



COVID-19 GUIDANCE ON RE-STARTING OUTDOOR COMPETITIVE GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL

Version: 1.0

Published: 30 July 2020

FOR REFEREES



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Now the UK Government has given approval for outdoor competitive grassroots football and training sessions to re-start, this detailed guidance **for match officials** has been produced by The FA in relation to football in England. It applies to outdoor youth and adult football, as well as the small-sided game. For now, indoor football and futsal are not permitted.

It should 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**. Should Government guidance change in response to the current Covid-19 Alert Level, The FA guidance will be updated accordingly.

Please remember: Referees should only return to football when it's right for them to do so. There is no pressure to return and there will be no consequence or judgement for not returning. Everyone's health, wellbeing and safety are the priorities

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The overriding principles to help safeguard the wellbeing of all match officials in the matchday environment are to:

- Minimise face-to-face contact where possible;
- Avoid lengthy periods of time in enclosed spaces;
- Ensure appropriate hygiene protocols are always in place;
- Encourage maintenance of appropriate social-distancing measures.

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

Should you need any support or advice, please contact your County FA Referee Development Officer. You can find a list of County FA contacts **here**.

Referee Developers appointed by the County FA (Observers, Coaches and Mentors) are permitted to attend matches to support referee development.

All Referee Developers must follow the guidance for spectators covered in The FA's Covid-19 Guidance on re-starting outdoor competitive grassroots football, found **here**. It is important that any Referee Developer attending a match should contact the home club before matchday to let them know they'll be attending.

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 competitive grassroots is as smooth and safe as possible.



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BEFORE THE MATCH

All referees and other participants (players, coaches, volunteers, spectators etc.) should check for symptoms of Covid-19 in line with current UK Government guidance. If you are symptomatic and/or living in a household with a possible Covid-19 infection you should remain at home and follow UK Government guidance. Referees should advise their Appointments Officer if they are unable to fulfil any appointment.

In addition, if you have been asked to isolate by NHS Test and Trace because you are a contact of a known Covid-19 case, you must not exercise outside your home or garden and must not exercise with others.

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°C);
- A new, continuous cough;
- A loss of, or change to, their sense of smell or taste.

AT THE VENUE:

- **Social distancing:** This should be maintained at all times, where possible. Where not possible, 'one-metre plus' distancing should be observed. Further information can be found [here](#).
- **Safety briefing:** In competitive football activities, the Covid-19 officer who will have been appointed by each club must provide a safety briefing before the commencement of any fixture. This briefing will remind match officials, both sets of players and club officials about their responsibilities to comply with the Code of Behaviour found within The FA's general Covid-19 Guidance [here](#).
- **Match fees:** These should be cashless where possible. Referees should agree with the paying club in advance of matchday whether payment will be by cash or BACS/electronic payment. If payment is by BACS/electronic payment, a payment timeframe should be agreed, up to a maximum of 48 hours post-match. If payment is not received within the agreed timeframe, referees should contact the Competition or Appointments Officer.
- **Travel:** All referees should follow best practice for travel, including minimising use of public transport. You

should walk, cycle or use a personal vehicle if possible. People from a household or support bubble can travel together in a vehicle. Further travel guidance can be found in The FA's general guidance [here](#).

- **Face coverings:** Referees should wear face coverings upon arrival at the ground and at all times until they start their warm-up.
- **Drinks and Refreshments:** Referees should bring their own named drinks and refreshments in named containers, as well as their own hand sanitiser/gel.
- **Ready-changed:** Where possible referees **must** arrive in match kit and shower at home, as changing rooms may not be available. There may be certain exceptions where changing rooms are opened, for example to support those with disabilities.
- **Toilets:** The home club should ensure these are open pre-match, during the match and for 30 minutes afterwards.
- **NHS Test and Trace:** Referees may be asked by the home club or hosting venue to participate in the NHS Test and Trace process. Under-18 referees who are asked to do so should refer to the specific guidance at the end of this document.
- **Paperwork:** The exchange/collecting of any paperwork (teamsheets, expense cards etc.) should be done at a distance, with minimal physical contact. This could be by using other methods, such as a photo, email or text. Under-18 referees must not share personal details with team coaches/managers.
- **Assistant referee flags:** Referees should clean assistant referee flags before and after use. Where clubs are providing the assistant referees, you should advise them before matchday to supply and use their own flags. Further information on cleaning items can be found [here](#).
- **Inspections:** Referees should complete pre-match pitch and player inspections visually and at a safe distance.
- **Respect:** The Respect handshake between players and match officials **must not** take place.
- **Ball-handling:** Referees are encouraged not to handle the ball pre-match and either use their feet or leave it to the teams.

