Live Covid-19 FA Q&A

1) Do the recent Government restrictions limiting gatherings to groups of 6 affect grassroots football?
Outdoor team sports are exempt from these restrictions and organised, Covid-19 secure grassroots football can continue. All participants must follow all FA and Government guidance.

From Thursday 24 September, organised indoor sport and indoor exercise classes for **adults** can continue to take place, **provided groups of more than six do not mix** (i.e. a maximum of 3 v 3 matches can be played indoors). If groups of six are likely to mix, these indoor activities must not go ahead.

There are exemptions for organised indoor team sports for **disabled people** and also for **children (under-18s)**. Therefore, disabled people and children can continue to play indoor sport without restrictions on numbers.

2) Why is training limited to 30 people, but matches are not?
The FA guidance does not provide a cap of 30 for competitive matches as this would prohibit many formal matches from taking place when you factor in players, substitutes and officials.

The wider Government guidance is clear that that you are able to play outdoor team sport in any number if this is formally organised by a sports club or similar organisation and sports-governing body guidance has been issued, as detailed here.

Social distancing must be adhered to in all settings before and after matches. Training sessions should be limited to groups of no more than 30.

3) What happens if a player tests positive for Covid-19?
If there is a player who has tested positive, they must from that point self-isolate (or if they have symptoms, from the moment of symptoms) and NHS Test and Trace will pick up from this point. The player should contact NHS 111.

The Club can carry on, but be mindful to ensure all the guidelines are strictly followed on social distancing, hand washing etc. If Test and Trace contact them, they must provide the details and then if deemed anyone needs to isolate on their instruction, do so.

4) What happens if I have played an opposition team and one of their players has tested positive for Covid-19?
Match play is not considered 'close contact' so no action is needed unless individuals experience symptoms, in which case they must self-isolate from that point as per Government guidance.

5) Can football teams play international fixtures?
Government guidance currently advises against all but essential travel. Travel to some countries and territories is exempt. You can find the full Government guidance here.

6) A player has had Covid-19 but is now recovered – can they play? (Do they need a negative test?)

The player should follow advice from a medical professional on when is best to return to exercise. Assuming the player is no longer symptomatic, has fully recovered and has finished their required self-isolation period a return to sport can be considered. Players should return to sport gradually and if they feel unwell at any stage seek further guidance from a medical professional.

7) I am a healthcare worker and regularly in contact with people with Covid-19 – can I play?
As long as you do not have any symptoms (as is the case for any other participant) and are not self-isolating, then you are able to play. Please adhere to Government guidance on this.

8) Will the grassroots football guidance be updated to mirror the latest National League System (NLS) guidance with regards to the use of changing facilities?
All participants should follow the Government's guidance on changing rooms which can be found here. The FA's guidance reflects this position.

9) What if my club is not ready to return to full competitive training and matches?
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.

10)What happens if a player, parent or coach shows Covid-19 symptoms before, during or after a match?
All players, officials, volunteers and spectators must undergo a self-assessment for any Covid-19 symptoms **and complete a full risk assessment, as set out in The FA's guidance.** 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 37.8^0C);
- 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.

11) Does this mean we can now play competitive football normally?
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.

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. All adult participants must also adhere to the rule of six for indoor sport. There is an exemption for disabled people and children.

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

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 FA guidance which is available here.

13) Are we allowed to share kit and equipment such as balls, goalkeeper gloves and training tops?
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.

14)If there is a regional lockdown, does this mean we won't be allowed to play competitively?
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. County FAs will be working with Local Authorities to determine what restrictions, if any are appropriate.

15) Will we be able to use changing rooms?
Changing rooms are an area of increased risk of transmission. It is important that social distancing is maintained in changing rooms and showers and that they are only use if essential. All venues should encourage attendees to arrive at the facility in sports kit and where possible to travel home to change/shower. Use of changing rooms and showering facilities should in general be avoided where possible, although these must be available for participants with disabilities or special needs. If changing rooms are to be used, users should use the facilities as quickly as possible.

16) Will I be allowed to go and watch a grassroots football match as a spectator if I'm socially distanced?
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 is available here and Women's Football Pyramid is available here.

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

18)Do we need to support NHS Test and Trace efforts?

Yes, facility providers are expected to fully support the Governments test and trace system. This involves displaying NHS QR posters at your venue to offer a quick, simple and secure way for visitors to register that they've been to your venue.

