

# CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)



## GUIDANCE

ON THE SAFE PHASED RETURN OF  
SPORT, LEISURE AND RECREATION  
IN NORTHERN IRELAND

April 2021



Department for  
**Communities**

An Roinn

**Pobal**

Department for

**Commonities**

[www.communities-ni.gov.uk](http://www.communities-ni.gov.uk)



# Contents

<b>1. The importance of a safe phased return of Sport, Leisure and Recreation</b>	<b>4</b>
Current Position	4
<b>2. Links to Key Guidance</b>	<b>5</b>
The NI Executive's 5 Step Plan	5
Sport NI Guidance Framework for a Return to Sport	5
Sports Governing Bodies guidance	5
Sport NI Guidance on Re-opening Sports Facilities	5
Sports Grounds Safety Authority advice for hosting sporting events with no spectators	5
UK Active framework for the re-opening of gym, leisure centre and wider fitness industry	5
Guidance on making workplaces safer	6
Wearing Facemasks	6
<b>3. General Principles for Individuals Participating in Sport and Recreation</b>	<b>7</b>
Travelling for physical activity	7
If you have children with you	7
Clinically vulnerable people (such as those who have been asked to isolate)	8
<b>4. General Principles for Sport &amp; Leisure Facility Owners/Operators</b>	<b>9</b>
Ensure the activity can meet public health guidelines	9
Communicating clearly and consistently	9
Timetable for reopening	10
Taking bookings	10
Keeping facilities and equipment clean	10
Sharing equipment	10
Maintaining hygiene, through handwashing, sanitisation facilities and toilets	10
Keeping staff safe	11
Entering a building to access outdoor courts	11

# 1. The importance of a safe phased return of Sport, Leisure and Recreation

- 1.1. The Covid-19 restrictions have impacted on every thread of society in NI and adhering to them has had serious financial implications for the Sport, Leisure and Recreation sectors. Carefully working our way out of the lockdown arrangements is something that will need to be carefully managed so that the immense effort to suppress the spread of the virus is not undone and to ensure that we avoid a second wave.
  - 1.2. The Department recognises the significant positive impact that a return to Sport, Leisure and Recreational activities will have on the mental and physical health of the general population were measures can be put in place to ensure social distancing, hygiene and controls to manage usage. It will especially have a positive impact on local communities impacted by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic where team and group activities make up a significant fabric of the local community.
  - 1.3. The return to Sport, Leisure and Recreational activities will also play a key role in getting young people and adults active and will provide opportunities for exercise as well as an outlet for parents and society as a whole.
  - 1.4. It is also recognised that the resumption of Sport, Leisure and Recreational activities will generate economic activity for local clubs and providers as controls on numbers and restrictions on access, along with no competitions, limits income generation for councils/sports/ clubs and those affected right across the general leisure and recreation sectors.
- ## Current Position
- 1.5. While the position is constantly evolving the current position will be summarised on the NI Direct website at - **Coronavirus (COVID-19) regulations guidance: what the restrictions mean for you | nidirect**
  - 1.6. **'Your Guide to the Covid-19 Restrictions'** will be reviewed and updated as changes to the Regulations occur. Details can be found at: **<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/covid-19-legislation>**

## 2. Links to Key Guidance

- 2.1. On 2 March 2021, the NI Executive published its 'Pathway Out of Restrictions' document which sets out how the Executive will approach the relaxation of restrictions: **Coronavirus (COVID-19) regulations: Pathway out of restrictions | nidirect**
- 2.2. This is complemented by the 'Your Guide to the Covid-19 Restrictions' which will be reviewed and updated as changes to the Regulations occur. Details can be found at: **<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/covid-19-legislation>**
- 2.3. Sport NI's 'Framework for a Return to Sport' and toolkit is being used by sports Governing Bodies as they develop their own protocols to reflect the changing Health regulations. The Framework is aligned with the Executive's Plans and has been informed by discussions with Sport Ireland, UK Sport, Governing Bodies and International Federations: **Framework for a Return to Sport | Sport NI**

Sport NI has produced a checklist for developing protocols - **Developing Protocols | Sport NI**

