



COVID-19 GUIDANCE ON RE- STARTING OUTDOOR COMPETITIVE GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL

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FOR **LEAGUES**



COVID-19 GUIDANCE ON RE-STARTING OUTDOOR COMPETITIVE GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL – FOR LEAGUES

Now the UK Government has given approval for outdoor competitive grassroots football and training sessions to re-start, this detailed guidance **for leagues** has been produced by The FA in relation to football in England. It applies to outdoor youth and adult football. For now, indoor football and futsal are not permitted.

This guidance is for grassroots leagues who operate under the Standard Code of Rules (SCOR) and the Standard Code of Rules for Mini-Soccer and Youth Competitions (SCORY). The Standard Code is mandatory for all competitions at Regional National League System (NLS) Feeder League level and below, and The FA Women's Pyramid, excluding the Barclays FA Women's Super League (BFA WSL), FA Women's Championship (FA WC).

The document aims to help and support and raise issues to consider as a league organiser. It should be read in conjunction with all FA guidance documents produced around the re-start of football which can be read [here](#).

It should be read in conjunction with the Government's latest [Covid-19 guidance](#) and is based on the Government's framework for a return to recreational team sport, which can be read [here](#).

Should Government guidance change in response to the current Covid-19 Alert Level, The FA guidance will be updated accordingly. As local lockdowns are a possibility, then leagues are advised to build flexibility into the fixture programme and not to sanction any teams that are following government advice around self-isolating. The season could very much be stop-start, so building in flexibility will help.

Some leagues are looking at smaller division sizes, or splitting divisions into two groups with the winners of each group playing each other in a final to determine the champions. Dealing with the challenge of Covid-19 does present the opportunity to be creative and innovative around fixture programmes. For example, if you opt for a fixture programme and it turns out the season finishes early, then it's easier to add a smaller competition at the end. To assist with flexibility, you should also consider reviewing league rules, especially around player registration cut-off dates and kick-off times.

Grassroots leagues can return from September 2020. A return to competitive football should only happen once clubs and facility providers have completed the necessary risk assessments and comprehensive plans are in place. Leagues should take as much time as needed to do this. Checking on venues to make sure they are available, especially school and local authority sites, will be key in the planning of fixtures and your County FA will be working alongside these facility providers to ensure maximum usage within the guidance.

Please remember: Your league's teams should only return to football when it's right for them to do so. There is no pressure to return everyone's health, wellbeing and safety are the priorities

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 competitive grassroots is as smooth and safe as possible.

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KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- If a league or club has any general concerns relating to the playing of fixtures they should contact the County FA who will follow up and offer support.
- Leagues should maintain regular dialogue with clubs/teams.
- Pitch availability – this may be reduced now due to maintaining social distancing. i.e. the amount of back-to-back games on a pitch are now likely to be reduced, with bigger gaps between matches. Leagues rules may need to be changed to facilitate a large kick-off window and/or fixtures changed to accommodate teams pitch availability.
- Leagues may wish to create a list of club/team Covid-19 officer(s) to help with communication.
- League may want to ask their pool of referees about their availability and any concerns or issues they may have.
- Leagues are advised not to collect or publish any club risk assessments. Leagues could ask clubs to submit a declaration that they have completed their risk assessment.
- 1 September 2020 is the first date by which league-organised fixtures can be played. It is important leagues keep dialogue with clubs/teams to understand their issues and establish a realistic start date.
- If a league is using player ID cards they may want to consider if this is still required. If so, the need for social distancing should be taken into account when handling ID cards, given that team sheets should not be shared physically.
- If you are a central venue league, then follow the guidance and requirements as set out in the guide for facilitates and clubs found [here](#)
- As local lockdowns are a possibility, then leagues are advised to build flexibility into the fixture programme.
- Leagues should not sanction any teams that are following Government guidance around self-isolating.
- Leagues should review their rules to see if they need amending, especially those rules that contain dates. **(See Appendix A)** to ensure the leagues rules are as flexible as possible.
- Leagues should review their fixture programmes. These will be determined by the start date, but need to build in flexibility around any local lockdowns and teams potentially self-isolating. Leagues also need to consider that some teams might not be able to commence from the beginning of the season and that some teams may need to play several away games initially until their facility is available **(see Appendix B)**.



