**BAFA Covid-19 return to play - frequently asked questions**

Monday, September 21, 2020

**We've compiled answers to some of the most commonly asked questions about BAFA’s return to play guidance**

**Following this morning’s UK Government press conference, we urge all those undertaking American football activity to closely adhere to our guidance to help ensure the welfare of their teammates, family, friends and local communities.**

 **What happens if there are local lockdowns?**
To find out where local restrictions are in place, and what these restrictions are, [refer to the local restrictions page on the government's website](https://web.archive.org/web/20201104021916/https%3A/www.gov.uk/government/collections/local-restrictions-areas-with-an-outbreak-of-coronavirus-covid-19) which is being kept constantly updated. This details local lockdowns in England, but also links to local lockdown information for Scotland and Wales.

You should consult the local guidance for further clarification on the number of people allowed to gather, and types of activities that can and can’t take place. If specific restrictions are introduced, for example on the playing of team sports, [they will be noted on the local restrictions page](https://web.archive.org/web/20201104021916/https%3A/www.gov.uk/government/collections/local-restrictions-areas-with-an-outbreak-of-coronavirus-covid-19) of the government's website. **Will BAFA automatically move to stage 4 as of 1 October?**
BAFA’s return to play roadmap states the indicative earliest date to progress from stage 3 to stage 4 is during October. A review of current progress against stage 3 will take place over the coming week and a decision will be made as to whether progression to the next stage is safe and appropriate at this time. If a move to stage 4 is agreed, an indicative date during October will be set and communicated to give clubs time to plan and prepare.
 **What about teams holding practices or organising events and tournaments who are not registered with BAFA?**BAFA is recognised as the sole governing body for the sport of American football by our home nation sports councils and the UK Government’s Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the sports councils of England, Scotland and Wales.

Following approved return to play guidance for each recognised sport is what provides the exemption to breach social distancing and gathering regulations during the narrow circumstances agreed for that sport.

We have double checked with the DCMS and the home nation sports councils and can confirm that teams or organisations who are not registered with BAFA and are undertaking American football activity that does not comply with our guidelines are breaking their home nation guidelines on gatherings and social distancing. Therefore they are at the same risk of fines or other penalties as anyone else breaking these rules.

The only sports that do not need government approval are those returning to activity that reflects current social distancing guidelines of 2m.

You can read more about requirements for team sports and government approval in Sport England’s [frequently answered questions](https://web.archive.org/web/20201104021916/https%3A/www.sportengland.org/how-we-can-help/coronavirus/return-play/frequently-asked-questions-return-sport-and-activity).

**How do you plan to enforce these guidelines?**
Any activity undertaken by BAFA affiliated clubs or currently registered BAFA members that does not strictly follow our guidance will be uninsured. We will also consider appropriate disciplinary action against teams and individuals proven to be involved in non-compliant activity on a case-by-case basis. **What about the BUCS? Your guidance doesn’t mention university football?**
Student football competition is no longer directly managed by BAFA, but by BUCS – although they refer to our playing rules and will look to take a steer from our guidance.  Our return to play guidance has been shared with BUCS, and BAFA are currently in discussion with them to agree details for the playing structure for 20/21.

We anticipate more information on what this means for university football teams from BUCS in the coming weeks. In the meantime, any university football team wanting to restart activity should make sure that they only do so with explicit agreement from their institution’s AU/SU. BAFA’s guidance around what is allowable at each stage and any additional guidance from your institution should be followed, and risk assessments and record keeping protocols to support track and trace should be in place.  **Will the guidance change in stage 4 to allow tackle bags and blocking shields?**
The planned review of current progress against stage 3 will also inform plans for any additional changes to guidance for stage 4 over and above what has been indicated in our road map. Updated guidance will then be produced and shared. We do not foresee any major change to the guidance prohibiting tackle bags and blocking shields. However, we anticipate this will be amended to make an exception for free standing tackle dummies and other free-standing training aids – which will be permitted in stage 4 if strict accompanying equipment hygiene protocols are put in place.

**How will friendly competition work across different nations in stage 4? For example, a team travelling across the border from England to Scotland or Wales or vice versa**All three nations with clubs under BAFA’s auspices have slightly different versions of our return to play guidance. However, the core principles of our approach are mirrored across each version. The differences largely relate to specific guidance on track and trace protocols - which have different requirements and terminologies across each home nation - and also reflect the different restrictions or requirements currently in place. When we move to stage 4 and inter-club locally organised friendly games are permitted, the guidance that should be followed during these games is that of the home nation where the game is taking place.

**What do you mean by ‘locally organised’ games?**
More detailed guidance on this will be shared for stage 4 – however we are prevailing on the common sense of our clubs to risk assess what is appropriate and prioritise the safety and wellbeing of their members at all times.

For planning purposes, we advise clubs to stay within their own or their neighbouring local authority regions, and do not travel outside of their home nations. The exception to this would be where clubs are located on neighbouring border areas between home nations.

We appreciate this may not always be straight forward, and there are some BAFA clubs who are geographically isolated and their nearest teams – particularly for some formats of our sport such as women’s and junior football - may be some distance. Although frustrating, we would advise teams in these circumstances to exercise extreme caution in planning friendly games.

Any travel restrictions put in place by your home nation, for example, as part of local lockdown measures, must also be stringently followed.

**Why aren’t we returning to contact straight away? My home nation guidance said contact sports could return**
What the DCMS and home nation sports councils define as contact and non-contact sport for the purposes of their return to sport and activity frameworks are slightly different to what we think of as contact (tackle football) and non-contact (flag football).

