

A photograph of a grassy football pitch with three green cones and one red cone in the foreground, slightly out of focus. The cones are arranged in a line, receding into the background.

COVID-19 GUIDANCE ON GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL

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



INTRODUCTION

FOLLOWING THE UK GOVERNMENT'S ANNOUNCEMENT ON 22 SEPTEMBER, ALL COVID-SECURE GUIDELINES ARE NOW LEGAL OBLIGATIONS, WITH WHICH EVERYONE MUST ADHERE. FAILURE TO DO SO WILL RESULT IN FINES AS THE PRIME MINISTER SET OUT IN HIS SPEECH TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, A TRANSCRIPT OF WHICH YOU CAN READ [HERE](#).

UPDATES TO THIS GUIDANCE

This guidance has been updated to reflect the fact that both indoor and outdoor football is now permitted.

INTRODUCTION

Now the UK Government has given approval for competitive 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 11-a-side youth and adult futsal football, as well as the small-sided game.

As a club/football facility provider, you should ensure your facility is compliant with current UK legislation, including legislation and guidance specific to Covid-19. This includes strict adherence to social-distancing protocols, whether outside or inside in areas where people can congregate, e.g. a clubhouse. You can find these social-distancing guidelines [here](#).

The document you are reading should also 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](#) and the guidance for the providers of grassroots sport and gym/leisure facilities which can be found [here](#).

As a facility provider, it's your decision when you consider your facility is ready to re-open. You should only re-open when you feel able to do so safely. Until you feel it is safe to re-open, your facility should remain closed.

The purpose of this guide is to help you to plan and prepare your facility for a safe re-opening and the phased return to grassroots football. In producing this guide, we have reflected current Government guidance in a football facility context and provided you with practical tools to apply the guidelines.

However, we know that each facility is different, and it is not possible to cover every scenario. As such, you should use this guide as a starting point to develop and implement your **own Covid-19 risk assessment**. This will ensure that the

safety measures you choose to adopt meet your facility's particular circumstances and conditions.

You should also check any insurance you have in place (e.g. personal accident and public liability), to ensure it remains adequate and in place during the pandemic and if so, you are not breaking any of its terms.

Above all, your facility must be able to operate **consistently with Government guidance regarding health, social distancing and hygiene**. That currently means:

- All users can maintain current social distancing measures;
- Good hygiene practices are in place;
- Equipment is disinfected regularly;
- It is clear that anyone who is symptomatic or suspects they have been exposed to the virus does not take part and remains at home.

Due to the changeable nature of Government guidance, we strongly recommend you review your current measures regularly and update your Covid-19 risk assessment accordingly. The current guidelines from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport can be found [here](#). When Government guidance changes, The Football Association (The FA) will update the permitted formats of grassroots football [here](#).

However, for the remainder of this guide, we will focus on how to prepare a safe football facility.

IN SUMMARY:

- **Always follow the latest Government guidance;**
- **Follow any football-specific protocols, which should be in line with Government guidance;**
- **Complete a thorough and updated risk assessment;**
- **Check your insurance cover;**
- **If in doubt, or you're not comfortable re-opening, don't.**

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. See [link](#) for further information as needed



'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'

Government guidance permits the re-opening of indoor and outdoor sports facilities such as playing fields and sports halls. It also allows facility operators to open buildings for:

- Access to pitches;
- Use of toilets;
- Bars and restaurants, including any food or drink facilities inside a clubhouse can open, in accordance with the **latest guidance**.

If you choose to open for these purposes, 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. See [here](#).

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;

'OFF THE PITCH' (CONTINUED)

- 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.
- 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.

RE-OPENING BARS AND CATERING

Bars and restaurants, including any food or drink facilities inside a clubhouse can open, in accordance with the latest **Government guidance**. In line with the Government's announcement on 22 September, these **must** close at 10pm.

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;
- Use clear signage to inform users that food and drinks must be consumed in outdoor spaces and give thought to where these people might congregate in bad weather;
- 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.
- Groups in clubhouses and hospitality facilities must be restricted to six-person gathering limits and spread out, in line with wider Government guidance. There should be no mingling between these groups, and the same six people should stay together.

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.



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.

Further Government guidance can be found [here](#).

FACE COVERINGS

Unless you have an exemption, face coverings are mandatory for all staff in retail/hospitality outlets (e.g. a clubhouse). This also applies to users of the facility, except when seated at a table to eat or drink. The latest Government guidance on face coverings is [here](#).

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/sanitisers);
- 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. See [here](#).

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 from Thursday 24 September to help NHS Test and Trace to identify and notify people who may have been exposed to the virus.

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.

The Government's current NHS Test and Trace guidance is available [here](#), with detail on how to maintain Test and Trace records [here](#).

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. 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 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.

SUPPORTERS, PARENTS AND SPECTATORS

Supporters, parents, and other spectators must 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. There should be no mingling between these groups, and the same six people should stay together.

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](#).

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 below, 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 	MAINTAINING SOCIAL DISTANCING AND AVOIDING CONGESTION: <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

E.g. Posters and other communication tools on hygiene and social distancing

Sport England and Public Health England (PHE) are producing a series of useful communication tools to help you promote social distancing and good hygiene. When available, these will found [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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