



**FAI SAFER RETURN TO TRAINING & PLAY PROTOCOL
GRASSROOTS UNDERAGE, YOUTH & ADULT FOOTBALL**

8th Edition - Update 21st September

2021 INTRODUCTION

- This Protocol applies to all training sessions and matches from Tuesday 21st September 2021.
- The primary aim of this Protocol is to support the clubs affiliated to the FAI and to protect the health & safety of their players, coaches, all essential personnel, and volunteers in a safer return to training and matches.
- This Protocol will be in line with Department of Health and Public Health Policy at all times.
- This Protocol will follow all Government updates on the Return to Sport.
- The Protocol will be utilised in line with all other FAI policy documents including Child Welfare & Safeguarding Policy.

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1 - Key Dates

- This Protocol applies to all training sessions and matches from Tuesday 21st September 2021 and must be adhered to for all training sessions and matches under the jurisdiction of the FAI and its Affiliates.

2 – Club Management COVID-19 Compliance

- Club management committees must review the FAI Safer Return to Training & Play Protocol 8th Edition ahead of any return to games from Tuesday 21st September 2021.
- Only team players, match officials and support staff are allowed in dressing rooms for a maximum period of 15 minutes.
- Wear face mask in all indoor settings.
- Sanitize your hands regularly.
- Observe 2 metre social distancing in dressing rooms and all indoor facilities at all times.
- Clear signage is to be displayed on capacities and spacing in dressing rooms.
- Hand sanitization stations to be placed at each dressing room entrance.
- A clear flow management plan for dressing rooms to be in use.
- Practice good coughing and sneezing etiquette.
- Showers are best avoided, if possible, in the transition period.
- If shower use is unavoidable, only use every second cubicle/shower head with a maximum of 5 minutes allowed in the shower.
- COVID-19 Compliance Officers should be familiar with the Updated FAI Safer Return to Training & Play Protocol 8th edition in advance of any consultation with their club.
- All clubs must appoint at least one COVID-19 Compliance Officer before any return to training/matches are implemented.
- Clubs with multiple training/match venues will need to appoint more than one COVID-19 Compliance Officer (minimum 1 per training/match venue).
- The Football Association of Ireland will provide Role & Responsibilities Document for all COVID-19 Compliance Officers.
- Clubs must confirm appointment of COVID-19 Compliance Officer(s) to FAI via the checklist before any return to training/play. **Clubs who have already completed this process do not need to do so again.**
- Clubs must ensure, through their Compliance Officers, that all coaches, parents, and players are fully aware of their responsibilities.
- Clubs must continually educate players/coaches/parents/guardians/volunteers – see <https://www2.hse.ie/coronavirus/>
- Clubs are advised to inform insurers of their intention to return to training/matches.
- Clubs who are returning to training/matches must follow all steps set out above.

3 – Preparing Training and Match Venues, Facilities & Equipment

- A COVID-19 Risk Assessment must be carried out by all clubs in advance of any resumption of training/matches and/or facility reopening.
- FAI Risk Assessment Template can be found here - [FAI Risk Assessment Template](#)
- The Risk Assessment must be reviewed in advance of training/matches returning, dressing rooms reopening and kept up to date at all times.
- The Risk Assessment must be in line with any Government updates to the COVID-19: Reframing the Challenge, Continuing Our Recovery and Reconnecting guidelines.
- Only team players, match officials and support staff are allowed in dressing rooms for a maximum period of 15 minutes.
- Wear face mask in all indoor settings.
- Sanitize your hands regularly.
- Observe 2 metre social distancing in dressing rooms and all indoor facilities at all times.
- Clear signage is to be displayed on capacities and spacing in dressing rooms.
- Hand sanitization stations to be placed at each dressing room entrance.
- A clear flow management plan for dressing rooms to be in use.
- Practice good coughing and sneezing etiquette.
- Showers are best avoided, if possible, in the transition period.
- If shower use is unavoidable, only use every second cubicle/shower head with a maximum of 5 minutes allowed in the shower.
- Sanitary facilities should be accessible for players, coaches, and match officials.
- Sanitary facilities should be thoroughly cleaned before the first and after the last training session/match at the venue.
- Hand sanitizer and cleaning products should be available in the sanitary facilities for use during training sessions.
- All training equipment – including goalposts - must be sanitised before and after every training session/game.
- Players and Coaches must bring their own hand sanitisers.
- Clubs are advised to have hand sanitisers in place and observe strict hand hygiene measures.
- COVID-19 Signage must be clearly visible throughout the training facility.
- COVID-19 Signage is available to download from www.fai.ie