You must register for an official NHS QR code and display your official NHS QR poster at entrances to your venue, in places that are easy for visitors to see and access such as your car park and entrances to your pitches and clubhouse. The same poster should be printed and displayed multiple times to avoid queuing and congestion when visitors are registering.

19)Where can I find out more about the NHS QR code for test and trace?
A full set of FAQ's from the NHS can be found here.

20) Is the QR code just for facilities with buildings/changing rooms?
This applies to all football facility types including pitch only sites, however if not practical to use the QR code, information can be captured manually. Essentially, if you play at a venue that is visited by members of the public and has a space where people congregate, then we encourage you to create a QR code poster for that venue if not already in place.

21) When does a club need to create a QR code?
A club should create a QR code when the club is the facility operator or a QR code is not provided by the facility it hires for training or home matches. Each different venue should have a QR code.

22) Do all players and parents have to scan the code or can a coach scan this on behalf of the players?
Anyone over the age of 16 should register their visit. Parents/guardians can do this on behalf of their children. Individuals are encouraged to register (instead of a group representative).

23) What visitor types does test and trace apply to?
Players, spectators, coaches, match officials, staff / volunteers and all other visitors to the site aged 16 and above.

24) If we use local authority pitches, do we still have to produce a QR code, or do the Local Authority?
This must be agreed between the facility provider and the user group. In certain venues it may be more effective for user clubs to register visitors. In such cases, each club must provide the facility provider with a copy of their Covid-19 risk-assessment (including its track and trace measures).

25) What happens if a visitor refuses to register via the NHS QR system?
For pitches and outdoor areas, downloading and using the NHS COVID-19 app is currently voluntary. Facility providers should encourage all visitors to use this service but should not stop visitor access if they have not used the check in feature.

However, in hospitality areas, Government guidance states that visitors should be refused entry if they do not provide their name and contact details, is not in a group (for which one other member has provided name and contact details), or who has not scanned the NHS QR code.

If in the rare case that a customer or visitor becomes unruly, you should follow your own security procedures. This may include calling the police if you feel the individual poses a risk to yourself or others.

26) What happens for people who don't have the appropriate smart phone to scan the code, or no phone at all?

A manual system must remain in place as a backup.

27)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?
Guidance for the National League System is available here and Women's Football Pyramid is available here.

28) Can clubs/venues provide food and drink?
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 FA's guidance on facilities which you can find here.

Face coverings must be worn by customers in hospitality venues, when they are not eating or drinking. Staff will also be required to wear face covering as well. Exemptions apply which you can read about here.

29) Are there any rules around goal celebrations?
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.

30) What about Walking Football, is there any specific guidance around this?
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.

31) What if there is an injury, is it safe for a player to be treated?
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.

32) What is permitted as 'organised' football?
Above all, football must be played in an organised and safe environment that has a Covid-19 risk assessment specifically for organised football activity. This can be provided by a) the user group (e.g. a club), b) the facility provider (e.g. a small sided football centre), or c) by both. Where no risk assessment exists – groups must follow the Governments 'rule of six'.

Example 1: a football club that has its own Covid-19 risk assessment and plays at a local park = permitted.

Example 2: a small-sided team that plays at a small sided football centre with a Covid-19 risk assessment = permitted.

Example 3: a group of friends that meet at a local park for a kick about = must follow the Governments 'rule of six'.

33) Our venue has set a lower maximum capacity than The FA have proposed – are they able to do this?
The venue has final say over the number of spectators they are willing to allow into the ground and this must be respected at all times.

34) Is there a cap for matches which take place indoors?
There is no cap for matches for indoor or outdoor games, however for indoor games, the amount of players must be proportionate to the size of the facility and must allow players to socially distance before and after the game.

35) What if a team continually breaks the rules around Covid-19?
This is a matter for leagues (working with County FAs) to deal with, in the same way they would deal with any other type of rule break. All Risk Assessments, including the Covid-19 Risk Assessment are owned by the club and with any non-compliance of various aspects in a club environment, doing so is at the club's risk.

36) If a school sends home a year group can that child still play football?
If a school has sent someone home to self-isolate, they must do exactly that – stay at home and not come into contact with anyone for the period of self-isolation. If they are sent home to self-isolate because they have symptoms, they should get a test and must stay at home for at least 10 days (although if the test comes back negative, they can end their isolation). If they are sent home because they've been in close contact with someone who has tested positive, they must self-isolate for 14 days (and only get a test if they subsequently develop symptoms themselves).

