



# **BRITISH**

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## **AMERICAN FOOTBALL**

**COVID-19 RETURN TO PLAY  
ACTION  
PLAN**

**STAGE 4 COMMUNITY CLUB  
GUIDANCE FOR ENGLAND**

# STAGE 4 COMMUNITY CLUB GUIDANCE FOR ENGLAND

**Updated: 1 December 2020**

These guidelines have been produced in line with the UK Government's [return to recreational team sport framework](#) and have now been updated to move to stage 4 of BAFA's return to play roadmap.

While stage 4 provides us with new opportunities to increase American football activity, including locally organised friendly non-contact games, we must continue to be cautious in our approach to ensure the safety of our members.

**Please also be aware that guidance can change, and restrictions may be reintroduced at short notice. Where a locality or region is subject to localised restrictions, guidance in this document may not apply. You can find information on localised restrictions [here](#).**

Our guidance will be updated and reissued as we progress through our road map and to reflect any relevant changes to public health guidance or advice from the UK Government's Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

Make sure you read this guidance carefully and fully understand the requirements in place to meet with the varying restrictions outlined by your relevant home nation government.

## **England – tier system**

Clubs should use the [post-code checker](#) to confirm which tier their club activity will take place in, and then make sure activity is currently permitted at that level. This should be considered at all times as part of their risk assessment and activity planning.

**Particular notice must be taken of travel restrictions in place for tier 3 and what this may mean for members who live outside of the local authority region in which the club operates and who may be in a higher or lower tier.**

If you have any questions relating to this document, or the guidance contained within, please contact [covid-19@britishamericanfootball.org](mailto:covid-19@britishamericanfootball.org) in the first instance.

## **BAFA's return to play road map**

Read BAFA's six stage [return to play roadmap](#) for more information.

## GENERAL GUIDANCE

1. Clubs are only allowed to return to the activity detailed in each stage of our route map when advised they may do so by BAFA.
2. Teams and individuals should not travel to or from tier 3 areas to take part in American Football activity. The sole exception to this rule is for under 18s, who may travel a reasonable distance to or from a tier 3 area to participate in training activities with their registered club only.
3. Teams and individuals should not travel to Wales or Scotland to take part in American football activity at this time
4. Club management should ensure all appropriate management processes are in place so that they can effectively oversee and maintain the implementation of the measures outlined in this document.
5. It is expected that clubs will draw up their own detailed practice protocols, however the Covid-19 adapted behaviours outlined in this document should be common to all clubs.
6. All clubs need to conduct a risk assessment of their facilities, operating procedures and planned activities prior to returning to American football activity. They should have appropriate measures in place to provide a safe environment for players, volunteers and other relevant individuals. These measures should be aligned with BAFA and Government guidance. The aim is to introduce suitable control measures to reduce the risk of contracting the virus to as low a level as is 'reasonably practicable'. A BAFA risk assessment template is available [here](#).
7. Clubs must also make sure they have an Emergency Action Plan for reacting to incidents. An example template is available [here](#).
8. All activity must take place outdoors.
9. Clubs should strictly limit the time spent congregating at a venue before activity begins. Meet- up times should reflect this – arrival no more than five minutes before the start time of a session is recommended. This includes arriving changed and ready to begin the warmup, if possible, to minimise time spent waiting or in holding areas.
10. No spectating should take place other than where a parent / guardian is supervising a child or vulnerable adult. In all cases physical distancing should always be followed.

11. Use of changing rooms and showering facilities should be avoided where possible, Players should arrive changed and shower at home afterwards. Use of changing and shower facilities must follow [government advice on the use of indoor facilities](#) where available.
12. BAFA clubs should adhere to the government managed social distancing guidelines in force at the time, before and after any activity, and during breaks.
13. Participants are encouraged to follow best practice for travel including minimising use of public transport and limiting car sharing. Walk or cycle if you can. People from a household or [support bubble](#) can travel together in a vehicle. See the government's [safer travel guidance](#) for passengers for further information.
14. Participants should be discouraged from socialising after practice or games and reminded that they must adhere to current government guidance on social mixing.

