

COVID 19 – GUIDANCE ON RE-STARTING FOOTBALL ACTIVITY

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FOR COACHES

The FA
FOR ALL

INTRODUCTION

These guidelines have been produced in line with the Government guidance issued on 1 June 2020, which sees the easing of lockdown restrictions on gatherings, public spaces, and outdoor activities and the phased return of outdoor sport and recreation. The Government guidance is published **here**.

The return of grassroots football is something that we know many are keen to see, but at this stage of the nation's response to Covid-19, it must be done with careful consideration for everyone's safety – especially vulnerable groups, children and their families. Please note this guidance will be updated regularly, in line with Government guidance as we progress through this pandemic.

Just like schools, every grassroots club will have to decide when it's right for them to return. They should also undertake a risk assessment to ensure it's done safely. Your club may already have a risk assessment tool they use, and may have already adapted this to include the risks associated with Covid-19.

The Football Association (The FA) recognises every coach will need to decide when it feels right for them to continue with their role in football. Please ensure that you are clear and fully aligned to your club's expectations on the phased return to football activity when you are ready to start coaching.

As a football coach you have a key role to play in structuring and managing football activity that is inclusive and safe, ensuring everyone stays alert and that it abides by Government guidance. You should also check any insurance you have in relation to your coaching activities, to ensure it remains in place during the pandemic and if so, you are not breaking any of its terms.

This guidance is focused on the coaching environment rather than the arrangements for the facility. Additional guidance notes for Facility Operators or Hirers is available on **TheFA.com**.

Anyone who is deemed vulnerable in respect of Covid-19 is reminded to follow the Government's guidance, only returning when it's right for them to do so.

A recent Public Health England (PHE) report published **here** has highlighted a greater risk from Covid-19 to people from BAME communities. As the current impact of Covid-19 on members of these communities is not yet fully understood, we acknowledge that there may be increased concerns and levels of anxiety from within these communities. Clubs and coaches should do everything that they can to create a safe and inclusive environment to ensure players feel comfortable taking part in activities. The FA will review **its position** in response to any specific guidance that may be issued by the Government or PHE in the future.

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 should stay at home until an NHS practitioner advises you that you no longer need to remain in isolation.

IN SUMMARY:

- **Always follow the latest Government guidance;**
- **Complete a thorough risk assessment;**
- **Check your insurance cover;**
- **If in doubt, or you're not comfortable returning to football, don't.**

CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE RE-STARTING FOOTBALL ACTIVITY

- **Coaches should ensure that all football activity follows the latest Government guidance** which permits football training or fitness activities in groups of no more than five other people from outside your household, keeping two metres apart at all times.
- **Physical contact with anyone outside your household is not permitted**, therefore, playing of any games (small-sided or full) is also not permitted at this time.
- **You can organise a training session that has two or more groups of six (with each group including a coach) involved in the session, as long as the groups are kept separate, and everyone is socially distancing.** If coaching children, please ensure you have considered coaching ratios to the number of children involved. All activity requires careful planning so this is maintained. By choosing to coach, you are taking the responsibility to ensure that the group or groups you work with do remain two metres apart at all times.
- **The approach taken by schools in only bringing back small groups of children is sensible, to help children to adjust to the new way of doing things in the school context.** Behavioural change takes time and so coaches are encouraged to consider work with one group of five children initially, to help children to adjust in the football context.
- **Before you commence activities, clubs and coaches should check with their insurer** to ensure that their 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.
- **Operators of facilities have an obligation to arrange for their facilities to be compliant with the latest Government guidance.** A venue risk assessment should have been undertaken prior to reopening. Coaches should be familiar with these safety and hygiene arrangements and communicate them to players, other coaches and observing parents. The FA has issued guidance for facility operators on **TheFA.com**.
- **Coaches should complete an appropriate risk assessment** and should only re-start coaching when happy that safe sessions can be provided that are in line with Government guidance.
- **While some players (or parents of players) might be pushing for a return to football activity as soon as possible there will be others who have real concerns, or their personal circumstances might make it difficult.** The coach should be sensitive to these differing viewpoints. Some individuals, such as members of the BAME community, or due to their age, may face heightened risks from Covid-19. As such, any concerns should be taken seriously and addressed sensitively.
- **In a club environment, the coach should check with the appropriate club official that the club wishes to re-start coaching and has all the necessary Covid-19 preparations in place.**
- Coaches should remind anyone intending to attend the activity that **if they are showing symptoms of Covid-19 infection or have been in contact with someone displaying symptoms or diagnosed with Covid-19 within the last two weeks, they should not attend and should seek medical advice.**
- **In planning a session, a decision should be made and communicated on the presence of parents/carers at training.** If the space allows for them to observe from a safe social distance (e.g. in their car, if they have one), then consideration will need to be given on how to ensure they maintain the social-distancing and hygiene arrangements required.

CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE RE-STARTING FOOTBALL ACTIVITY (CONTINUED)

TRAVEL TO THE VENUE

Coaches must travel to the venue on their own or with members of their own household where applicable. Please remember there must be no car-sharing with anyone outside your household. This also applies to all parents/carers bringing their child(ren) to your session.

ARRIVING AND LEAVING

Ask participants to arrive shortly before the session starts and depart promptly when it finishes. Children and parents/carers should not congregate at the venue and should maintain social distancing at all times.

SELF-CHECKS BEFORE ATTENDING A PLANNED TRAINING SESSION

Self-checks will be important to prevent transmission among people who are unaware that they are carriers of the virus. Such checks should help identify if anyone has:

- Had a high temperature (above 37.8ºC);
- Has developed a new continuous cough;
- Has shortness of breath or a sore throat;
- Loss of or change in normal sense of taste or smell;
- Is feeling unwell.

This quick check should be done before each training session and must be covered in your regular risk assessments. 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.

If none of the above apply then, if they wish to, those players can participate in the session. If any of these symptoms do apply, the player cannot participate. They should return to and stay at home and follow NHS advice. Please reassure the parent/carer that there will be other opportunities for their child to participate in future.



CONSIDERATIONS WHEN RUNNING A SESSION

- **After a period of low or no activity, players may be more susceptible to injury than before lockdown.** Consider the need for a thorough warm-up, and for the physical demands of a session to be suitable to the individuals involved. A session should start at a low physical intensity with gradual progression. Helping decrease the risk of injury is very important while social distancing requirements remain in place.
- **Social distancing does not permit handshakes, high-fives or group goal celebrations, so please ensure that the players understand this and comply.**
- **Participants should bring with them their own named water bottles and named hand sanitiser.** The placement of these should be dispersed to avoid groups of players coming together. They must not share their drink with anyone else.
- **Equipment should be handled as little as possible by as few people as possible.** Where equipment is handled by more than one person, they should wash their hands immediately afterwards, taking care not to touch their mouth/face in the meantime. For goalkeepers, it might be sensible for players to have their own individual ball for the session, with wiping of the ball with disinfectant wipes frequently if it is being handled by more than one person.
- **Players should refrain from spitting.** If a player needs to sneeze or cough, encourage them to do so into a tissue or upper sleeve and advise them to avoid touching their face. Tissues should be disposed of immediately and hands washed.
- **If a player gets injured, a member of their household can aid them but others 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 to protect themselves and others if they need to compromise social-distancing guidelines to provide medical assistance.
- **If a player becomes symptomatic during the session, they should be immediately removed from the session and taken home as soon as possible.** NHS guidance on further management of symptoms should be followed.



SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN

- You are also 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.
- In line with Government guidance on social distancing, you must work on a ratio of one coach to groups of no more than five children in each group (1:5) and there must be a minimum of two FA-DBS-checked adults present at any one time.
- If Government guidance changes the position on group size in due course, 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.
- Children (anyone under 18) should not be working 1:1 with a coach unless their parent/carer is present and observing social distancing.
- 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.
- 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.

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.

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN (CONTINUED)

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**.



AFTER THE SESSION

- **When the session is finished, players should be encouraged to leave the venue rather than congregate.** The coach should try to manage departure to avoid any congestion at gates or doors. Utilise a one-way system if possible to focus player and parent/carers' attention on the importance of maintaining social distancing.
- **All participants should wash hands at the earliest opportunity** and personal equipment should be wiped down with a disinfectant.
- **All shared equipment should be thoroughly washed/ disinfected and it should be clear whose responsibility it is to do this.** You are encouraged to maintain a record of the regular cleaning of club or team equipment that players use.



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 return to football, 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/persons should therefore ensure that they seek independent advice from medical practitioners, or healthcare providers, prior to implementing any return to football activity, 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.

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