

A photograph of a grassy football pitch with three cones. One red cone is in the background, and two green cones are in the foreground, one slightly behind the other. The text is overlaid on the bottom half of the image.

COVID-19: STEP ONE GUIDANCE ON THE RETURN OF GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL

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**FOR PROVIDERS OF INDOOR AND
OUTDOOR FOOTBALL FACILITIES**



COVID-19: STEP ONE GUIDANCE ON THE RETURN OF GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL

EVERY PARTICIPANT MUST FOLLOW ALL FA AND GOVERNMENT ADVICE. THIS IS CRUCIAL TO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF EVERYONE INVOLVED IN THE GAME, AND SO WE CAN CONTINUE TO PLAY. ANY INCIDENTS OF NON-COMPLIANCE WILL BE REPORTED TO THE RELEVANT COUNTY FA FOR ACTION. THE LATEST GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE IS [HERE](#).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE RETURN OF OUTDOOR GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL

On Monday 29th March, as part of the next step of the Government's roadmap out of national lockdown, outdoor sports facilities can open, and organised outdoor sport can take place. **This means that from 29th March, organised outdoor football, following all the protocols in The FA's guidance, can take place.** Organised outdoor disability football can take place, including under national lockdown. **This guidance document applies to all outdoor youth and adult football and futsal, including all formats of the game.**

TRAVEL

The Government guidance on travel is that the 'stay at home' rule will end on 29th March, but many restrictions will remain in place. As organised sport can resume, all participants may travel to games but should avoid travel at the busiest times and routes, as well as minimising any unnecessary journeys where possible. All participants must follow the Government's guidance on [safer travel](#). Participants should note that this guidance will be updated as we move through the different steps of the Government's roadmap. All participants should therefore regularly review this guidance to make sure they are following up to date information.

CHANGING ROOMS

Changing rooms cannot be used as part of step one of the Government's roadmap out of lockdown and therefore must remain shut. **Changing facilities can only be used in emergency situations, or by disabled people who are taking part in organised sport and physical activity. Toilets will be allowed to open, 30 minutes before and 30 minutes after training and/or matches.**

SPECTATORS

No spectators are allowed at grassroots sport as part of step one of the Government's roadmap. This means that at this stage, no spectators are allowed at grassroots football.

PARENTS/CARERS

Where clubs and facilities can accommodate this safely, one parent/carer per youth player is permitted to be present at football activities although they must observe the relevant Government Covid-19 guidance.

INDOOR FOOTBALL

Indoor sport is not currently allowed. This is planned to return no earlier than **Monday 12th April** for under 18s and **Monday 17th May** for adults, as part of steps two and three of the Government's roadmap. **Disability football is exempt and can take place indoors from the 29th March.**

Additional guidance for clubs with teams competing in the men's National League System and the Women's Football Pyramid (Tiers 3 to 6) will be available on TheFA.com.

The guidance you are reading is FOR ALL – players, coaches, club officials, club welfare officers, match officials, league officials, first-aiders, 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 on TheFA.com.

Please remember anyone who is deemed vulnerable in respect of Covid-19 is reminded to follow the Government's specific 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.

COVID-19: STEP ONE GUIDANCE ON THE RETURN OF GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL (CONTINUED)

Please also bear in mind the Public Health England (PHE) report published [here](#), which has highlighted a greater risk from Covid-19 to people from BAME communities.

Before re-starting playing/training, clubs 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.

Clubs should also update their medical emergency action plan around player care and strictly follow the first-aid guidance document published by The FA, without exception. This is both to protect players and any club member who is trying to aid the player if an emergency arises.

The FA is working with its recently-appointed official hygiene partner, Dettol, to support the return of the grassroots game.

Whenever this document refers to finding further information on TheFA.com, you'll find it [here](#).

AS WE MOVE THROUGH EACH NEW STEP OF THE GOVERNMENT'S ROADMAP, THE FA WILL UPDATE OUR GUIDANCE ACCORDINGLY. PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS GUIDANCE IS BASED ON THE INFORMATION PUBLISHED BY THE GOVERNMENT TO DATE, AND WILL BE UPDATED FOLLOWING ANY FURTHER UPDATES.

THE RETURN OF FOOTBALL AS PART OF THE GOVERNMENT'S ROADMAP OUT OF LOCKDOWN

The Government has published a roadmap setting out four steps for the easing of national lockdown restrictions in England. The FA's guidance will continue to strictly follow all Government guidance, as we have throughout the pandemic. The FA's guidance will be updated at each step to provide participants with the information needed to facilitate the safe return of the game.

The Government has been clear that the easing of restrictions set out in the roadmap is subject to review and could change if we see another surge in hospitalisations, if a new variant of concern is found or if there are any issues with the roll-out of the vaccination programme. As such we cannot confirm with certainty what the next steps for the return of football will look like over the coming months. We can instead point to what is in the Government's roadmap as an indication for what this return could look like. This is summarised below:

		STEP 1		STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4
		8 th March	29 th March	No earlier than 12 th April	No earlier than 17 th May	No earlier than 21 st June
UPDATE		Schools return, including play for school-age children as part of educational provision and wraparound care – following DfE guidance.	Outdoor grassroots football returns – following all FA guidance. No spectators. No changing rooms. No hospitality.	Indoor football for under 18s returns – subject to Government approval. Socially-distanced spectators permitted - in accordance with Government guidelines. Changing rooms can be used – following strict Covid-19 protocols. Outdoor food and drink allowed – following the rule of six or two households.	Organised indoor football returns – subject to Government approval. Socially distanced spectators permitted - in accordance with Government guidelines. Changing rooms can be used – following strict Covid-19 protocols. Indoor food and drink allowed – following the rule of six or two households.	No legal limits on gathering. Larger events allowed.

