:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide signage so people can find their destination quickly. • Review how people walk through the clubhouse and adjust this to reduce congestion and contact between users. • Regulate the entry to the clubhouse to avoid overcrowding. • Apply two metre markings to the clubhouse entrance / toilets / and the queue to the café serving hatch. • One-way arrow markings to help foot traffic flow management. • Single-use doorways to avoid congestion i.e. one-way only entrances / exits. • Single / limited use of toilet facilities to avoid congestion in confined spaces. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor effectiveness, especially at peak times. • Train workers to promote compliance to facility users. • Train workers to report / deal with issues of non-compliance. • Daily check (promotion posters and signage). 			

SUPPORT TOOLS (CONTINUED)

2. COMMUNICATIONS

E.g. Posters and other communication tools on hygiene and social distancing

Sport England and Public Health England (PHE) are producing a series of useful communication tools to help you promote social distancing and good hygiene. When available, these will found [here](#).

FINALLY...

We want to thank you in advance for playing your vital part in helping our great game get going again. By observing Government guidance and the football-specific protocols, let's work together to ensure the transition back to enjoying football is as smooth and safe as possible.

But everyone's circumstances are different, and if you don't feel ready to re-open, there's no pressure. Everyone's health, wellbeing and safety are the priorities.



DISCLAIMER:

This guidance is for general information only and does not constitute legal advice or replace any Government or PHE advice; nor does it provide any specific commentary or advice on health-related issues. Affected organisations should therefore ensure that they seek independent advice from medical practitioners, or healthcare providers, prior to implementing any re-opening plan, as required. While efforts have been taken to ensure the accuracy of this information at the time of publication, the reader is reminded to check the Government website to obtain the most up-to-date information regarding social distancing and any other Government measures.



FOR ALL

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