Sport NI has also developed guidance for owners and operators of sport and leisure facilities to return to sport safely: **<http://www.sportni.net/return-to-sport/re-opening-sports-facilities-2/>**
- 2.4. Each individual Governing Body should now have protocols in place for teams/athletes to adhere to which will assist with risk assessments and help manage the risk for coaches, staff, volunteers and participants. For example:
  - Football: **<https://www.irishfa.com/irish-football-association/coronavirus-irish-fa-updates>**
  - Rugby: **<http://www.ulsterrugby.com/rugby-in-ulster/rugby-development/clubs/covid-19-guidance-for-clubs/>**
  - GAA: **<https://ulster.gaa.ie/covid-19/>**
  - Golf: **<https://www.golfnet.ie/news/golfnet/4689/step-3-protocolconfirmed-for-northern-ireland>**
  - Outdoor Recreation: **<http://www.outdoorrecreationni.com/news/be-outdoor-smart-leave-no-trace-love-the-place/>**
- 2.5. The Sports Grounds Safety Authority has developed advice and direction for those organisations hosting sporting events with no spectators during the current COVID-19 pandemic restrictions: **<https://sgsa.org.uk/sport-without-spectators-general-guidance/>**
- 2.6. UK Active has developed a framework for re-opening of the gym, leisure centre and wider fitness industry during social distancing: **<http://www.ukactive.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Covid-19-A-framework-for-the-re-opening-of-the-gym-and-fitness-industry-V2.3-2.pdf>**

2.7. Other associated general advice and guidance e.g. on making workplaces safer is available at the following links:

- NI Business Info: <https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/coronavirus-guide-making-workplaces-safer-and-priority-sector-list>
- Tourism NI: <https://covid19.tourismni.com/guidance>

2.8. Wearing Facemasks

Information on wearing facemasks can be found at: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-face-coverings>

# 3. General Principles for Individuals Participating in Sport and Recreation

## Travelling for physical activity

- 3.1. Check in advance if the facilities you want to use have reopened.
- 3.2. When exercising in the countryside remember to follow the countryside code and act responsibly.
- 3.3. You can travel for physical activity. Ideally use your nearest, local, appropriate venue to reduce pressure on transport infrastructure. However, you can travel to outdoor open space irrespective of distance. You shouldn't travel with someone from outside your household unless you can practise social distancing - for example by cycling. It is not possible to practice effective social distancing in small vehicles. You should consider all other forms of transport before using public transport.
- 3.4. To help keep yourself and your fellow passengers safe, you should not travel if you: are experiencing any coronavirus symptoms, are self-isolating as a result of coronavirus symptoms or as a result of being in contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19, or sharing a household

with somebody with symptoms, or are clinically extremely vulnerable.

- 3.5. See the government's **safer travel guidance** for passengers for further information.
- 3.6. Sport NI guidance on car sharing is available at: <http://www.sportni.net/return-to-sport/advice-on-car-sharing/>

## If you have children with you

- 3.7. You can bring your children with you to exercise and it's important that children have as many chances to be as active as possible.
- 3.8. Remember that if you have children with you, you are responsible for supervising them at all times and in line with social distancing guidelines.
- 3.9. Children are not always good at hand hygiene; the virus can be spread by touching contaminated surfaces. Therefore pay special attention to children's hand hygiene.

## Clinically vulnerable people

- 3.10. It is important, as more sports and activities restart, that absolutely everyone is able to access these opportunities including those with disabilities for whom the health and well-being benefits of activity can be particularly important.
- 3.11. If you are classified as extremely vulnerable on health grounds, and keep yourself safe by taking extra care to minimise contact with others by keeping two metres apart at all times, wearing a mask and observing good hygiene - Face Space Hands.
- 3.12. If you have been asked to isolate by NHS Test and Trace because you are a

contact of a known COVID-19 case, do not exercise outside your own home or garden and do not exercise with others; you can spread the virus to others even if you never get symptoms.

### **Guidance for the sports sector in managing a suspected case of Covid-19**

- 3.13. Sport NI's Sport Institute has developed guidance for sports clubs and organisations on how to manage a suspected case of Covid-19. This guidance can be found at: **Managing a Confirmed or Suspected COVID -19 Case: A Guide for Sports | Sport NI**
- 3.14. Sport NI has also developed a suite of advice and guidance on Sports Medicine for the sector: **Sports Medicine | Sport NI**

# 4. General Principles for Sport & Leisure Facility Owners/Operators

4.1. There are a number of key principles which everyone must follow in order to ensure a safe return for the Sport, Leisure and Recreation sectors.