## **FACILITY GUIDANCE**

15. We know that our member clubs are reliant on third party owned or managed facilities. Adherence to the following guidelines should worked out collaboratively between club and facility. Clubs should request information from their facility provider on venue operations plans, risk assessments and any special requirements relating to Covid-19 to help inform their planning and understand requirements around the following:
  - Entry exit and parking arrangements in place at venues to ensure social distancing can be maintained.
  - Traffic flow systems and signage at entry and exit points, to ensure that people maintain social distancing rules.
  - Socially distanced areas for teams, officials, and spectators.
  - Hygiene provisions in place.

More information of the key principles of facility usage can be found [here](#).

If not already in place, clubs are also encouraged to request their facility provider create and display a [QR code for their venue](#). This will enable visitors to scan the QR code when they arrive, using the NHS Covid-19 app, and help trace and stop the spread of the virus.

## **CLUB COVID-19 OFFICER / COVID-19 TEAM LEADS**

16. Each club should appoint a Club Covid-19 Officer to help assist in ensuring that the club has taken the appropriate measures to resume activity. The club ultimately has the responsibility to ensure that there are risk assessments in place for the club and the activity that is taking place, however, to assist in the implementation of these a Covid-19 Officer should be introduced to ease the burden and be a lead in this area.

17. As we appreciate many of our clubs comprise multiple teams operating across different third party provided facilities, and running to different timings, we know that having a single club Covid-19 Officer may be impractical. In these instances, we request that each team within the club has a designated Covid-19 Team Lead, reporting to an overall Club Covid-19 Officer.
18. Club management shall ensure that the appointed persons will receive all necessary support to undertake their roles.
19. The Club Covid-19 Officer and any Covid-19 Team Leads should not put themselves at risk whilst carrying out the role. Duties of these role should include:
  - Completing documented risk assessments and ensuring all appropriate mitigations are put in place by the club before any outdoor activity is undertaken.
  - Being aware of and understanding government and BAFA guidelines, communicating these with relevant club volunteers and monitoring that these are strictly adhered to especially in terms of the 2m social distancing rules and the practice activity undertaken by the club. (This is subject to change)
  - Ensuring that players have completed a Return to Play health questionnaires for each practice session and game or tournament and ensure the club keeps records of these as they may be requested by BAFA. (Covid-19 Team Leads should share these with the Club Covid-19 Officer on a weekly basis for their team).
  - Keeping a record of attendees practicing or attending games or tournaments within the club. (Covid-19 Team Leads should share this with the Club Covid-19 Officer on a weekly basis for their team).
  - Ensure all records must be kept for 21 days and used in accordance with GDPR legislation. More information is available from the NHS on [‘how test and trace works’](#) and [‘maintaining records’](#). Clubs should decide how these records will be kept and stored, for example paper or using online format e.g. Google Docs.
  - Providing safety information and protocols to all players, coaching personnel and parent/guardians prior to the resumption of club activities.
  - Ensuring relevant club volunteers are aware of the need to regularly clean and sanitise all equipment after each session (e.g. balls, flags).
  - Making necessary representations to club management about any COVID-19 concerns. (Covid-19 Team Leads should raise any issues with the Covid-19 Officer to share first).
  - Reporting any areas of non-compliance immediately to club management and ensuring that these are addressed. (Covid-19 Team Leads should raise any issues with the Covid-19 Officer to report first).
  - In the case of players or coaching personnel experiencing or displaying COVID-

19 symptoms the Club Covid-19 Officer should Inform club management if there is a confirmed case or if they have been made aware of an individual with COVID-19 symptoms. (Covid-19 team leads should advise the Covid-19 Officer first)

- If there is a confirmed case ensuring that track and trace protocols are followed
- In the event that a club is alerted to a confirmed positive case of Covid-19, either by the individual or by Test and Trace, informing BAFA by emailing [Covid-19@britishamericanfootball.org](mailto:Covid-19@britishamericanfootball.org)