4 -Training Groups / Numbers / Indoor Training

- Underage Training (Under 18) – (Pod of 13 players and minimum 2 coaches)
- Adult Training- (Pod of 14 players and minimum 1 coach)
- Clubs must adhere to the FAI Child Welfare and Safeguarding Policy and other associated policies, at all times which can be found here - [FAI Child Welfare & Safeguarding Policy](#)
- Only essential personnel are permitted access onto the training pitch/match pitch.
- More than one team can train at a venue at any given time provided there is a clear buffer zone between the groups.
- Keep training times staggered to ease the flow of arrivals and departures of players and coaches.

Indoor Training

- Indoor training is permitted in pods of six players and maximum two coaches up to Oct 22nd
- Indoor training areas for each pod must measure a minimum of 96 square metres.
- A buffer zone two metres wide must exist between each pod where multiple pods of six players are training.
- All indoor training areas must be suitably ventilated at all times.
- Multiple training sessions can take place concurrently once venue is big enough.
- Hand sanitizer must be available at all indoor training areas.
- Spectator numbers are limited to the venue's social distancing guidelines.
- All spectators must adhere to 2 metre social distancing.
- In relation to Gyms and Training Facilities within clubs, these may operate in line with the broader permissions for indoor facilities.
- Appropriate protective measures and COVID protocols should be in place.

5. Match Day & Transport To and From Activities & Events

- Matches can resume from Monday 7th June 2021.
- Teams should arrive as close to kick off as possible.
- All players and staff should travel to games in line with HSE Guidelines gov.ie - www.gov.ie - [COVID-19Travel Advice \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)
- While public transport is operating at full capacity, Private Coach Tour activity is limited at 75% capacity with protective measures.
- Football clubs/league organising transport to/from events should implement private Coach Tour capacities (75%).
- Protective measures such as physical distancing, mask wearing etc. should also be implemented.
- In line with the return of public and private transport participants may wish to return to the use of carpooling.
- Private transport carrying those not yet vaccinated or of mixed immunity should be aware of the higher risk. The use of appropriate face coverings is recommended.
- If carpooling, consider use of a pod system in which the same participants pool together for all activities.
- Travel in your gear.
- Bring your own labelled food and water in a sealed bag.
- On arrival observe and obey COVID-19 signage.
- Player and coaches should observe 2 metre social distance where possible (Warm Ups, Meetings, Team Talks).
- No hand greetings are permitted.
- No spitting is permitted.
- Pre-match and half-time meetings should take place on the pitch.
- For dugout use, ensure 2 metre social distancing can take place.
- A coach or club physio can attend an injured player on the pitch but please wear a facemask and gloves.
- A designated room can be used to treat injured players.
- A player/match official suspected of a new onset of covid 19 must be given a facemask and isolated from the rest of the attendees.
- After the game, please adhere to social distancing guidelines and leave the complex as quickly as possible.
- Each club COVID-19 Compliance Officer is responsible for keeping a list of their own squad for each match day for contact tracing purposes. This does not apply to spectators.
- Toilet facilities can be used with cleaning after each event.

6 - Crowd Control for Club Venues

The numbers permitted to attend match venues are:

50% of safe holding capacity with mixed vaccination status (vaccinated & unvaccinated).

OR

75% of safe holding capacity with all attendees fully vaccinated.

Note: It is recommended that the 50% option is used for matchdays.

- Spectators should ensure 2 metre social distancing is maintained at all times and avoid congregating.

7- Coach Responsibilities

- All coaches must be familiar with the Updated FAI Safer Return to Training/Play Protocol.
- All coaches must ensure that all participants in training sessions/matches are briefed on the Updated FAI Safer Return to Training/Play Protocol.
- Coaches must arrive to the training session/match in their training gear.
- All coaches must adhere to the Updated FAI Safer Return to Training/Play Protocol throughout the full duration of the training session/match.
- Coaches must provide a register of attendees at all training sessions/matches to the COVID-19 Compliance Officer for contact tracing purposes.
- Coaches must bring their own hand sanitizer.
- Coaches must ensure that the training area and pitch is clear of all equipment before leaving the facility.