BEFORE THE SEASON

Who?	Topic	Required actions
Leagues and Clubs	The basics	Clubs/teams should ensure they are affiliated to their local County FA for the 2020/21 season ahead of completing any league fixtures. The league must make sure they are sanctioned before they commence any league fixtures. This includes those leagues concluding last season's cups before the start of this season. If the league has not already held its AGM it must do so – all meetings must take place virtually. Leagues are reporting excellent and in some cases record number of attendees at AGMs by hosting them online. Guidance around holding online AGMs can be found here. Leagues may want to consider holding a general meeting to discuss the re-start of football and the league fixture programme. It is advisable for the leagues to invite the County FA to help and support any general meeting taking place. Leagues should check their own league applications from clubs/teams against those clubs/teams appearing on the league Whole Game System (WGS) sanction form. Players need to be registered with the league. Using FA WGS Player Registration will enable clubs/teams to use The FA Matchday App to help with contactless payments from players. Each club must only return to fixtures when they are ready and leagues should respect this. The FA has produced guidance to help clubs which can be read here. All clubs must identify a Covid-19 officer who will be responsible for developing a Covid-19 plan and risk assessment prior to the restart of any activity. The Covid-19 officer should continually monitor how compliance to their risk assessment is being observed within the club. The FA has produced guidance on conducting a risk assessment, which includes a template for self-completion here. The Covid-19 officer should consider establishing a Covid-19 group to be responsible for producing and implementing the Covid-19 risk assessment and to oversee the safe return to play. The Covid-19 officer at each club will be responsible for clearly communicating all relevant guidance to its players, coaches, volunteers, opposition and match officials. Leagues may wish to create a list of club/team Covid-19 officers to help with communication.
Leagues	Rules	Leagues' rules have a number of dates within them or rules that can be used to give the required flexibility to help football face the challenges of re-starting grassroots football. SCOR/Y do provide opportunities to be flexible in relation to the rules. Appendix A details the rules, how these may provide maximum flexibility and the rationale for consideration and implementation. Any local rule that a league may have is not included, so leagues should examine any local rules that are date-specific.

BEFORE THE SEASON (CONTINUED)

Who?	Topic	Required actions
Leagues	Fixture schedules	If a league is completing its cups from last season, player eligibility will need to be determined by the league and would need to be clearly communicated to the entrants prior to the games. Guidance around using FA Full-Time for last season's cups can be found here. If pitches have peak-use times, leagues will need to review their fixture programmes to stagger activities to avoid congestion as much as possible. This is where regular dialogue between the league and its clubs/teams will help. Practical examples would be when a team shares a pitch on the same day - e.g. a minimum 10-minute window between matches to avoid clustering of groups on pitchside or in the car park before/after sessions. All users should be encouraged to arrive and leave punctually. Leagues should consider applying flexible kick-off times to support this. If clubs foresee issues, because they share the pitch with other teams, they need to let their leagues know, so the leagues can assist with fixture planning and kick off times. Support around fixtures on FA Full-Time can be found here. Central venue leagues should consider staggering activities to avoid congestion as much as possible, including car parking arrangements and traffic flow. The league fixture programme may need to look different and will be dependent on when the season commences. Several opportunities exist that leagues could explore in terms of its fixture programme: • Consider smaller division sizes; • Consider splitting the season (having small divisions and re-allocating teams at the end of each block); • Consider using principles from trophy events used already in under-7 to under-11 leagues inclusive; • Consider removing league cup competitions allowing more playing weeks for league fixtures. The list below shows the number of weeks required to complete fixtures based on the number of teams within the division: 6-team division – home and away = 6 weeks; 7-team division – home and away = 14 weeks (teams have two blank weeks); 8-team division – home and away = 14 weeks; 9-team division – home and away = 18 weeks (teams have two blank weeks); 10-team division – home and away = 18 weeks; 11-team division – home and away = 22 weeks (teams have two blank weeks); 12-team division – home and away = 22 weeks. Leagues may want to consider the concept of circles leagues – see Appendix B.

