



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

**STAGE 4 - NON-CONTACT FOOTBALL  
COMMUNITY CLUB GUIDANCE FOR ENGLAND**

# STAGE 4 - NON-CONTACT FOOTBALL COMMUNITY CLUB GUIDANCE FOR ENGLAND

***Updated: 29 March 2021***

BAFA Stage 4 Return to Play allows for the return of non-contact American football activity, including locally organised friendly non-contact games.

These guidelines have been produced in line with the most recent version of the UK Government's [return to recreational team sport framework](#) and the [COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021](#) document which details the roadmap out of the current lockdown for England and explains how restrictions will be eased over time. Our guidance takes account of changes in the law that take effect on 29 March and will be updated to take into account any relevant changes.

The wellbeing of participants is vital, so we must continue to be cautious in our approach to ensure the safety of our members. **Make sure you read this guidance carefully and fully understand the requirements before undertaking any activity.** Please also be aware that guidance can change, and restrictions may be reintroduced at short notice. Please take particular notice of the following key points:

- Only organised American football activity following BAFA Return to Play guidance is permitted at this time. Informal sport and physical activity (for example, a gathering of friends for a throw-about in the park or an unsanctioned game or tournament) is not covered by any exemption and will have to follow the legal gathering limits for outdoors: the 'rule of six' or two households.
- Spectators are not currently allowed at any American football activity sessions or games. Only those people actively participating in a practice session should attend. This does not include injured players intending to observe only or parents / guardians who may normally observe their children practicing or playing. This does not apply to carers for disabled people or adults needed to supervise under-18s in a safeguarding role. Where it is necessary for them to be present, supervising adults must adhere to the legal gathering limits.
- Travel is allowed in order to participate in organised sporting activity and exercise but should still be minimised wherever possible. Cross-border travel into or out of Scotland and Wales to participate in American football activity is not currently permitted.

Please also view our [Return to Play Roadmap](#).

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# OFF-FIELD ACTIVITY

## CLUB PREPARATION

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. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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](#).
5. Clubs should upload a copy of their club's Return to Play Risk Assessment in BAFA's GoMembership! system, where it will be reviewed. Where clubs have multiple teams returning to play in different facilities, a separate Return to Play Risk Assessment should be uploaded for each team.
6. Clubs must also make sure they have an Emergency Action Plan for reacting to incidents. An example template is available [here](#).
7. Participants must be made aware that relevant COVID-19 mitigations are in place and complying with these measures as a condition of participation.

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

8. Each club should appoint a Club Covid-19 Officer to help assist in ensuring that the club has taken and maintains the appropriate measures to resume activity safely.
9. The name of your Club COVID-19 officer must also be entered in the club details section of the GoMembership! system.

10. All Club Covid-19 Officers should complete BAFA's [ReActivate Covid-19 Awareness Award](#). This training is mandatory for all designated BAFA Club Covid-19 Officers and recommended for all Covid-19 Team Leads and any coaches leading activity, and supersedes any other equivalent training completed. Completion of this training will be tracked by BAFA and certificates should be loaded up within the GoMembership! system as an individual qualification for approval.
11. 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 volunteer 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.
12. Club management must make sure that the appointed persons will receive all necessary support to undertake their roles.
13. The club must ensure that all members are notified of who their Club Covid-19 Officer is, should they have to pass on their details to a member of the NHS Test and Trace team
14. 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 roles include but are not limited to:
  - Completing documented risk assessments and ensuring all appropriate mitigations are put in place by the club before any 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 social distancing rules and the practice activity undertaken by the club.
  - Ensuring there is awareness of your club's Covid-19 protocols across club volunteers and participants, and that processes are in place to ensure participants and parents / guardians for those under 18 take individual responsibility to self-assess for symptoms of Covid-19 prior to attending sessions.
  - Making sure a record of attendees practicing or attending games or tournaments is kept within the club. This may be delegated across the club, for example to Covid-19 Team Leads or coaching staff, but must be accessible by the Club Covid-19 Officer at all times.
  - Ensuring 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 on paper or using an online format e.g. Google Docs or a shared drive.
  - 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).
- The Club Covid-19 Officer should Inform club management if they become aware of a confirmed case of Covid-19 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)
- Ensuring track and trace protocols are followed should the club be contacted

