

The FA issues guidelines for the return of outdoor competitive grassroots football

Practical guidance for players, coaches, officials, volunteers, clubs, leagues, parents/carers and facility providers undertaking outdoor competitive grassroots football activity in England.

The FA can confirm that the UK Government approved its plan for the return of outdoor grassroots football late last night, Friday 17 July 2020.

As a result, the grassroots football community now has the opportunity to return to football and prepare for the start of the new season.

The FA has been working hard over recent weeks to prepare guidelines for the safe return of grassroots football and, following Government approval, these can now be published.

Football activity can take place with necessary modifications in place to mitigate the transmission risk of COVID-19.

The FA would strongly recommend a phased return to competitive football activity as follows:

- **Until 31 July** – When ready, you can begin competitive training, with the overall group size (inclusive of coaches) being limited to 30 people;
- **From August** – Competitive matches to begin, for example pre-season fixtures, festivals and small sided football competitions;
- **From September** – Grassroots leagues, men's National League System, Women's Football Pyramid tiers 3 to 6, and FA Competitions can commence.

Clubs, players, coaches, match officials, league officials, volunteers, parents/carers, spectators and football facility providers should read The FA's full guidelines, which are accessible below, in addition to the [latest Government guidance on COVID-19](#).

A return to competitive football should only happen once clubs and facility providers have completed the necessary risk assessments and comprehensive plans are in place.

A summary of key points to consider from The FA's guidelines are listed for ease below:

- Everyone should self-assess for COVID-19 symptoms before every training session or match. If you are symptomatic or living in a household with possible or actual COVID-19 infection you must not participate or attend;
- Clubs and facility providers should ensure that their facility is compliant with current Government legislation and guidance related to COVID-19;
- Competitive training is now permitted, with groups limited to a maximum of 30 people, including coaches;
- Competitive match play is permitted, with social distancing in place before and after the match, and in any breaks in play;
- Players and officials should sanitise hands before and after a game as well as scheduled breaks throughout a game or training session;

- Ball handling should be kept to a minimum with most contact via a boot and the ball disinfected in breaks of play;
- Youth football coaches are encouraged to limit persistent close proximity of participants during match play and training;
- Goal celebrations should be avoided;
- Equipment should not be shared, and goalkeepers should ensure they disinfect their gloves regularly in breaks in training or matches and thoroughly afterwards. Where possible, coaches should only handle equipment in training;
- Where possible, players, coaches and officials should arrive changed and shower at home. Use of changing and shower facilities must follow government advice on the use of indoor facilities;
- Participants should follow best practice for travel including minimising use of public transport and walking or cycling if possible. People from a household or support bubble can travel together in a vehicle
- Clubs should keep a record of attendees at a match or training session, including contact details, to support NHS Test and Trace;
- Clubs should ensure they are affiliated with their [County Football Association](#).

[Separate guidance](#) has been developed for clubs with teams competing in the men's National League System (NLS) and the Women's Football Pyramid tiers 3 to 6. This will support these Clubs on the safe return of paying spectators and also the applicability of the guidance to facilities under Ground Grading conditions, to ensure the safe return of competitive matches.

Please note that at this stage, indoor football and futsal is not permitted. The FA will look to work with indoor facility providers to develop appropriate guidance for indoor formats as soon as possible.

James Kendall, Director of Football Development at The FA, said:

“We are delighted that the Government has given the go-ahead for competitive grassroots football to return. The past few months have been some of the most challenging times not just for football, but across society, and today's news will be welcomed by the grassroots football community all over the country.

“Now that we are able to look ahead to the new season, it's crucial that we continue to do all we can to follow safety measures, both as advised by the government and specifically for football.

“I would encourage anyone returning to competitive grassroots football to take the time to read this guidance, prepare thoroughly and to adopt our recommended approach to phasing football back in. I would also like to thank you for playing your vital part in helping our great game to get going again.”

The full guidance document can be downloaded below, along with a short summary for all those involved in restarting activity.