BEFORE THE SEASON (CONTINUED)

Who?	Topic	Required actions
League	League officials	The league workforce may have changed. Some officials may decide they are unable to perform their role due to health or personal circumstances and support to help new officers may be required. Your County FA will be able to offer support and guidance for any new officials if required. To support league officers with technology, The FA Technology Digital Gym is available and can be found here



DURING THE SEASON

Who?	Topic	Required actions
League and Clubs	Pre-Match	ID Cards: For those Leagues who use League ID cards, please consider if checking ID cards is necessary and if so, how they intend teams to do so safely within social-distancing guidelines, given that team sheets should not be shared physically. Team sheets: Physical team sheets should not be shared between the officials or opposition where possible. These can be sent electronically via photo or e-mail if required. Respect handshake: The pre-match Respect handshake will be suspended until further notice. Match official payment: Where possible, arrangements should be made for the payment to be paid electronically, but should be communicated in advance to the match officials.
	Technical Areas	Clubs will need to increase the size of technical areas to allow for adequate social distancing for substitutes and team officials. Technical areas are allowed to be extended for this purpose.
	Non-fulfilled fixtures	Treat these fixtures as you would normally deal with a non-fulfilled fixture. Leagues to be mindful of non-fulfilled fixtures especially if teams are having to self-isolate. Teams should not be sanctioned if teams are having to self-isolate. Remember a process has to take place and clubs are able any decision to the sanctioning body (in most cases this will be the County FA) For example, if the league: • Came to a decision to which no reasonable such body could have come; and/or • Imposed a penalty, award, order or sanction that was excessive.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

GUIDANCE ON RECOGNISING THE NHS AND KEY WORKERS ON PLAYING KIT ETC.

The FA is supportive of initiatives to recognise the work and sacrifice of the NHS and key workers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The following criteria is to be used by a club at all levels of the game when recognising support for the NHS and key workers on playing kit and outer clothing used during the period of a match to the end of season 2020/21. All forms of message, logo or emblem must meet the requirements and spirit of the Regulations and Laws of the Game.

The following is permitted for a single match or series of matches:

- Simple messaging. For example, 'Thank You NHS';
- The use of a recognised motif or emblem;
- A message, logo or emblem (or combination thereof)

may be appear as a single area of no more than 100cmsq anywhere on a shirt and outer clothing in addition to the club crest and any sponsorship. Alternatively, such a message, logo or emblem may appear on shirts and outer clothing in the space reserved for the main club sponsor to a maximum total area of 250cmsq. (Note: Affiliated Association or Competition requirements may apply);

- A competition may require its permission for a message, logo or emblem to be used during the course of a match to be played in its competition;
- A competition-led initiative for all its member clubs subject to that initiative meeting this guidance, the Regulations and Laws of the Game.

The following is not permitted:

- The use of hashtags (#);
- Political, religious, personal or offensive messages, slogans or emblems.



RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO LEAGUES

FA Faith Calendar

The FA and Kick It Out's calendar of religious festivals 2020/21 guides everyone in football about different holy days that are observed by different faiths and guides those running football to adopt an inclusive approach to support the involvement and inclusion of people with an active faith. You can find and download it [here](#).

Youth Leadership

A Club and League Toolkit showing short videos and FAQs surrounding Youth Leadership in leagues and clubs, and giving examples, is available [here](#).

Club and League page

Resources and information to support clubs and leagues can be found on The FA website [here](#).



DISCLAIMER: This guidance is for general information only and does not constitute legal advice, nor is it a replacement for such, nor does it 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. Independent legal advice should be sought, as required and depending on your, or relevant circumstances.

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.

APPENDIX A

Leagues rules have a number of dates within them or rules that can be used to give the required flexibility to help football face the challenges ahead. SCOR/Y both provide the opportunities to the flexible in relation to the rules.

