Return of outdoor competitive grassroots football – FAQs

Below are a set of FAQs in response to The FA's guidelines on returning to play outdoor competitive grassroots football, which were published on 18 July 2020.

Q: What if my club is not ready to return to full competitive training and matches?

A: The FA has worked with the government to develop approval for the restart of competitive grassroots football; however, each club should fully understand the guidelines before deciding to commence activity. Each club must only return to competitive football when they are ready and have the appropriate measures in place as developed by The FA and general government guidance. There is no pressure to return. Everyone's health, wellbeing and safety are the priorities.

Q: What happens if a player, parent or coach shows Covid-19 symptoms before, during or after a match?

A: All players, officials, volunteers and spectators must undergo a self-assessment for any Covid-19 symptoms. No-one should leave home to participate in football if they, or someone they live with, has any of the following:

- A high temperature (above 37.8^{0}C);
- A new, continuous cough;
- A loss of, or change to, their sense of smell or taste.

If a participant becomes Covid-19 symptomatic during the activity, they should immediately remove themselves from the session and return home as soon as possible. NHS guidance on further management of symptoms should be followed.

If an individual becomes symptomatic post an activity they must follow the NHS Test and Trace guidance found here.

Q: Does this mean we can now play competitive football normally?

A: Competitive match play is now permitted, however, in all settings before and after the session, and in any breaks, all participants should practise social distancing, in line with government guidelines on two metres or 'one metre plus'. You can read these guidelines here.

The FA would strongly recommend a phased return to competitive football activity as follows:

- **Until 31 July** – When ready, you can begin competitive training, with the overall group size (inclusive of coaches) being limited to 30 people;
- **From August** – Competitive matches to begin, for example pre-season fixtures, festivals and small side football competitions;
- **From September** – Grassroots leagues, men's National League System, Women's Football Pyramid tiers 3 to 6, and FA Competitions can commence.

Substitutes and coaches are permitted but must socially distance on the touchline or in the dugout. During warm ups and cool downs, participants should practise social distancing where possible.

Q: Is there a limit to the number of people that can train together?

A: Yes, competitive training can take place, in an outdoor setting provided this takes place in groups of no more than 30 (including coaches).

Q: Does this now mean we can play football indoors?

A: Unfortunately, for now, the current government approval does not permit football or futsal activity within indoor settings.

The FA will look to work with indoor facility providers to develop appropriate guidance for indoor formats as soon as possible.

Q: We want to arrange a football competition with different teams competing, is this allowed under the new guidelines?

A: The FA would strongly recommend a phased return to competitive football activity as follows:

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The current government guidance permits competitive football activity, therefore in order to host multiple fixtures at the same time you will need to ensure you have considered this as part of your Covid-19 risk assessment and are comfortable that the groups can maintain social distancing off the field at all times.

All clubs and teams need to ensure they are affiliated to their respective County FA to ensure valid insurance is in place and to allow for the use of FA registered referees.

You must ensure that you do not overload your facilities – your Covid-19 risk assessment should cover maximum occupancy levels to ensure that social distancing can be maintained. For all other consideration on the impact upon your facilities please see the "providers of outdoor football facilities including clubs" document which is available here.

Q: Are we allowed to share kit and equipment such as balls, goalkeeper gloves and training tops?

A: The sharing of equipment must be avoided where possible. Where equipment is shared, equipment must be cleaned before use by another person.

Participants should take their kit home to wash it themselves, rather than have one person handling a large quantity of soiled materials. Where kit absolutely has to be shared or kept together (e.g. last-minute stand-in players, shortage of kit, or an essential club function), each person handling it must wash or sanitise their hands immediately after and appropriate cleaning arrangements for the kit must be made.

Q: If there is a regional lockdown, does this mean we won't be allowed to play competitively?

A: Clubs must always consider whether there are local restrictions in place in their area. If so, clubs should first read the guidance relevant to their area as this may supersede FA guidance and therefore also football activity.

Q: Will we be able to use changing rooms?

A: Changing rooms are an area of increased risk of transmission. Where possible, they should remain closed. Players and Officials should arrive changed and shower at home. Exceptions may be made where safety and safeguarding measures require their use e.g. supporting disabled athletes or a child needs a change of clothing etc. If you choose to use your changing and shower facilities you must follow government guidelines found here.

Preparation and use of toilets before, during or after the match or training should follow government guidance as seen here.

Q: Will I be allowed to go and watch a grassroots football match as a spectator if I'm socially distanced?

A: Supporters, parents, and other spectators should remain socially distanced whilst attending events. Spectator groups must be restricted to discrete six-person gathering limits and spread out, in line with wider government guidance, ensuring space for officials, coaches and substitutes.

Specific FA spectator guidance and protocols for clubs in the men's National League System and Women's Football Pyramid is available here.

What are the guidelines for participants and spectators before and after a game or training session?

A: There are a number of considerations that should be taken before, during and after a game. The full guidance here provides an overview of these.

Q: Do we need to support NHS Test and Trace efforts?

A: Yes, clubs or facility providers must support NHS Test and Trace efforts by collecting name and contact information on participants at both training and matches.

This information should be stored for a minimum of 21 days in-line with the government Recreational Team Sport Framework and collected/processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and in line with GDPR principles. It should be used only for the purpose of NHS Test and Trace.

Clubs or facility providers should follow current UK Gov guidance here.

Q: What does this mean for clubs with teams in the National League System or the Women's Football Pyramid, is there a set of specific guidance for players and spectators at this level of the game?

A: Specific guidance for those clubs that have teams participating in the men's National League System and Women's Football Pyramid is available here.

Q: Can clubs/venues provide food and drink?

A: Yes, for those clubs that have catering and bar facilities they are able to operate in accordance with the government guidelines for that sector and these can be found here. Extra considerations should be made to ensure social distancing is in place. Further information can be found in the "providers of outdoor football facilities including clubs" document which is available here.

Q: Are there any rules around goal celebrations?

A: Yes, goal celebrations should be conducted in a socially distant manner. Please refer to this guidance for a summary of considerations that should be taken during play.

Q: What about Walking Football, is there any specific guidance around this?

A: As a format of football, Walking Football is covered by all the same guidelines that are provided by The FA. These can be found here.

Q: What if there is an injury, is it safe for a player to be treated?

A: If a participant gets injured, a member of their household can assist if present and appropriate, but others (including match officials, teammates and coaches) will still need to socially distance unless a life or limb-threatening injury necessitates compromising guidelines to provide emergency care.

If there is a first-aider or other medical personnel present, they should be equipped with the appropriate PPE (including face coverings) before treating anyone to protect themselves and others if they need to compromise social-distancing guidelines to provide medical assistance. Full medical guidance can found here.