8 – Before You Coach

If you feel unwell, the following guidelines should be followed:

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/symptoms.html>

If you are a close contact of someone who tests positive for COVID-19 you must follow the advice provided here - <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/testing/if-you-are-a-close-contact.html>

Guidelines on when and how to restrict movements can be found here -

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/managing-coronavirus-at-home/if-you-live-with-someone-who-has-coronavirus.html>

9 – Player Responsibilities

- All adult players & parents/guardians of underage players must be familiar with the Updated FAI Safer Return to Training/Play Protocol.
- Clubs must ensure that all players & parents/guardians of underage players are briefed on the Updated Protocol before returning to training/matches.
- Players and parents/guardians are advised to keep up to date with HSE Guidelines.
- Players must arrive in their training gear/match gear and with their own equipment including water (labelled with their name) and shin pads.
- Goalkeepers, or any player acting as a goalkeeper, must wear their own gloves
- Players must bring their own hand sanitiser.
- Personal items must be labelled with the player's name and not shared.
- Players must bring all personal items home with them.

10 – Before You Train/Play

If you feel unwell, the following guidelines should be followed:

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/symptoms.html>

If you are a close contact of someone who tests positive for COVID-19 you must follow the advice provided here -

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/testing/if-you-are-a-close-contact.html>

Guidelines on when and how to restrict movements can be found here -

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/managing-coronavirus-at-home/if-you-live-with-someone-who-has-coronavirus.html>

11 – Training sessions

- Access and egress to and from the training pitch or area must be coordinated and is subject to social distancing guidelines.
- A 15 minute gap between sessions must be implemented if consecutive training sessions are scheduled on the same training area.
- All activity must take place only on the training pitch or area.
- Players and coaches must practice good coughing & sneezing etiquette.
- Players and coaches must adhere to HSE guidelines on hand hygiene at all times.
- Any meeting which may need to take place must take place on the training pitch area and should last no longer than 10 minutes.
- All meetings and briefings on the training pitch or area must adhere to social distancing guidelines. Please avoid players queueing within activities.
- Contact must be made with a parent/guardian of any underage player who is suspected of contracting COVID-19.
- Players in need of attention, where possible, should be treated on the pitch.
- A coach or Club Physiotherapist can attend an injured player on the pitch.
- They should wear a face mask and gloves.

- A designated room – where applicable and necessary – can be used for treating an injured player.
- Physiotherapists – where applicable – must wear PPE.
- A player or coach suspected of a new onset of COVID-19 must be given a face mask and must be isolated immediately from the rest of the attendees.
- Contact must be made with a parent/guardian of any underage player who is suspected of contracting COVID-19.

12 – Contact definition

Close Contact -v- Casual Contact

Guidelines on close and casual contacts can be found here -

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/close-contact-and-casual-contact.html>

13 – Updating Policy

- Clubs should communicate regularly to review implementation, Risk Assessment and Updated FAI Safer Return to Training and Play Protocols.
- All clubs should hold regular de-briefing sessions with coaches, player representatives and COVID-19 Compliance Officers and also seek feedback from spectators.

14 – Next Steps

- The FAI will continue to update this FAI Safer Return to Training & Play Protocol based on the advice of Government and Health agencies.
- All FAI Safer Return to Training and Play Protocols updated will be posted on FAI.ie
- All enquiries can be emailed to covidchecklist@fai.ie

15 - Additional Guidance

Since the emergence of COVID 19 football has developed and implemented a wide range of protocols and protective measures to limit the transmission of COVID 19 and ensure the safety of participants, volunteers, staff, and spectators.

As mandatory restrictions unwind football should continue to manage COVID-19 on the basis that it will likely continue to be constantly present into the foreseeable future.

Football should seek to maintain overarching structures and basic protective measures throughout the Winter season.

These include the use of COVID 19 Officers, recommending symptomatic individuals do not participate in or attend sporting activities, the ongoing promotion of good respiratory & hand hygiene along with the wearing a face covering in relevant settings and considering indoor space densities and duration of indoor activities.

All stakeholders, including players, match officials, coaches, administrators and parents and spectators have a responsibility in ensuring the above guidelines are adhered to at alltimes. In turn, this will ensure that our players can continue to participate safely in sport.