Any local rule that a league may have is not included, so leagues should examine any local rules that are date-specific.

RULE	DESCRIPTION	RATIONALE/OPPORTUNITY
2B	This Competition shall consist of not more than [] Clubs and/or [] Teams approved by the Sanctioning Authority.	Flexibility to be given to relax the numbers to stop this been a potential barrier to entry.
2M	Only one team shall be permitted from any Club to participate in the same division as another Team from the same Club unless there is no viable alternative because of logistical issues and/or reasons linked to participation and geographical boundaries. The Competition will obtain the prior approval of the Sanctioning Authority in the event of a division comprising of more than one Team from the same Club. This Competition will ensure that, where permission is given, Teams from a Club operating in the same division are run as separate entities with no interchange of players other than via transfers of registration in accordance with these Rules.	It maybe that clubs have teams in the same division to allow flexibility, especially if leagues look to group teams by geography. Such teams could carry the same core identity, and be differentiated (such as Reds, Blues- Remember those leagues that operate under SCORY can not use "A", "B" or "1st", "2nd" etc. In this instances players registrations are not interchangeable.
4C	In the event of any issue concerning the membership of any Club with the Competition the Management Committee may require a Deposit to be paid (in accordance with the Fees Tariff) by or on behalf of the Club on such terms and for such period as it may in its entire discretion think fit. Failure to comply with this Rule will result in a fine in accordance with the Fines Tariff.	Leagues to consider returning any deposits they may have back to clubs. Leagues also to consider not taking any deposits for any new clubs joining the league.
18A	Date of player registrations	The league may need to look at these dates to make sure they support clubs.
18B	Number of players registered XX days before the season commences	The league may need to reduce this number to make sure they support clubs.
18I	A Player may not be registered for a Club nor transferred to another Club in the Competition after [date] except by special permission of the Management Committee.	The league may need to look at this date to make sure they support clubs fulfil its fixtures.
18L	A Player shall not be eligible to play for a Team in any special championship, promotion or relegation deciding Competition Match (as specified in Rule 22 (A)) unless the Player has played [] Competition Matches for that Team in the current Playing Season.	The league may need to look at reducing the number of matches played to make sure they support clubs fulfil their fixtures.
18M	A Team shall not include more than [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11] Players who has/have taken part in [] or more senior Competition Matches during the current Playing Season unless a period of 21 days has elapsed since they last played. For the purpose of this Rule a senior competition(s) is/are [].	The league may need to look at this rule to make sure they support clubs to fulfil their fixtures.

APPENDIX A (CONT'D)

20A	Kick off times The times of kick-off shall be fixed at the AGM and can only be altered by the mutual consent of the two competing Clubs prior to the scheduled date of the Competition Match with written notification given to the Competition at least 7 days prior.	Leagues are advised to use a large kick-off time window for all games to be played and to allow flexibility.
20E i	In the event of a Club failing to keep its engagement the Management Committee shall have power to impose a fine	Leagues to be reminded that they must view any non-fulfilment fixture on its merits and follow the correct process. If a team has to self-isolate then they should not be sanctioned.
20F	A Club may at its discretion and in accordance with the Laws of the Game use substitute Players in any Competition Match. A Club may name up to [] (3, 4, 5, 6, 7) substitute Players of whom not more than [] ((3, 4, 5) may be used. A Player who has been substituted himself becomes a substitute and may replace a Player at any time subject to the substitution being carried out in accordance with Law 3 of the Laws of Association Football.	Leagues are encouraged to look at this rule and encourage use of rolling subs.