4.2. Each venue, including council-owned sports facilities, should make their own decisions about when their facilities are ready to open while taking account of these. Sport NI's Guidance on re-opening sports and leisure facilities is a useful resource available for these considerations: <https://www.sportni.net/return-to-sport/re-opening-sports-facilities-2/re-opening-considerations/>

## Ensure the activity can meet public health guidelines

4.3. All activity should be consistent with the government guidance regarding health, social distancing and hygiene. **Coronavirus (COVID-19) regulations guidance: what the restrictions mean for you | nidirect**

4.4. That means that participants and others can maintain the recommended social distancing (except during permitted contact sport activity), that good hygiene practices are in place, that equipment is disinfected regularly,

and that 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.

4.5. Consider the whole end-to-end 'user journey' when planning safe operating practices; this means all activities from the time of arrival on site to leaving, not just the sporting activity.

## Communicating clearly and consistently

4.6. Organisations will need to communicate clearly and regularly with members and participants setting out what they are doing to manage risk, and what advice they are giving to individuals to do likewise.

4.7. Ideally organisations should publish an action plan detailing their plans to re-open safely and the steps they are taking to avoid confusion.

4.8. Organisations should also communicate clearly opening times and how people can safely access a facility, if relevant, for example through a booking or queuing system.

4.9. It is more important than ever to consider inclusive guidance for people who need support to be active and organisations should consider this as part of their work to encourage people to return.

4.10. Organisations should be ready to strengthen or relax measures at short notice. Organisations are encouraged to think creatively about how best to make their sport or activity possible within these guidelines.

### **Timetable for reopening**

4.11. You should only reopen or restart activities as soon as you feel able to do so safely. Until you feel it is safe and responsible to reopen you should remain closed.

### **Taking bookings**

4.12. Booking in advance, online or over the phone is preferable. Where this is not possible and a venue has staff available to take bookings (for courts or rounds, for example), consider mandating contactless or at least card payment, to avoid handling cash.

### **Keeping facilities and equipment clean**

4.13. Cleaning protocols should be put in place to limit coronavirus transmission in public places. It is advised that touch points (e.g. handrails and gates) should be particular areas of focus for increased cleaning.

4.14. Frequent cleaning of work areas and equipment between use, using your usual cleaning products, is advised, as is clearing workspaces and removing waste and belongings from work areas at the end of shifts.

4.15. Indoor facilities should remain closed except for essential toilets. No communal changing or showering is currently permitted (21 April 2021).

### **Sharing equipment**

4.16. It is a decision for facility managers whether or not they hire out equipment. However, it is expected that precautions will be taken and equipment will be cleaned in between users, and COVID-19 guidelines will be followed.

4.17. Where possible, avoid or limit sharing of equipment, for example, you should use your own tennis racquet, golf clubs, football or basketball etc.

4.18. If you are sharing equipment, including balls, you should practice strict hand hygiene and wash your hands thoroughly before and after use.

### **Maintaining hygiene, through handwashing, sanitisation facilities and toilets**

4.19. To help everyone maintain good hygiene, consideration should be given to:

- Using signs and posters to build awareness of good handwashing technique, the need to increase

handwashing frequency, avoid touching your face and to cough or sneeze into your arm;

- Consider how to ensure safety messages reach those with hearing or vision impairments;
- Providing regular reminders and signage to maintain hygiene standards;
- Providing hand sanitiser in multiple locations in addition to washrooms;
- Setting clear use and cleaning guidance for toilets to ensure they are kept clean and social distancing is achieved;
- Enhancing cleaning for busy areas;
- Providing more waste facilities and more frequent rubbish collection;
- Using disposable paper towels in handwashing facilities where possible;
- Minimising use of portable toilets;
- Provision of automated hand sanitising dispensers in public places;
- Ensuring that takeaway catering facilities can be used in a safe way that maintains social distancing and hygiene.

## Keeping staff safe

4.20. The Executive has published guidance to help workplaces operate as safely as possible. You should refer to this guidance: <https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/campaign/coronavirus-updates-support-your-business>

## Entering a building to access outdoor courts

- 4.21. If you opt to open your building for these purposes, there are a number of things you can do to help minimise risks and avoid accidental gatherings.
- 4.22. Ensure clear signage is in place so people can find their destination quickly. Looking at how people walk through your building and consider how you could adjust this to reduce congestion and contact between customers. For example, queue management or one-way flow, where possible. Using outside premises for queuing where available and safe, for example car parks.
- 4.23. Take into account total floor space as well as likely pinch points and busy areas. Limiting the number of customers in the building, overall and in any particular congestion areas, for example doorways between outside and inside spaces.

Available in alternative formats

© Crown Copyright 2021



Department for  
**Communities**  
[www.communities-ni.gov.uk](http://www.communities-ni.gov.uk)

An Roinn  
**Pobal**

Department fur  
**Commonities**