37) Can schools hold inter-school competitions?
Schools can hold inter-school competitions all long as guidance from DfE, DCMS/SE and the NGB is followed. The decision will fall to schools and they will want include visitors to the school in their risk assessment.

38) What should a club do if they are worried about the opposition's handling of Covid-19 (i.e. they are concerned their risk assessment is not adequate or they have not put the appropriate measures in place to ensure the safety of participants)
Opposition clubs should deal with this situation in the same way they would any similar issue regarding a club's management of the game. For example, if they are not happy with the quality of a pitch or they have concerns that a club hasn't conducted a risk assessment on any element of health and safety. All Risk Assessments, including the Covid-19 Risk Assessment are owned by the club and with any non-compliance of various aspects in a club environment, doing so is at the club's risk.

39) Are we allowed to drop children at matches and leave?
There must always be at least 2 DBS-checked people present and supervising U18s and this should be pro-rata based on the ratio guidance. A risk assessment should be undertaken with mitigation managed locally to strike the right balance and first aid provision must be covered in the risk assessment. Clubs should ensure they liaise with local authorities to ensure reasonable adjustments are made when catering for players with disabilities.

40) I manage an under-18s team that play indoors, and have 17 and 18-year-olds in the team, can they continue to play together?

The exemption from the rule of six, for children's sport, does not apply to adults over the age of 18. If an adult (aged 18 or over) participates in organised indoor sport alongside children (under 18), this is no longer exempt, so this can only take place in groups of up to six people (including both adults and children).

41) If I am in a Tier 3 area can I travel to grassroots league fixtures (which include NLS Feeder Leagues (Step 7) and below of the Men's Football Pyramid and Tier 7 and below of the Women's Football Pyramid), in and outside of the area?

The current Government guidance on travel is as follows:

- Medium: there are no restrictions on travel for sport or exercise.
- High: there are no restrictions on travel for sport or exercise, but you should aim to reduce the number of journeys you make where possible.
- Very high: You are advised not to travel into or out of areas that have a very high alert level, including for sport, unless this is necessary to enable individual exercise (or exercise for people from the same household or support bubble). This does not apply to travel where it is necessary to enable disability sport, sport for educational purposes, or supervised sport and physical activity for under-18s to take place.

Local Authorities may impose additional restrictions for football which County Football Associations will endeavour to communicate.

NATIONAL LEAGUE SYSTEM, STEPS 3 TO 6 SPECIFIC FAQS

43) Our Club plays at Step 3 (example) but we have a B Graded ground – can we work on 15/30% of the minimum capacity of the B Grade?

No, not at present. The submission to DCMS was made on the basis that any return to spectators was a phased approach and, in order to mitigate risk, the % figure is derived from the minimum capacity required for ground grading at the Step level of the host Club. That is not to say that we may be able to adjust this upon a future review.

44) Our Club, who plays at Step 3 (example) has an officially calculated capacity that is higher than the minimum required for the Step level – can we work on this basis and apply 15/30% of the calculated capacity?

As above, not at the moment, but again it is something that will be considered upon a future review.

45) We participate at Step 1/Step 2 – can we have a return to spectators?

In order to complete play-offs, the National League was deemed to be "Elite" in relation to the Government's sporting guidance. As such, a return to spectators within Steps 1 and 2 will be subject to the conditions of the Government's Elite Sport Guidance which will be issued from time to time. At this time there are no spectators permitted at Steps 1 or 2 of the NLS.

46) Our local authority has informed us that we are not permitted to have as many spectators in our ground as The FA are currently suggesting (i.e. 15/30% of the minimum grading capacity) – which figure do we work to?

Local authorities now have delegated powers from the Government to deal with Covid-19-related matters and so, if a local authority provides a lower maximum capacity, this must be adhered to as opposed to that set by The FA.

WOMEN'S PYRAMID

47) Our Ground is used above Step 1 of the Men's National League System – what are there minimum capacity percentages we should work from?
There is no set capacity percentages for venues outside of Steps 1 to 6 of the Men's National League System. Clubs should discuss what level these should be sat at with their host venue Safety Officer. As a starting point, Step 1 capacity percentages could be used.

48)We play at Tier 5 or below in the Women's Pyramid, but our ground is used at Steps 1 to 6 of the National League System – do we have minimum capacity percentages we need to follow?
Clubs at Tiers 5 and below of the Women's Football Pyramid are able to follow the FA Grassroots Guidance in relation to spectators, with no minimum capacity percentages. However, if your club expect to exceed 100 spectators you should consider following the minimum capacity percentages set by the National League System Step that the venue falls within.