APPENDIX B

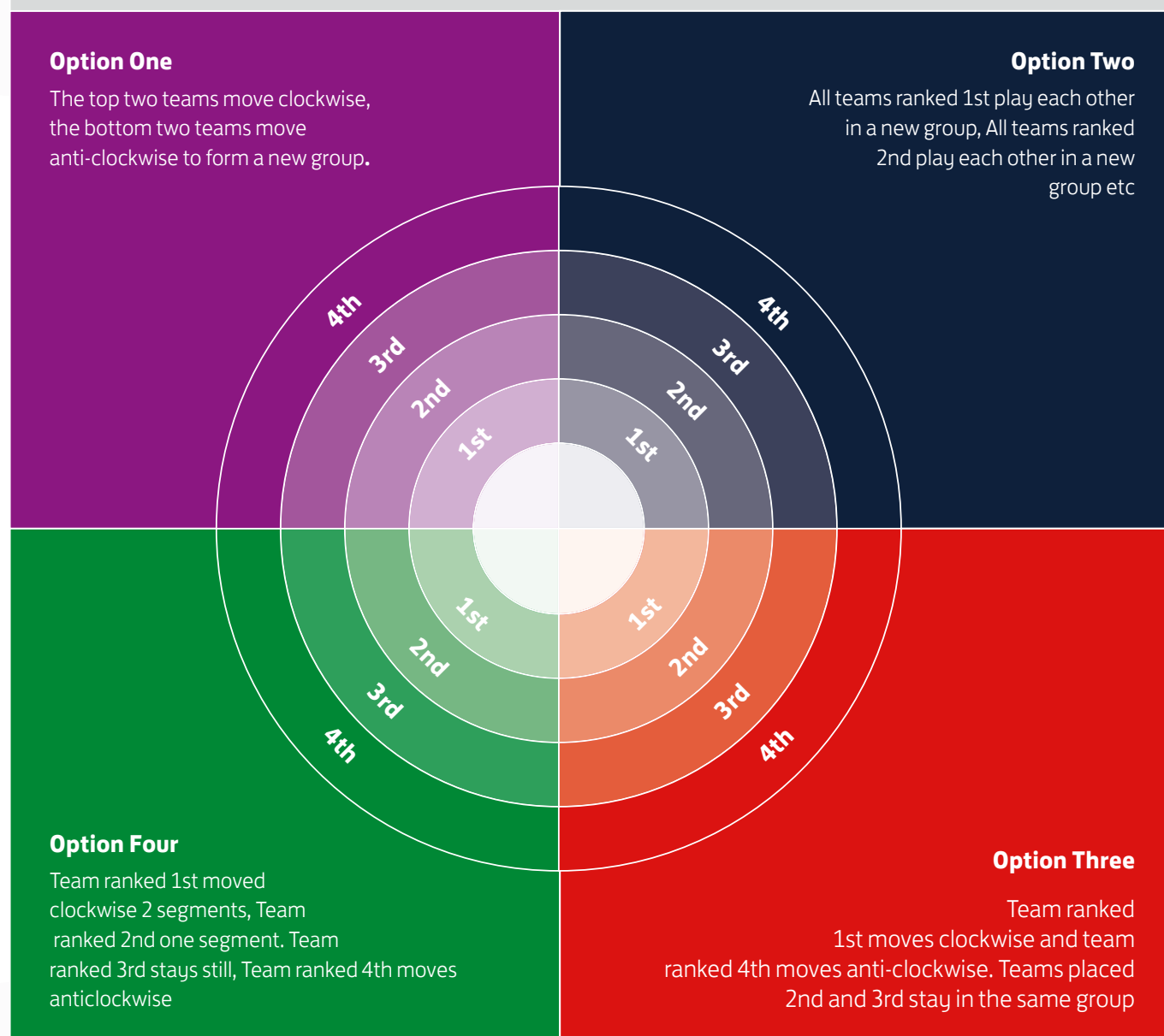
CIRCLE LEAGUES

Description: Teams play a small round-robin, with four teams in a group and move around either clockwise (top two) or anti-clockwise (bottom two). This allows teams to play different teams and over time, teams play each other in their coloured group.

More segments can be added and leagues could have multiple circles. Some options work better with more segments

The example below shows 20 teams in four segments. Using this concept means fixture programmes have to be created more often during the season.

- Teams play each other in their colored group.
- More segments can be added and leagues could have multiply circles.
- Some options work better with more segments





FOR ALL

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