## TEST AND TRACE

20. [Test and Trace](#) is England's way to ensure that anyone who develops symptoms of Covid-19 can quickly be tested to find out if they have the virus, and also includes targeted asymptomatic testing of NHS and social care staff and care home residents. It helps trace close recent contacts of anyone who tests positive for coronavirus and, if necessary, notifies them that they must self-isolate at home to help stop the spread of the virus

- The gathering of contact information from anyone attending American football activity in a secure and safe manner, will assist the Test and Trace service to identify any clusters of cases, contact those who may have been exposed to the virus, and request them to take appropriate steps to prevent potential onward spread.
- In order to support Test and Trace, Club Covid-19 officers for BAFA affiliated clubs are required to keep a record of the name, contact number, date of activity session and timings for all those attending organised American football activities within the club. (Covid-19 Team Leads should share this with the Club Covid-19 Officer on a weekly basis for their team).
- Ensure all records must be kept for 21 days and used in accordance with GDPR legislation. More information is available from the NHS on '[how test and trace works](#)' and '[maintaining records](#)'. Clubs should decide how these records will be kept and stored, for example paper or using online format e.g. Google Docs.
- More information on Test and Trace is available [here](#).

21. GoMembership! Is BAFA's member registration system. Accurate player, coach and support staff data including full name, email address and phone number is collected upon registration and is available to designated club administrators to help enable detailed Test and Trace record keeping. The only exception to this is new club members – who may undertake three trial sessions as long as their details are captured as per BAFA's existing three-trial session process. New members MUST be registered after their third trial session.

22. Clubs will be regularly spot-checked by BAFA to make sure this information is accurately captured and will have strict sanctions failing to produce records or ensure

members are registered.

23. Through these measures, an accurate and effective database will be available if required for Test and Trace purposes.

## **PRE-SCREENING**

24. Prior to attending practice or games, all participants in community American football should complete a pre-practice health questionnaire. As part of this, participants will be asked to confirm that they have read and understood the risks associated with playing American football and the transmission of Covid-19. This should be completed by a parent or guardian for members under 18. A template form is available [here](#).
25. Clubs may create and use an equivalent electronic form – ie Google forms - to capture this information instead if appropriate but must have access to view and validate the information ahead of activity taking place.

## **PHYSICAL DISTANCING**

26. Normal physical distancing and household number guidelines apply before (including warm ups), after any activity takes place or when taking breaks.
27. Non-contact practice activities should in the main follow social distancing rules of 2m wherever possible. However, larger groups of up to 30 participants may breach social distancing guidelines for non-contact only activity if following the appropriate mitigation measures detailed within our guidance - for example when playing a game of flag football at the end of a practice session where any instances of face-to-face contact would be fleeting in nature.
28. No formal presentation ceremonies should take place during or after an activity and the focus should be on reducing numbers in attendance at any one time.
29. Coaches and others supporting organised activity should attempt to keep physically distant where possible, but it is recognised that this will not always be possible. In such circumstances the responsible Club Covid-19 Office should consider appropriate mitigating actions as part of their risk assessment.

## **FIRST AID, HEALTH AND HYGIENE**

30. Injuries during practice and play should still be treated as participant wellbeing is utmost. The best way to protect yourself and others is through rigorous cleaning, personal hygiene and regular hand hygiene. An increased frequency of cleaning and disinfection of all surfaces and equipment, using standard household cleaning and disinfection products, is recommended. Face coverings are also advisable when undertaking treatment.

31. After contact with an injured participant, clean your hands thoroughly with soap and water or alcohol hand sanitiser at the earliest opportunity. This advice is applicable to all situations, regardless of whether there was close contact or the minimum social distancing was maintained. Avoid touching your mouth, eyes and nose.
32. Physios or their equivalent, should keep a record of each participant they have come into contact with for test and trace purposes.
33. See [further information](#) for those who may need to act as a 'first responder' role in a sports setting.
34. If you are not wearing face coverings and need to sneeze or cough, do so into a tissue or upper sleeve. Dispose of your tissue into an appropriate bin supplied at the venue or place in a plastic bag and take home. Wash your hands afterwards for 20 seconds.
35. Avoid touching your face and ensure to clean your hands with at least 60% alcohol gel when you finish participating.