Any sport or activity where the participants necessarily come into bodily contact / close proximity with one another is deemed a contact sport. A non-contact sport or activity is defined as a sport where the participants are already physically separated by the playing rules, making it difficult for them to make physical contact during the course of an activity. Examples include tennis, cricket, bowls and curling.

At this stage we don't feel it is appropriate to move to full contact yet. However, should it be safe to do so it is possible different stages may be accelerated.

**If someone tests positive for Covid-19 and has attended a practice / game with our club, does everyone need to self-isolate or seek a test?**
All activity taking place during practice and play should in the main follow social distancing rules of 2m / avoid face-to-face contact wherever possible or should be fleeting in nature when proximity within 2m or face-to-face contact is unavoidable. This minimises the risk of all individuals who took part in a session requiring to self-isolate or being advised to seek a test.

Clubs aren’t required to do anything unless until the NHS Test and Trace team for your home nation contacts you for further details. Should this be the case, then BAFA should also be notified at [covid-19@britishamericanfootball.org](https://web.archive.org/web/20201104021916/mailto%3Acovid-19%40britishamericanfootball.org)

Following our guidance on pre-screening and maintaining an attendance register will allow you to assist trace and trace efforts should they be required.

**What about team social events?**
We know that socialising is an important element of our sport, and that many clubs have sponsorship agreements with hospitality venues in their area that they want to maintain and grow. However, we currently discourage face-to-face team social events and recommend teams focus on virtual social events using online meeting tools such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams instead.

Where clubs decide to go ahead with social events, they must be risk assessed and recorded by the Club Covid-19 Officer as part of the organisation’s Covid-19 risk assessment documentation. They must also strictly comply with existing home nation social distancing requirements and the guidance on gatherings and hospitality in place at that time as well as any additional local lockdown restrictions. Any additional requirements imposed by the venue to support track and track must also be stringently followed.

**Can we have team meetings – ie film sessions / AGM?**Face-to-face club meetings and film sessions are discouraged at this time and we recommend online alternatives using virtual meeting tools such as Zoom or MS Teams. Where clubs decide to go ahead with face-to-face meetings, they must be risk assessed and recorded by the Club Covid-19 Officer as part of the organisation’s Covid-19 risk assessment documentation. Any meetings must also strictly comply with existing home nation social distancing requirements, guidance on gatherings and hospitality in place at that time, any additional local lockdown restrictions and stringently follow any additional requirements imposed by the venue to support track and track.

**Can we hold team gym sessions?**
Team gym sessions may take place as long as they comply with existing home nation social distancing requirements and any additional local lockdown restrictions.Hygiene guidelines and any additional requirements imposed by the venue to support track and trace must also be stringently followed.

**Can we recruit new players? It says only registered members can participate.**Yes – you can recruit new players. Their details should be captured as per BAFA’s existing three session trial process, and you must make sure they are registered following their third trial session. The BAFA membership system will be reopening shortly to enable new member registrations.

**Can we car share to practice?**
BAFA does not advocate car sharing for recreational activity at this time. Where there may be no available alternative, or in the event of an emergency where it becomes required, appropriate home nation travel guidance should be followed at all times.

**Can we do x, y, z at practice?**BAFA has provided return to play guidance as a framework for clubs and coaches to use as a basis to plan and risk assess activities against. At this time no traditional contact American football activities such as tackling or blocking are permitted.  At all times during their practice planning, clubs and coaches should consider the wellbeing of their members, ensure that all the mitigations outlined in our guidance are put in place and make sure that any instances of face-to-face contact or proximity of closer than 2m during practice and play activities are fleeting in nature.

**Can we undertake non-contact activities while kitted? For example, hold a helmets only session.**
Although at this stage all practice and play activities should remain fully non-contact and traditional contact activities such as blocking and tackling drills may not take place, contact teams may elect to do these in kit should they choose. Teams who decide to do this should not allow equipment, especially helmets, to be shared between players during sessions and strong hygiene measures should be followed for any team equipment before and after practice.

**Does BAFA insurance cover Covid-19 related claims?**
The personal accident coverage included with BAFA membership is designed to cover unforeseen injuries. Covid-19 is classed as ‘sickness’, therefore this would not be covered as sickness is a standard exclusion under personal accident insurance.

**Can I still use a mouth-operated whistle?**
Yes, traditional mouth-operated whistles are still permitted. These should not be shared under any circumstances and should never be blown directly in proximity to someone’s face. Coaches, especially those who opt for additional mitigations when coaching such as face masks may prefer to opt for other alternatives, such as electronic or hand operated whistles.

**Why are we not distancing 2m still at all times during practice?**
All activity should in the main follow social distancing rules of 2m / avoid face-to-face contact wherever possible. However, the return to play guidance that we have put in place has been approved by the UK government’s Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and home nation sports councils and reflects and complies with the overarching team sport frameworks in place for England, Scotland and Wales.

Approval of these guidelines and strict adherence to the rules and mitigations detailed within is what allows participants in our sport to be able to breach social distancing rules and get closer than 2m under the narrow circumstances detailed. These circumstances include, for example, playing a game of flag football at the end of a practice session or undertaking practice drills where any instances of face-to-face contact would be fleeting in nature.

**What’s the best way of cleaning leather footballs?**You can follow this [guidance from football manufacturer Wilson](https://web.archive.org/web/20201104021916/https%3A/www.britishamericanfootball.org/downloads/Wilson%20Ball%20Cleaning%20Recommendations.pdf) – please note it refers to products that are available in the US, but the general guidance on use of soap and water stands, and it may be a useful resource to determine similar UK based products.

If you have further questions or need additional clarity on any of the points within our return to play guidance, please contact [covid-19@britishamericanfootball.org](https://web.archive.org/web/20201104021916/mailto%3Acovid-19%40britishamericanfootball.org)