DURING THE MATCH

- **Laws of the game:** Their practical application, including the decision-making principles, remain unchanged. Whilst there will be certain guidelines to consider, the **DNA of English refereeing** is the same. Although competitive contact match play is now permitted, in all settings before and after matches all participants should practise social distancing.
- **Specific tasks:** When completing the following, referees should observe 'one-metre plus' distancing:
 - Coin toss (NB: Referees should toss and catch the coin, not either captain);
 - Speaking to players in play or during stoppages;
 - Interactions between referees and assistant referees;
 - Issuing misconduct (yellow/red cards);
 - Assessment of injured players;
 - Substitution procedure.
- **Spitting:** Referees should avoid spitting, as well as reminding the players of the same responsibility. If you need to sneeze or cough, you are encouraged to do so into a tissue or upper sleeve and advised to avoid touching your face. However, spitting on the floor is not an act of misconduct, unless it is at someone when it is punishable with a red card, as per the laws of the game.
- **Coughing:** In an extreme case, where the referee is certain that someone deliberately, and from close range, coughed into the face of an opponent or match official, the referee should take action under the Law 12 'Using offensive, insulting or abusive language and/or gestures.' The action of moving the head/mouth towards someone and then coughing would fall within the 'spirit' and general definition of a gesture which is "a movement of part of the body, especially a hand or the head, to express an idea or meaning." If the incident was not severe enough to merit a sending-off (red card), a caution (yellow card) could be issued for 'unsporting behaviour – shows a lack of respect for the game'. However, referees should not be looking to punish 'routine' coughing (in the same way that there is no disciplinary sanction for spitting which is not at someone); action can only be supported where it is evident it was a clear act against someone else.
- **Shouting:** If possible, referees and players should avoid shouting or raising their voices when facing each other during, before and after games.
- **Stoppages:** Referees are encouraged to re-start the game as quickly as possible, specifically at stoppages for corner kicks, free kicks etc, when there are often large gatherings of players.
- **Set plays – free kicks:** Referees and coaches should encourage players to get on with the game and not unnecessarily prolong set play set-up, such as defensive walls;
- **Set plays – corners:** These should also be taken promptly to limit prolonged close marking.
- **Goal celebrations:** Physical contact at goal celebrations should be avoided. However, this is not an act of misconduct and referees should not punish those involved in goal celebrations where physical contact occurs.

If referees feel there are matchday breaches of The FA's Covid-19 Guidance on re-starting outdoor competitive grassroots football, even if they are not a discipline matter, these must still be reported to the competition and County FA. Referees are not responsible for clubs, players or spectators complying with The FA guidance. The home club and their Covid-19 officer have responsibility for managing these matters to the best of their ability.

AFTER THE MATCH

- **Post-match handshakes:** These must not take place.
- **Hand-washing:** Hands should be washed at the earliest opportunity and personal equipment should be wiped down with a disinfectant.
- **Face coverings:** These should be worn by referees at the first opportunity post-match until departing the ground.
- **Flags:** If flags are used by assistant referees, the referee should clean them with disinfectant at the first opportunity. Further information on cleaning items can be found [here](#).
- **Cash payments:** If cash payment of match fees has been agreed, this should be done with minimal contact and always in an envelope.
- **Changing rooms and showers:** These may not be available, even in adverse weather conditions.
- **Post-match hospitality:** This may be offered by clubs in accordance with the latest Government guidance, where bars and restaurants have been able to open since July 4. The rules which apply to bars and restaurants also apply within clubhouses where food and/or drink is being served which includes any food or drink facilities inside a clubhouse.
- **Post-match symptoms:** Referees who become ill or notice symptoms of Covid-19 two to three days after a match, must contact NHS Track and Trace on 119 or online [here](#).



SPECIFIC GUIDANCE

FOR OUTDOOR SMALL-SIDED FOOTBALL

- Small-sided football should be modified to provide more regular hygiene breaks in activity. Players should be discouraged from touching boards at any time, with tackling against boards discouraged. Referees should consider stopping play when this happens and re-starting play with the team in possession

FOR UNDER-18 REFEREES AND YOUTH FOOTBALL

In addition to all the information in this guidance, these points are specific to under-18 referees and any referee officiating a youth football match:

- Upon arrival at the match/venue, all under-18 referees should contact the home club's Covid-19 officer or Welfare Officer to let them know they have arrived and to agree the plan for the match and resolve any questions.
- Under-18 referees should not give their personal details (e.g. phone number) to anyone on matchday. Should details be requested by the home club for participation in the NHS Test and Trace process, please discuss this in advance with your parents/carers and if appropriate, give their details.

- Referees in youth football are advised not to tie players' shoe laces.
- To demonstrate throw-ins etc. you are to maintain 'one-metre plus' distancing.
- If you are an under-18 referee and have with any questions away from matchday, please contact your County FA. You can find a list of County FA contacts [here](#).
- All referees of youth football matches are encouraged to agree with both coaches before the match the expectations around social-distancing and stoppages, as well as providing regular hygiene breaks. Coaches are required to communicate this to their players, team officials and all parents/carers who may be social distancing as spectators.
- Referees play an important part in safeguarding so should ensure they refer to the safeguarding section of The FA's Covid-19 Guidance on re-starting outdoor competitive grassroots football, found [here](#).

FINALLY

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 competitive grassroots is as smooth and safe as possible.

But remember, if you're not comfortable returning to refereeing, there is no pressure to do so. 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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