



COVID-19: STEP FOUR GUIDANCE FOR THE NATIONAL LEAGUE SYSTEM

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FOR CLUBS



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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. Naturally, we'll provide any updates if any are required going forward.

IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT THAT CLUBS, PLAYERS, COACHES, MATCH OFFICIALS, LEAGUE OFFICIALS, VOLUNTEERS, PARENTS, CARERS, AND FACILITY PROVIDERS READ AND UNDERSTAND THIS GUIDANCE AND WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT DO AS PART OF THE LATEST STEP OF THE GOVERNMENT'S ROADMAP.

IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT CLUBS STILL CONTINUALLY RISK ASSESS HOW TO ENSURE PLAYERS ARE REDUCING OR PREVENTING CLOSE CONTACT SCENARIOS, TO MANAGE THE RISK OF ISOLATION CAUSING MATCHES IN NLS LEAGUES AND FA COMPETITIONS BEING POSTPONED.

A SUMMARY OF WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT STEP FOUR OF THE GOVERNMENT'S ROADMAP OUT OF LOCKDOWN

On Monday 19th July, as part of the next step of the Government's roadmap out of national lockdown, there will be further changes to the restrictions on football.

Here are the key points, all set out in detail on subsequent pages:

1. On-field adaptations for playing football are no longer required.
2. No limits of how many people can meet.
3. One-metre-plus rule is removed.
4. The **definition of close contact** remains the same, however the rules on self-isolation will be changing from the 16th August for those fully vaccinated.
5. Face coverings no longer required by law, but recommended in crowded indoor settings and may be mandated by some organisations.
6. Changing rooms can be used, however clubs should manage this to minimise use where possible to avoid participants being in a crowded area for a prolonged time thus triggering a close contact.
7. No capacity limits for spectators, but good practice encouraged.
8. Hospitality is permitted without restrictions.
9. Use of Test and Trace and QR codes are no longer mandated, but clubs can continue to do this, if they wish.
10. **Free NHS lateral flow testing** is available to clubs and The FA encourage clubs to take this up.
11. No domestic travel restrictions. Participants should continue to follow Government advice on international travel for any fixtures/ tournaments.

This guidance document applies to National League System football. Whilst similar, guidance for all youth and adult football and futsal, including all formats of the game, both indoors and outdoors, can be found on www.TheFA.com.

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DETAILED GUIDANCE ON STEP FOUR RESTRICTIONS FOR NATIONAL LEAGUE SYSTEM FOOTBALL

ADAPTATIONS TO THE GAME

In previous FA guidance, we set out the required adaptations to the playing of the game, to align to the Government's team sports framework. This included not prolonging elements of the game where players will be in close proximity and avoiding team huddles and handshakes (for example).

As part of step four, these adaptations will no longer be required by the Government and so have been removed from The FA guidance. However, clubs and leagues should consider whether they should tailor their approach as needed (for example, continuing to discourage players from shaking hands or maintaining distancing in and around the field of play – such as dugouts).

CLOSE CONTACT AND SELF-ISOLATION

The rules on close contact and self-isolation changed on the 16th August. The updated Government guidance can be found [here](#).

If a player tests positive on a team there is not a need for the other players to self-isolate, unless they have been contacted by Test and Trace, have developed symptoms or tested positive themselves.

Following amends to the Covid-19 rules on Monday 16th August 2021 on self-isolation, those individuals who are double-jabbed or under-18 no longer need to self-isolate after being identified as a close contact of a positive Covid-19 case, even if that person is within the same household. However, they are strongly advised to get their own free PCR test as soon as possible. PCR tests can be ordered online, by calling 119, or going to a test site.

As double-jabbed people identified as close contacts are still at risk of being infected, they are advised to consider other precautions such as wearing a face covering in enclosed spaces, and to limit contact with other people. If individuals conduct a PCR test and it comes back positive, they must follow the Government guidance on isolation irrespective of your vaccination status. There must also be a two-week gap (i.e. 14 days) between your second vaccination and this exemption coming into effect. If you are over 18 and not fully vaccinated, you will still need to isolate if you come into close contact with someone with Covid. It is important to note that players must continue to self-assess and if they are experiencing any symptoms and awaiting a test result, they must stay at home.

