

COVID-19 GUIDANCE ON RE-STARTING INDOOR AND OUTDOOR GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL

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FOR ALL

The FA
FOR ALL

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UPDATES TO THE GUIDANCE

This guidance has been updated in September 2020 to cover the return of all indoor football. Please note that for outdoor football, this guidance remains the same. It is very important that all participants ensure they are following both The FA and Government guidance. The Government guidance can be found **here**.

Now the UK Government has given approval for outdoor and indoor grassroots football and training sessions to re-start, this detailed guidance has been produced by The FA in relation to football in England. It applies to youth and adult football, as well as the small-sided game and all other formats of football and futsal, including walking football. It applies to clubs, teams and groups of people playing organised football.

Additional guidance for clubs with teams competing in the men's National League System can be found **here** and/or the Women's Football Pyramid tiers 3 to 6 can be found **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.**

In indoor and outdoor competitive training and matches, physical contact is allowed, but for all other activity (e.g. warm-ups/cool-downs) the Government guidance on social distancing should be observed. You can read them **here**, but two-metre social distancing should be observed where possible. Where not possible, 'one-metre plus' distancing should be observed. You can read about the specific football situations when social distancing still applies in this guidance document.

The guidance you are reading is FOR ALL – players, coaches, club officials, club welfare officers, match officials, league officials, volunteers, parents/carers, spectators. It is also for clubs and football facility providers and should be read in conjunction with the updated additional guidance for 'Providers of indoor and outdoor football facilities' which is available **here**.

Should Government guidance change in response to the current Covid-19 Alert Level, The FA guidance will be updated accordingly.

In the meantime, anyone who is deemed vulnerable in respect of Covid-19 is reminded to follow the Government's guidance, only returning 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.

Please also bear in mind the recent Public Health England (PHE) report published **here**, which has highlighted a greater risk from Covid-19 to people from BAME communities. As the current impact of Covid-19 on members of BAME communities is not yet fully understood, we acknowledge that there may be increased concerns and levels of anxiety from within these communities.

When your club decides to return, you must carry out a risk assessment and record the procedures and checks put in place. It's essential everyone is clear about the restrictions and works together to manage social distancing, strict hand hygiene and the other protocols set out in this document.

DEALING WITH LOCAL LOCKDOWNS

In the event of a local lockdown, County FAs should liaise with Local Authorities, who will determine the appropriate restrictions that need to be put in place.

IMPORTANT:

If you are showing symptoms of the virus or have been in contact with someone displaying symptoms within the last two weeks, then you must stay at home and follow Government advice.

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BEFORE ANY FOOTBALL ACTIVITY TAKES PLACE

Who?	Topic	Required actions
CLUBS AND FACILITY PROVIDERS	**The basics**	• Facility operators should ensure they have read and understood The FA's guidance for 'Providers of indoor and outdoor football facilities, including clubs', available **here**. • Clubs/teams should ensure they are affiliated to their local County FA for the 2020/21 season ahead of any match play. • Each club must only return to sport when they are ready and have the appropriate measures in place as developed by The FA and general **Government guidance** in relation to recreational sport. • All clubs and facility providers must identify a Covid-19 officer who will be responsible for developing a Covid-19 plan and general risk assessment before re-starting any activity. The Covid-19 officer should continually monitor how compliance is being observed within the club or facility. • A specific safeguarding risk assessment must also be produced. The FA has produced guidance on conducting a safeguarding risk assessment, which includes a template for self-completion. It is available **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. • Clubs and facility providers should also check the insurance policies they have in relation to all football activities (e.g. personal accident and public liability), specifically any changes to insurance provider's advice and guidance on returning to competitive play, ensuring full compliance with its terms. • The Covid-19 officer at each club or facility provider will be responsible for clearly communicating all relevant guidance to its players, coaches and volunteers. **Please note:** if you have teams that play in the men's National League System (NLS) or the Women's Football Pyramid (WFP) tiers 3 to 6, The FA has produced additional and specific guidance for these environments. It is available **here** for NLS and **here** for WFP.
	Arrival at venues	Clubs and facilities should consider further mitigations to ensure safe arrival at venues, including: • In line with current Government guidance, all participants (players, coaches, club and match officials, volunteers, spectators etc.) should check for symptoms of Covid-19. If an individual is symptomatic and/or living in a household with a possible Covid-19 infection they should remain at home and follow **Government guidance**. In addition, any participants who have been asked to isolate by NHS Test and Trace because they are a contact of a known Covid-19 case, must not exercise outside their home or garden and must not exercise with others; • Clear signage (e.g. for one-way systems) to manage entry, parking arrangements, traffic flow and general movement around the venue which ensure social distancing can be maintained.
	Safety briefing	In competitive football activities, the Covid-19 officer of each club or facility provider must ensure a safety briefing is provided to all participants before the commencement of any fixture or game. This briefing will remind players and officials about their responsibilities in complying with the Code of Behaviour set out in **Appendix 1** to this guidance.