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.

All facility providers 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 may wish to 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 should continually monitor how compliance is being observed within the club or facility.

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

In respect of participants using your facility, please remember that In line with the Equality Act, 2010, you are responsible for ensuring that your facilities are accessible and for considering any reasonable adjustments In line with this.



'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. 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 pitch/sports hall 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. This is especially important for indoor environments such as sports halls.

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'

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 and facility;
- 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 and facility;
- 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.

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 and facility 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 facility and adjust if necessary to reduce congestion and contact between users;
- Regulating entry to your facility to avoid overcrowding;
- Applying floor markings in accordance with Government social distancing measures where necessary to manage queues, e.g. outside the entrance/toilets/ catering facility;
- 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

All bars and catering services must follow [**Government guidance**](#).

Outdoor hospitality will be able to reopen no earlier than **Monday 12th April**. Indoor hospitality will be able to reopen no earlier than **Monday 17th May**.

'OFF THE PITCH' (CONTINUED)

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;
 - Applying floor markings in accordance with Government social-distancing measures to ensure social distancing when queueing;
 - Use outside areas for queueing;
 - 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.
 - High ventilation in indoor facilities is paramount to reducing transmission of Covid-19; indoor facilities such as clubhouses and hospitality facilities should be well ventilated, for example by having doors open and opening windows where appropriate.
- Introducing enhanced cleaning of all facilities regularly throughout during the day and at the end of the day.
 - Providing cleaning materials and hand sanitiser for customer use at touch points.
 - Providing additional signposting in these areas to maintain social distancing and adhere to the relevant gathering limit.
 - Supervision checks should be made to ensure compliance with your rules.
 - Access must be maintained where safety and safeguarding measures require their use, e.g. supporting customers with disabilities, allowing children to change clothes.

Above all, when you do choose to re-open your changing rooms, all considerations and mitigations must be in line with current Government guidance and be captured within your risk assessment and compliance must be monitored on an ongoing basis.

CHANGING ROOMS

Changing rooms are an area of increased transmission risk.

Until such time as the Government confirms changing rooms can be reopened, you should communicate to players and officials to arrive in kit and shower at home.

When you do re-open your changing rooms, you must take additional measures to reduce the risk of transmission and minimise social contact. This includes:

- You must also take all necessary precautions to ensure appropriate distancing can be maintained within the changing room – e.g. tape markings on changing benches, toilets and sinks to separate spaces with safe distances.
- Encourage all users to minimise the time they spend in the changing area.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

VENTILATION MEASURES

Ventilation is an important part of mitigating against the transmission of Covid-19. Ventilation into your building should be optimised to ensure a fresh air supply is provided to all areas of the facility and increased wherever possible. Particular attention should be given to areas where high-intensity exercise activity takes place, such as sports halls.

Ventilation systems should provide 100% fresh air and not re-circulate air from one space to another.

You should consider:

- Increasing the existing ventilation rate by fully opening dampers and running fans on full speed;
- Operating the ventilation system 24 hours a day;
- Increase the frequency of filter changes.

FACE COVERINGS

Current Government guidelines must be followed.

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 (appropriate spacing);
- Hygiene (hand washing/sanitiser);
- 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.

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)

SUPPORTING NHS TEST AND TRACE

You **must** now comply with the NHS Test and Trace system. This includes collecting name and address information for all visitors/users of your venue.

You must register for an official NHS QR code and display the official NHS QR poster.

In addition, there is an NHS Covid-19 app, which has a feature that allows users to quickly and easily 'check in' to your venue by scanning the code. The information stays on the user's phone. In England, you do not have to ask people who choose to 'check in' using the official NHS QR code to provide their contact details. If there is an outbreak associated with a venue, a message will be sent to the relevant app users with the necessary public health advice.

For those who do not have a smart phone, a manual process should be used to collect information.

This information should be collected, processed and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR principles for 21 days in line with the Government Recreational Team Sport Framework then deleted. 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.

Posters should be printed and displayed multiple times to avoid queuing and congestion when visitors are registering their visit.

In certain venues, such as open-access public park pitches, it maybe more effective for user clubs to register visitors. In such cases, each club must provide you with a copy of their Covid-19 risk-assessment (including its track and trace measures).

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 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 the minimum two-metre social distancing was maintained. The first aider should also avoid touching their own mouth, eyes and nose.

First-aiders, or their equivalent, should keep a record of each participant they have come into contact with for NHS Test and Trace purposes.

If a participant becomes symptomatic during the session, 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.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS (CONTINUED)

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 valid 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.

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 overleaf, 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.**



SUPPORT TOOLS

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed?	Controls required	Additional controls	Action by whom?	Action by when?	Date completed
<p>Spread of Covid-19</p>	<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 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
Spread of Covid-19	<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 (promotional posters and signage). 			

SUPPORT TOOLS (CONTINUED)

COMMUNICATIONS

The FA has produced downloadable posters and other communication tools on hygiene and social distancing. You can find them at the foot of the page [here](#).

Sport England and Public Health England (PHE) are producing a series of useful communication tools to help you promote social distancing and good hygiene. You'll find these at the foot of the page [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, 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.



FOR ALL

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