

# SAFER RETURN TO PLAY



## MATCH DAY PROTOCOL

### Grassroots Referees



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FAI Referee Department



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# Introduction

Referees are an integral part of football and we must ensure that we are well prepared prior to our return to play. This 'Safer Return To Play - Match Day Protocol' provides guidance and direction to match officials on how to manage the administration and the refereeing of games. The 'Laws of the Game' provide referees with all the necessary authority to deal with all on-field issues, whilst other matters should be reported to the leagues who run the competitions.

The primary aim of this protocol is to minimise risk of transmission of the COVID-19 virus to as low a level as possible. The principles of risk mitigation are identical for training and for refereeing. This protocol must be followed in conjunction with all FAI Protocols which can be found [here](#)

All guidelines are underpinned by the principle that individual referees should only engage with practices that protect their health and safety as they return to refereeing in line with Government and HSE directives. We must take personal responsibility around our own health when making our decision to return to play.

The exact date of a return to play will be determined by the league you are assigned to and this will be guided by the Affiliate body and Football Association of Ireland. In the meantime, it is recommended that you continue to take some preparatory steps to be ready for a return to football.





## Availability

- To facilitate the resumption of football it is important that referees advise the 'allocations officer' in their league and their Lead Observer of their availability.
- Some referees will be eager to referee immediately, whilst others may adopt a 'wait & see' approach. Whatever your choice is, it is imperative that you communicate this.
- When you return it is important to keep the 'allocations officer' in your league up to date with any changes in your circumstances and copy this to your Lead Observer.

## Laws of the Game

- If your league is resuming its 2019/20 season, then the 2019/2020 Laws of the Game will apply to the matches in your league until the season concludes.
- If your league is starting its 2020/21 season, then the 2020/2021 Laws of the Game will apply. A summary of the changes can be found here [LOTG Changes 2020.2021](#)
- A full version of the 2020/2021 Laws of the Game can be downloaded from the following link [LOTG](#)
- Training will be provided by the Referee Department for referees that will be operating under the new laws.

## Key Points

- Clubs are permitted to resume full contact training and training games between teams from the same club from June 29<sup>th</sup>. Referees are **not** permitted to referee these games.
- Clubs are permitted to resume friendly games from July 11<sup>th</sup> and leagues are permitted to organise competitive fixtures from July 18<sup>th</sup>
- If you are unwell, stay at home and contact your GP
- Adhere to social distancing of 2 metres, where possible
- Practice good hand hygiene with regular hand washing and the use of hand sanitiser
- Practice good coughing and sneezing etiquette - [HSE Coughing and sneezing Guidelines](#)





## Before the game

If you are unwell stay at home, notify the allocations officer that you cannot attend the match and contact your GP. The symptoms include:

- Temperature of 38C or greater
- Sudden onset of cough or shortness of breath
- Sudden loss of the sense of taste or smell

A Risk Assessment of the venue must be carried out and all equipment including goalposts must be sanitised before and after every game. The protocols are available at the following [LINK](#)

**This is the responsibility of the club. Referees will have no part in policing this.**

The club must appoint the COVID-19 Compliance officer or a designated club member to act as the first point of contact for the match official on arrival. The coordination of the pre match protocol should be discussed (team sheet, equipment check, coin toss etc.) and agreed.

The referees fee should be placed into an envelope and sealed. This fee should be paid on arrival.

### a) Arrival

- Referees should arrive as close to kick-off time as is feasible, no later than 15 minutes before kick-off
- All match officials should travel to games in line with [HSE Guidelines](#)
- Consult with your league about their policy regarding appointment of three match officials in the current circumstances
- Referees are advised not to use dressing room facilities. Referees should travel in tracksuit and match kit
- Bring your own hand sanitiser
- Bring your own labelled, food and water if needed and seal them in a plastic bag
- On arrival, observe and obey the COVID-19 signage
- Match officials should observe 2 metres social distancing where possible (warm-ups, meetings, pre-match discussions)
- Avoid greeting players, coaches and other match officials with handshakes, fist bumps, high fives
- Spectators must adhere to 2 metres social distancing at all times





**b) Match Card**

- Where applicable team sheets / match cards should be completed by each team prior to kick-off and placed into a sealed envelope after the referee has reviewed them.
- Local league arrangements may differ, and you may wish to consult your 'allocations officer' in this regard.

**c) Pitch / Equipment Inspection**

- Inspect all players and substitutes, listed on the match card prior to the start of the match. Inspection should be carried out in open space, outdoors and respecting social distancing.
- Any issues with the field of play or equipment (goal posts, nets, corner flags, markings and match balls etc) should be referred to the home club compliance officer or designated person to be corrected.