BEFORE ANY FOOTBALL ACTIVITY TAKES PLACE (CONTINUED)

Who?	Topic	Required actions
CLUBS AND FACILITY PROVIDERS	**Changing rooms and showers**	Use of changing and shower facilities must follow **Government advice** on the use of indoor facilities. If these facilities remain closed, exceptions may be made where safety and safeguarding measures require their use. For example, to supporting players with disabilities, or when a child needs a change of clothing etc.
	Toilets	Toilets should be open pre-match or training, during the match or training and for 30 minutes afterwards. See further guidance **here**
	NHS Test and Trace	Clubs and facility providers should 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 21 days in-line with the Government Recreational Team Sport Framework then deleted 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 and, where requested to share with the NHS for Test and Trace purposes, the shared information should relate only to the match or training in which the player or supporter tested positive Clubs and facility providers should follow current UK Government NHS Test and Trace guidance, which is available **here**, with detail on how to maintain Test and Trace records **here**.
EVERYONE (i.e. players, coaches, match officials, league officials, volunteers, parents/ carers, spectators, clubs and football facility providers)	**Covid-19 self-assessment**	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°C); • A new, continuous cough; • A loss of, or change to, their sense of smell or taste. This check should be done before each training session and must be recorded in regular, general risk assessments. It is important to note that no training session should take place without this having been done. Some clubs may wish to have this completed in the form of an online or paper questionnaire at the start of sessions. If symptoms are checked at the start of a session rather than in advance, this should be completed on arrival before the player mixes with others, so that if they have symptoms there is no chance of others being affected. Should an individual have demonstrated any such symptoms, they must not participate. Instead they should follow NHS and PHE guidance on self-isolation available **here.** Anyone who has already been instructed to self-isolate by a health care practitioner or PHE should continue to follow this advice and may not participate. Clubs will make relevant participants aware of any increased risk associated with taking part in activity, based on the risk assessment undertaken by the club. Everyone should comply with public health restrictions and avoid high-risk behaviour outside the football setting to reduce the risk to fellow participants and other attendees.

BEFORE ANY FOOTBALL ACTIVITY TAKES PLACE (CONTINUED)

Who?	Topic	Required actions
EVERYONE (i.e. players, coaches, match officials, league officials, volunteers, parents/ carers, spectators, clubs and football facility providers)	**Travel to training and matches**	All participants and other attendees should follow best practice for travel, including minimising use of public transport. Participants should walk or cycle if possible. People from a household or **support bubble** can travel together in a vehicle. If participants do have to travel with people outside their household or support bubble they should try to: • Share the transport with the same people each time; • Keep to small groups of people at any one time; • Open windows for ventilation; • Face away from each other; • Clean the car between journeys using standard cleaning products – including door handles and other areas that people may touch; • Ask the driver and all passengers to **wear a face covering;** • Consider seating arrangements to maximise distance between people in the vehicle – this may mean using more than one coach or minibus if possible, and the wearing of face coverings on coaches or minibuses; • Require regular hand sanitisation by passengers on a coach or minibus; • Limit the time spent at garages, petrol stations and motorway services; • Keep distance from other people and if possible, pay by contactless; • Wash hands for at least 20 seconds or sanitise hands often, and always when exiting or re-entering the vehicle; • When finishing the journey participants should wash their hands for at least 20 seconds or sanitise their hands as soon as possible.
PLAYERS, MATCH OFFICIALS AND COACHES	**Changing, showering and use of toilets**	• Where possible, players, match officials and coaches must arrive changed and shower at home; • Toilets should be open pre-match, during the match and for 30 minutes afterwards.
CLUB OFFICIALS, COACHES & CWOs	**Safeguarding**	• Please see **Appendix 2: Safeguarding Children** for guidance and your specific responsibilities in this area.
PLAYERS WITH A DISABILITY	**Advance information**	If you have additional disability or medical needs, please ensure that you have discussed this specifically with the club or facility provider. Then you can agree how/if these needs can be met within current Government Covid-19 and FA guidance.