MASKS AND SOCIAL DISTANCING

In step four, the use of masks will become voluntary in all settings, with the Government advising people to use their personal judgement and to take responsibility, depending on the situation. Government advice is that the use of masks reduce risks to people (both yourselves and those around you) in crowded spaces. Please also note that businesses and organisations may still require masks to be used.

All businesses and facilities will be able to open in step four, with no caps on capacity (indoors or outdoors).

QR CODES

There will be no legal requirement for use of QR codes of collection of test and trace data, however businesses and facilities can continue to do this, if they wish.

CHANGING ROOMS

Changing rooms can be used. However, given that the definition of close contact is not changing, participants should consider this and minimise use of changing facilities where possible, to avoid prolonged contact with others which could trigger an isolation requirement should a participant test positive.

Clubs and facilities may also wish to consider taking precautions to avoid close contact, for example, asking participants to socially distance and ensure thorough ventilation.

FREE LATERAL FLOW TESTS

The FA strongly recommends clubs may wish to follow Government guidance and consider following a community-testing programme. You can find details on this [here](#). **Clubs should consider implementing a testing policy for players and staff 48 hours prior to any fixture.**

Rapid lateral flow tests help to find cases in people who may have no symptoms but are still infectious and can give the virus to others. These are currently distributed free by the Government and you can order packs to be sent to a home address. Where clubs do follow the twice-weekly free community Government testing programme, according to recently published PHE guidance they would meet the criteria for a Low-Risk Pathway, meaning certain first aid restrictions during Covid-19 can be lifted in this situation. More information can be found in our First-Aid guidance on [TheFA.com](#).

TRAVEL

All participants may travel to games with no restrictions in place for domestic travel. Any international travel should be in line with [Government advice](#).

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Players and clubs should consider how they can reduce the likelihood of close contact occurring especially on travelling to and from fixtures, such as social distancing where coach travel is used and encouraging the use of face masks.

SPECTATORS

As part of step four, there are no limits on spectators and clubs can work to the capacity limit of the ground where they play. Clubs are encouraged to agree limits with their local authority or Safety Advisory Group, where applicable.

Clubs should (and risk assess) plan to make the attendance of spectators to be as safe as possible for all. Some measures clubs should consider include:

- Encouraging spectators to follow hygiene best practice and guidance i.e. signage, hand sanitisers;
- Continuing to maintain and encourage social distancing whenever possible;
- Encouraging spectators to respect the rules of the venue they are attending, including arriving at the venue in good time;
- Wearing face masks in crowded indoor areas, such as moving around clubhouses;
- Making use of Government supplied Lateral Flow Tests (LFT) and take one before attending and reminding supporters that: 'If your LFT is positive or you have any doubt about your health, you should not attend';
- Encouraging those fully vaccinated or with a negative lateral flow test to download their Covid pass in the NHS app where the anticipated crowd may prevent social distancing in the ground.

The FA is working with its recently-appointed official hygiene partner, Dettol, to support the safe continuation of the game. You can find more information [here](#).

HOSPITALITY

All outdoor and indoor hospitality will be allowed as part of step four and can operate without any restrictions on capacity limits, or how people order food and drink.

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. 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.

INSPECTING THE EXISTING CONDITION OF YOUR FACILITY

If parts of your facility have not been used for some time, 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 and should include water quality (e.g. for Legionella and other contaminants), drains, gas services, ventilation, alarms/safety systems and pest control.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The guidance you are reading is FOR ALL – players, coaches, club officials, club welfare officers, match officials, league officials, first-aiders, volunteers, parents/carers, facility providers and 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, available on TheFA.com.

Before moving to step four, clubs should 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.

As noted above, the FA is working with its recently-appointed official hygiene partner, Dettol, to support the safe continuation of the game. You can find more information [here](#).

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

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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