## **SAFEGUARDING**

36. The lockdown period will have affected children in many ways. While most will have had a positive time with family, others may have had negative experiences and could be at increased risk. Please continue to follow the process outlined in your club Safeguarding Policy and report any concerns to BAFA by contacting our safeguarding team at [safeguarding@britishamericanfootball.org](mailto:safeguarding@britishamericanfootball.org)
37. There will be no alteration to the standards we had in place pre-Covid 19, therefore DBS checks will still need to be in place for designated roles, including coaches, and for any new recruits to roles, prior to any activity resuming with children and youth teams.
38. Coaches and those working with children should familiarise themselves with the Covid- 19 resources for supporting young people developed by the [NSPCC](#).

## **EQUIPMENT**

39. Clubs should carry out the following to make sure all equipment is regularly sanitised:
  - Balls should be sanitised at the start of activity, during natural stoppages and at the conclusion activity as a minimum. If there is no natural stoppage this should be done after every 15 minutes.

- Each player should have their own set of flags which they will keep for the duration of the practice or game. Flags and belts should be sanitised at regular intervals during activity, and at the conclusion of practices or games by either the individual, coach, team manager or Club Covid-19 Officer or Covid-19 Team Lead. During games, players should sub-out if equipment sanitisation is required.
  - Each pitch area should have antibacterial wet wipes or spray available to enable this. At the end of each practice or game, the Covid-19 Officer or Covid-19 Team Lead should ensure any other equipment which has been handled (such as cones) is sanitised.
33. Cones should be put out and collected by the same person on each pitch - preferably by a coach.
34. Participants should be encouraged to bring their own hand sanitiser to practices and games and use it at regular intervals in activity.
38. Participants should bring their own clearly labelled water bottles to practice and not share it under any circumstances. No communal water buckets or bottles are to be used.
39. Participants must not share towels, toiletry products, clothing such as practice jerseys or bibs, water bottles, boots, gloves, mouth guards, or disposables such as tape or ice packs.
40. As the virus is transmitted from respiratory secretions, mouthguard etiquette is very important. Players should refrain from touching or removing their mouthguard, and if they do so must sanitise their hands. Mouthguards must not be left on shared surfaces or public places but be placed in a personal container and stored with personal possessions.

## **AMERICAN FOOTBALL ACTIVITY GUIDANCE**

41. Participants are permitted to undertake non-contact American Football activity in line with BAFA rules and regulations.
42. No traditional American Football contact activities (e.g. tackle or blocking practices, including the use of tackle bags or blocking shields that have to be held) are permitted at this time. The only exception to this is drills which use free-standing training aids – such as free-standing tackle dummies – which may be used in conjunction with strict equipment sanitising protocols.
43. Inter-club locally organised non-contact friendly games are now permitted, as long as the following guidance is strictly adhered to:
- Teams and individual players must not travel to or from tier 3 areas to take part in American Football games

- Teams and individuals must not travel to Wales or Scotland to take part in American football games
- A separate risk assessment must be completed for each planned game.
- Games should only be organised between teams in the same or in a neighbouring local authority area.
- When planning games, clubs must take particular notice of any travel restrictions in place for tier 3 and what this may mean for members who live outside of the local authority region in which the club operates or the game may take place and who may be in a higher or lower tier. Clubs should also be aware that the guidance in place may change, and restrictions may be reintroduced at short notice.
- Participant numbers for friendly games should be kept to a minimum at all times. The total number of participants from across both teams taking part in a game and present on the playing and side-line areas should not exceed 30 – this includes coaches and those acting as game officials.
- No spectators are allowed – other than where a parent / guardian is supervising a child or vulnerable adult. In all cases physical distancing guidelines should always be followed and those individuals should spectate from outside the designated playing and side-line areas.
- When not in active game play, participants must socially distance along the side-line area. Side-line areas may extend the full length of the pitch to enable this.
- The host club should clearly communicate any Covid-19 related venue requirements – for example, one-way systems, designated entry points, availability of toilet facilities onsite – to the visiting team ahead of the game taking place.
- Staggered arrival and departure times and designated pitch entry points for each team are highly recommended to minimise any risks.
- Before the start of any game, the Club Covid-19 officer should hold a short, socially distanced, briefing with the head coaches for each team, and any individuals acting as game officials, reminding them of their responsibilities aligned to BAFA's return to play guidance.
- Individuals acting as game officials should observe BAFA's return to play guidance in the same way as participants are required to. Game officials must remain socially distanced from players wherever possible.
- Inter-club locally organised non-contact friendly game activity between two teams does not require BAFA sanction – however any plans for game activity involving multiple teams and games on the same day, such as a tournament, must be sanctioned by BAFA before taking place. To request sanction, please contact [covid-19@britishamericanfootball.org](mailto:covid-19@britishamericanfootball.org) detailing your plans, venue, the teams involved and attaching a copy of your risk assessment for the event. Please give at least 14 days' notice for approval.