BEFORE ANY FOOTBALL ACTIVITY TAKES PLACE (CONTINUED)

Who?	Topic	Required actions
PARENTS/ CARERS	**Advance information**	• If you decide your child can take part, you will need to give your written consent to the club and or coach. Ensure you are comfortable with the club's Covid-19 planning arrangements before doing so; • You may already be aware that the period of isolation may have resulted in your child becoming anxious or unsure whether to resume previous activities, such as football. Please only support their return to football activity when they feel confident to do so and you feel the activity is safe and right for them; • Your child must arrive changed and ready to exercise; • Ensure your child takes their own water bottle and their own hand sanitiser, both clearly marked with their name. They must not share these with anyone else; • Please ensure your child/children know how to maintain good hygiene and hand washing; • Young children may struggle to maintain social distancing. Please continue to do your best to help your child recognise what two metres or 'one-metre plus' look and feel like – for example, relate the distance to arm spans or standing jumps for example; • Despite the changed circumstances, the organiser of the activity still has a responsibility to implement The FA's safeguarding requirements. Anyone involved in activity directly with children (anyone aged under 18), must have an in-date FA DBS Check, is responsible for ensuring the environment is safe and should have completed some FA safeguarding training; • Coaches must ensure the ratio of coaches to children is appropriate – see FA **safeguarding guidance notes 5.5;**
EVERYONE	**Social distancing in competitive training**	Competitive training can take place for all participants, in both indoor and outdoor settings, provided this takes place in groups of no more than 30 (including coaches). For indoor training, the number of players should be proportionate to the size of the venue and should allow for players to maintain social distancing before and after play. Care should be taken on busy sites with limited access points to ensure safe play. Facilities should consider staggering start times and allowing cleaning time between change-overs. Clubs should determine the appropriate ratio of coaches to participants, following the relevant FA safeguarding policy outlined in **safeguarding guidance notes 5.5**. Sessions might include multiple groups of 30 but only if they can be appropriately socially distanced from each other. 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.** Any spectators at training sessions (including parents and carers) 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.
	Social distancing around matches	Competitive match play is now permitted, however, in all settings before and after matches, all participants should practise social distancing.

DURING ALL FOOTBALL ACTIVITY

Who?	Topic	Required actions
EVERYONE	**Other Covid-19 modifications – in matches (and training where applicable)**	• **Pre-match handshake** should not happen. Instead players will be asked to hand-sanitise before kick-off; • **Team talk huddles** should not take place. Team talks can take place, as long as social distancing is observed and held outdoors where possible; • **Warm-ups/cool-downs** should always observe social distancing; • **Coaches, other team staff and substitutes** are allowed, but must also always observe social distancing on touchlines/dug-outs. Social distancing must also be observed during interactions when a substitution is being made; • **Match preparation meetings** by officials should be held by video call/call; • **Set plays – free kicks:** referees and coaches should encourage players to get on with the game and not unnecessarily prolong set play set-up, such as defensive walls; • **Set plays – corners** should also be taken promptly to limit prolonged close marking; • **Goalposts** should be wiped down before matches , after matches and at half time; • **Goal celebrations** should be avoided; • **Interactions with referees and match assistants** should only happen with players observing social distancing; • **Small-sided football** should be modified to provide more regular hygiene breaks in activity. Players should be discouraged from touching boards at any time, with tackling against boards discouraged. Referees should consider stopping play when this happens. • **Youth football** coaches are encouraged to limit persistent close proximity of participants during match play (where young participants may be more likely to cluster around the ball) and provide regular hygiene breaks in activity. • **Other formats of the game** may require specific adaptations, participants should work with their club or facility provider to ensure these can be put in place. • **Face coverings:** All participants should follow government guidance on face coverings which you can find **here**. All participants and spectators should wear a mask in indoor facilities, unless they are playing football.

DURING ALL FOOTBALL ACTIVITY (CONTINUED)