**d) Warm – Up**

- Observe 2 metres social distancing at all times
- Practice good coughing and sneezing etiquette
- Avoid contact with players, coaches and other match officials (handshakes, fist bumps, high fives)
- Only consume liquids and food from your own labelled supplies
- Use hand sanitiser before and after you have completed the warm-up
- No spitting is permitted
- When operating in a team of officials, match instructions must take place on the pitch and must not last more than 10 minutes

**e) Start of play**

- Use hand sanitiser before entering the field of play
- Respect 2 metres social distancing at coin toss
- If photographs are being taken, 2 metres social distancing must be respected
- Hand greetings are not permitted (handshakes, fist bumps, high fives)
- At the coin toss do not allow others to touch the coin

**f) Flags for assistant referees and club linespersons**

- Match officials should not provide flags to club linesperson. The club linesperson should indicate ball out of play by raising their hand or by using an agreed item.
- Each match official should bring their own flag that only they will use when operating in a team of officials





# During the game

The following protocols apply to all participants in the match.

**It is not the referee's responsibility to ensure that all participants, players, managers, spectators adhere to this protocol.**

- Players and Match Officials should adhere to social distancing of 2 metres where possible
- Practice good coughing and sneezing etiquette
- Use hand sanitiser at half time and before the commencement of the second half
- The referee should sanitise the whistle at half time and again at the end of the game
- No hand greetings are permitted (handshakes, fist bumps, high fives)
- No spitting is permitted

## **a) Social distancing**

- Players and Match Officials should adhere to social distancing of 2 metres where possible, particularly at any breaks in play

## **b) Issuing of sanctions**

- When delivering a public warning or any form of sanction, adhere to 2 metres social distancing

## **c) Dealing with mass confrontations**

- Referees should adhere to the following guidelines for dealing with a mass confrontation
  - Respect 2 metre social distancing guidelines
  - Do not touch any players
  - Do not get in between players
  - Do not get in close proximity to players
  - Avoid excessive use of your whistle to deter any escalation
  - Stay back, observe and make a mental note of any offending players who may receive sanction
  - Once the confrontation has subsided, sanction the offending players from each team





#### d) **Substitutes and Technical Staff**

- Substitutes and technical staff must adhere to 2 metres social distancing. The confines of the technical area should be extended to facilitate social distancing requirements
- Substitutes are allowed to leave the technical area to warm up. The referee determines exactly where they may warm up and how many substitutes are allowed to warm up simultaneously
- Due to social distancing requirements substitutes may warm up behind their own goal
- Substitutes must adhere to 2 metres social distancing during warm-ups
- Match officials should check substitutes equipment prior to the game and practice social distancing guidelines when a substitution is being made
- Where leagues have sanctioned the use of 5 substitutes in line with the IFAB's temporary law change the following guidelines apply
  - Each team will be permitted to use a maximum of five substitutes
  - Each team will have a maximum of three opportunities to make substitutions during the game
  - Substitutions may also be made at half-time. This does not count as one of the three opportunities for each team
  - If both teams make a substitution at the same time, this will count as one of the three opportunities for each team
  - Unused substitutions and opportunities to make substitutions are carried forward into extra time
  - Where competition rules allow an additional substitution in extra time, teams will each have one additional substitution opportunity
  - Substitutions may also be made before the start of extra time and at half-time in extra time

#### e) **Injuries**

- A Coach or Club Physiotherapist can attend to an injured player or match official on the pitch. They should wear a face mask and gloves
- A designated room – where applicable – can be used for treating an injured player. A changing room may be used for this purpose
- Referees should follow the following guidelines for dealing with an injury:
  - Ask the injured player if they want treatment while maintaining 2 metres social distancing
  - Signal for the Coach or Club Physiotherapist
  - Take up a position adhering to 2 metres social distancing and monitor the treatment of the injured player in accordance with the LOTG







f) **Spitting**

- “Spitting at someone” is a sending-off (red-card) offence under the Laws of the Game
- Players and match officials have been advised that spitting is not permitted. However, referees should only act if a player breaches the LOTG by committing an offence in this regard
- Disciplinary sanction regarding “spitting at someone” is a matter for the competition organiser
- Where a competition organiser wishes to enforce protocols regarding spitting, any disciplinary decision should be taken by the relevant competition organiser or member association after the match

## After the game

a) **At the final whistle**

- Players and Match Officials must adhere to 2 metres social distancing at the final whistle and when exiting the pitch and venue
- No hand greetings are permitted (handshakes, fist bumps, high fives)
- Practice good coughing and sneezing etiquette
- No spitting is permitted
- Use hand sanitiser after the game
- The referee should sanitise the whistle after game
- Wash your hands when you get home

b) **Post-match debriefs**

- Observers and referees have the option of conducting the debrief by phone or video call, when possible
- If the match official(s) and observer agree, the post-match debrief may take place at the venue but must be outdoors and must not exceed more than 10 minutes



# Contact Tracing

- Contact tracing is a key component to all activities around the game
- The COVID-19 Compliance Officer must keep a register of ALL Players, Match Officials, Coaches, Parents/Guardians, Volunteers and Administrators attending the match
- Each club is responsible for providing its own COVID-19 Compliance Officer with a list of attendees for every game, home or away
- This will include name and contact details
- Referees must comply with this requirement
- This register should be kept electronically and be updated continually

**This is a live document and is subject to change on a regular basis as Government and FAI updates are announced.**