We appreciate organising friendly games may not always be straight forward, and there are some BAFA teams who are geographically isolated and their nearest opponents may be some distance. Although frustrating, we would advise teams in these circumstances to exercise extreme caution in planning friendly games and if in doubt, to contact [covid-19@britishamericanfootball.org](mailto:covid-19@britishamericanfootball.org) for guidance.

44. Maximum non-contact practice or play groups of 15 individuals can take place per

1/4 pitch or 30 individuals per 1/2 pitch – this is based on either a full-sized rugby pitch or 11s soccer pitch. The maximum number includes coaches and any individuals acting in the capacity of game officials.

- Two groups of maximum 30 participants may practice or play on one full sized pitch. However, they must remain wholly separate throughout the activity and must be separated by a 2m 'safe zone'. Staggered start and finish times and designated pitch entry points for each group are highly recommended to minimise any risks.
- Should other spaces be used for practice – for example – a 7-side soccer pitch or other area that is a third of a larger pitch or similar, coaches and the Club Covid-19 Officer should use the above numbers as a guide and exercise their judgement while being very careful to not exceed the maximum numbers detailed. This should also be recorded and detailed in the club risk assessment by the Club Covid-19 Officer.

45. In addition to non-contact flag football activity, players are also permitted to undertake non-contact skill development (ie, ball handling, route running) or fitness activities.
46. Non-contact practice activities should in the main follow social distancing rules of 2m wherever possible. However, larger groups of up to 30 participants may breach social distancing guidelines for non-contact only activity if following the appropriate mitigation measures detailed within our guidance - for example when playing a game of flag football at the end of a practice session where any instances of face-to-face contact would be fleeting in nature.
47. Coaches should risk assess and plan appropriately for each session in advance, be aware of responsibilities and be clear on expectations with participants. Practice planning should reflect the requirement for regular scheduled breaks for hand and equipment hygiene – before, during and at least every 15 minutes during sessions.
40. Only individuals registered in the BAFA GoMembership! System are eligible to participate in sanctioned National Leagues American football activity. The only exception to this is new club members – who may undertake three trial sessions as long as their details are captured as per BAFA's existing three-trial session process. New members MUST be registered after their third trial session. University football participants should be registered with their institution and follow their guidance.
48. To support maintaining records for Test and Trace, participants should only take part in activity sessions with their registered BAFA club team and age group.
49. Players, coaches and support staff registered for any BAFA football format may participate in non-contact flag American football activities with their registered BAFA club team and age group.

50. As per [BAFA Competition rules and regulations](#) item 3.8, mixed age ranges may practice alongside each other in the same facility or field but must operate distinctly from each other. No game like scenarios should take place across (or mixing) any age ranges.
51. Huddles – it is recommended that where possible team huddles do not take place before, after and during practice or non-contact game activities. If these are essential, it is recommended that teams all face in the same direction to receive instructions.
52. Team scoring celebrations involving person-to-person contact are not permitted.
53. Shouting - There is an additional risk of infection in close proximity situations where people are shouting or conversing loudly. This particularly applies when face to face. If possible, players should therefore avoid shouting or raising their voices when facing each other during, before and after games.
54. No pre or post-game handshakes, or alternatives of any sort e.g. elbowbump or foot taps are permitted.
55. No spitting or mouth rinsing is permitted during practice or play