Who?	Topic	Required actions
EVERYONE	**Social distancing during breaks (e.g. half-time)**	All participants must remain socially distanced during breaks in play, with spaced areas for equipment and refreshment storage for each individual including officials and substitutes. Coaching staff and substitutes, should, for example, spread out and avoid sharing a dug out or bench if social distancing cannot be observed. Players and officials should also observe social distancing during sin-bin instances. Water bottles or other refreshment containers should in no circumstances be shared. Participants are advised to bring their own drinks or refreshments, in a named container. After activity participants must maintain government mandated social distancing for social interaction. This includes in any available changing rooms, showers, and any clubhouse facilities or other venue participants congregate in afterwards. Any payments relating to the fixture or game (match fees, referee fees or facility fees) should where possible, be made in a cashless manner. **The FA Matchday app** allows affiliated teams using Full-Time to receive cashless payments from their players.
	Use of equipment	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.
	Ball transfer	The nature of football means that the ball is not frequently handled. When the ball goes out of play it should not be retrieved by non-participants and should be retrieved using the feet rather than the hands where possible. Where there are breaks in the game, or training, if throw-ins or handling has occurred the ball should be disinfected. Further guidance on disinfecting can be found **here**.
	Shouting	There is an additional risk of infection in close proximity situations where people are shouting or conversing loudly. This particularly applies indoors (e.g. indoor pitches and inside clubhouses) and when face to face. If possible, players should therefore avoid shouting or raising their voices when facing each other during, before, during and after games. This is included within The FA's Code of Behaviour (see **Appendix 1).**
	Spitting	Everyone should refrain from spitting. If you need to sneeze or cough, you are encouraged to do so into a tissue or upper sleeve and advised to avoid touching your face. Ensure any tissues are disposed of in a sealed bin as soon as possible.

DURING ALL FOOTBALL ACTIVITY (CONTINUED)

Who?	Topic	Required actions
CLUBS	**Code of Behaviour**	In **Appendix 1** you will find the Code of Behaviour The FA has produced to ensure a commitment for all involved to adhere to Covid-19 adaptations. The Covid-19 officer for each club will be responsible for communicating the code of behaviour to all players, coaches and volunteers within the club. All participants, including those playing games in indoor venues should ensure they familiarise themselves with the code of behaviour and comply with it. Participants must be clear that they are opting-in to participating as defined in The FA's guidance about risk and risk mitigation.
MEDICS	**Treatment of injuries**	The FA has produced a detailed First Aid Guidance document which can be found **here**. Injuries during play should still be treated as participant health and safety is of utmost importance. In all cases, but particularly where medical treatment is needed, the best form of protection is through rigorous cleaning, personal hygiene and regular hand hygiene. An increased frequency of cleaning and disinfection of all surfaces and equipment, using standard household cleaning and disinfection products, is recommended in The FA's supporting medical guidance which can be found **here**. If a participant gets injured, a member of their household can assist if present and appropriate, but others (including match officials and 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) to protect themselves and others if they need to compromise social-distancing guidelines to provide medical assistance. After contact with an injured participant, the person who has administered first aid should clean their hands thoroughly with soap and water or alcohol hand sanitiser at the earliest opportunity. This advice is applicable to all situations, regardless of whether there was close contact or social distancing was maintained. The first aider should also avoid touching their mouth, eyes and nose. Physios or their equivalent, or anyone who is administering any form of treatment, should keep a record of each participant they have come into contact with for NHS Test and Trace purposes. Further information for those who may need to act as a 'first responder' role in a sports setting can be found **here.** 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.
MATCH OFFICIALS	**Social distancing**	Match officials should observe The FA's guidance in the same way as participants are required to.

AFTER ALL FOOTBALL ACTIVITY

Who?	Topic	Required actions
SPECTATORS	**Social distancing**	Supporters, parents, and other spectators should remain socially distanced while 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. Participants playing indoor football must adhere to the facility's Covid-19 secure guidelines on spectators. Specific FA guidance and protocols for clubs who have paying spectators in the men's National League System is available **here** and the Women's Football Pyramid tiers 3 to 6 is available **here.**
PLAYERS, MATCH OFFICIALS AND COACHES	**Hygiene**	Hands should be washed at the earliest opportunity and personal equipment should be wiped down with a disinfectant. Individuals should take their own 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. **Coaches** are encouraged to maintain a record of the regular cleaning of club or team equipment that players use, and review the risk assessments you undertake in between sessions, learning from any changes you need to apply.
EVERYONE	**Social distancing**	After training sessions and/or matches, participants must maintain Government-mandated social distancing for social interaction. This includes in any available changing rooms, showers, and any clubhouse facilities or other venue that participants may congregate in afterwards. Bars and restaurants, which includes any food or drink facilities inside a clubhouse, have been able to open since 4 July, in accordance with the **Government guidance.**
	Departing	Please depart following the traffic-flow system that the venue will have in place.

APPENDIX 1

CODE OF BEHAVIOUR

Covid-19 is a highly infectious and dangerous disease.

A resumption of contact play is only achievable if those involved create and maintain a controlled environment that minimises the threat of infection.

Risk in sport cannot be completely eradicated but with caution and care these risks can be reduced.

Each player will need to decide when to return to contact football, based on their own circumstances and the arrangements that have been put in place for a safe return. This is particularly the case for players from BAME communities or those with underlying health conditions.

All those returning to competitive grassroots football must adopt the following code of behaviour:

- **Be aware of your own personal health.** If you show any of the Covid-19 symptoms you must stay at home, inform NHS Test and Trace and seek medical advice.
- **Be responsible.** Read the guidance provided by The FA and by your club so that you are aware of the changes to the game and what is expected of you. This will include things like being prepared to wash your own kit, bringing your own labelled water bottle and being aware of changes to meet-up times.
- **Practise good hygiene.** Wash your hands regularly and before, during and after a game.
- **Where possible maintain social distancing.** This won't always be possible in a competitive match environment (for example when tackling an opponent) and that is acceptable. However, before, and after a game you should maintain social distancing.
- **Support NHS Test and Trace.** You're likely to be asked to provide your details so that in the event of a Covid-19 outbreak those potentially infected can be traced. This is to everyone's benefit so please co-operate.
- **Do not spit.** Spitting and the rinsing out of mouths is now a recognised risk to health and must not be done. Avoid shouting or raising your voice if face-to-face with other players.
- **After the game.** Be aware that other users may be waiting to use the facilities. Changing rooms and showers are likely to be closed and any socialising must follow the **Government's guidance** on social distancing.

APPENDIX 2

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN – GUIDANCE FOR CLUB OFFICIALS, INCLUDING COACHES AND CLUB WELFARE OFFICERS

- Your club must have completed a safeguarding and Covid-19 risk assessment and have briefed you on your responsibilities.
- You are responsible for continuing to ensure the environment is safe and for implementing your club's safeguarding children policy and procedures.
- Coaches working with children must have an in-date FA DBS Check and should have done some FA safeguarding training.
- You must ensure the ratio of coach to different age groups of children is appropriate. See FA safeguarding **guidance note 5.5**, which covers the ratios of adults to children. There must be a minimum of two FA-DBS-Checked adults present at any one time.
- It is essential that parents/carers give informed consent for their child(ren) to participate in your football session. When requesting consent, you have the ideal opportunity to be clear about what is expected of the children and their parents/carers in line with this guidance.
- Ensure you retain a written record of parent/carer consent. The club may use a form such as the one in FA safeguarding **guidance note 8.2** to gather any relevant information from parents/carers.
- Any children with additional medical or disability needs must be discussed with parents/carers to ensure you, or as the parents/carers, they can provide effective support to facilitate their involvement and appropriately update your risk assessments.

LISTENING TO CHILDREN

While many families have coped well during lockdown, others may not have and for some children the experience will have been very difficult. You may be one of the first people outside the family unit that a child has met in recent times. It's important you know that some children may be struggling for various reasons, including:

- Lacking confidence, as they have felt cut off from their friends;
- Being confused and stressed about how to behave because of social distancing;
- They or someone they care about may have been or still be unwell;
- They may still be grieving because someone they love has died;
- Hearing that people from BAME communities may be more vulnerable to Covid-19;
- They may have been neglected emotionally and/or physically – through lack of food and/or care;
- Children with learning disabilities may find it particularly confusing, as their routine has changed.

You may also have seen media coverage on the increase in:

- Domestic violence – significantly impacting children emotionally and/or physically in households where this has happened;
- Online grooming of children;
- Cyberbullying.

We're sharing this because of your important role in safeguarding. If you are worried about a child as they return to football, it's vital you report your concerns. Doing nothing is not an option.

Please check-in with the children you are coaching/working with, and ask them how they've been and how they're doing. There are five ways to report your concerns if you are worried about a child as they return to football:

- To your club or league Welfare Officer;
- To your County FA Designated Safeguarding Officer. Click **here** for a list of County FA contacts;
- By emailing The FA Safeguarding Team at **safeguarding@TheFA.com**;
- If urgent and you cannot contact your club, league or County FA Designated Safeguarding Officer, you should call the NSPCC 24-hour helpline on 0808 800 5000;
- If it is an emergency because a child or children are at immediate risk, then call the Police on 999.

The NSPCC has produced a great film which reminds us all how best to respond if a child discloses to you. It really is worth taking the two minutes it requires to watch. You can watch the film **here**.

FINALLY

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.

But remember, if you're not comfortable returning to football, whatever your role, there is no pressure to do so. Everyone's health, wellbeing and safety are the priorities.

DISCLAIMER:

This guidance is for general information only and does not constitute legal advice, nor it is 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.



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