## DEALING WITH A POSTIVE CASE OF COVID-19

15. If an individual receives a positive test result following testing for Covid-19, they will be contacted by NHS Test and Trace and asked to share information about their activities and close contacts just before and/or after developing symptoms or testing positive. Participants who have taken part in club activities during this period should be encouraged to identify this activity on their Test and Trace record to support the contact tracing process. Further information is available on the [NHS Test and Trace webpage](#).
16. Should the confirmed case be unable to identify all those they may have had contact with during practice or play at the club, they should advise NHS Test and Trace during their interview and this will be escalated through the NHS Test and Trace system who may make contact with the club directly to see if contacts may be identified. Evidence of risk assessments, practice plans, record keeping, and other relevant documentation may be requested as part of this review and should be readily available to share if requested.
17. Please note, it is not the responsibility of the club to inform members if someone at the club has tested positive for Covid-19. This will be done by the NHS Test and Trace team if deemed appropriate, who will advise anyone identified as a close contact to self-isolate or seek testing if required. An individual's right to privacy must be observed.
18. Should the club have any concerns following a confirmed case that they become aware of, they should contact their local [PHE Health Protection Team](#) for advice and support.
19. In the event that a club becomes aware of a confirmed positive case of Covid-19, either by being notified by the individual or by Test and Trace, BAFA should be notified by emailing [Covid- 19@britishamericanfootball.org](mailto:Covid-19@britishamericanfootball.org) This information is requested to allow BAFA to monitor the number of confirmed positive Covid-19 cases occurring in clubs, and to make sure clubs have the appropriate support.

## VENUE AND FACILITIES

20. All activities must take place outdoors.

21. Indoor facilities including changing rooms should not be used except by people with disabilities or in emergency situations, although toilet facilities can be accessed. Players should arrive changed and shower at home afterwards.
22. We know that our member clubs are reliant on third party owned or managed facilities. Adherence to the following guidelines should be 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](#).

23. 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.

## **REGISTERING WITH THE INFORMATION COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE**

24. BAFA clubs in England who have created their own coronavirus QR code for their venue for people to scan and check-in on arrival with the NHS Covid-19 app should be aware that this may mean they have to register with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and pay a data protection fee. This may also apply to any other form of QR code or online check-in used to capture information for a venue by a BAFA club.
25. You may need register because you are using an electronic system to gather and store data and most organisations that process personal information are required by law to do so and pay the fee which for small organisations, is between £40-60 per year. If you're subject to the requirement, it's important that you register and pay the fee as otherwise the ICO can impose financial penalties.
26. You do not need to register if you are only using the QR code to capture information to keep an attendance record for your own members. This is because data processing which is only for the purposes of establishing or maintaining membership is exempt. Your organisation must also have already been exempt from the requirement to register with the ICO.
27. You also don't need to do this if your venue has a QR code members scan on arrival, but this was not created and is not administered by your club. For

example, the people who hire your pitch from require all your members to do this as a condition of use. You also do not need to do this if you are simply recording attendance using pen and paper. Records should be kept no longer than 21 days, in line with data protection regulations.

28. If you are unsure whether or not you need to register, please contact the ICO via their helpline on 0303 123 1113, or visit [www.ico.org.uk](http://www.ico.org.uk).

## SPECTATORS

29. Spectators are not currently allowed at any American football activity sessions or games. Only those people actively participating in a practice session should attend. This does not include injured players who intend to observe only or parents / guardians who may normally observe their children practicing or playing. This does not apply to carers for disabled people or adults needed to supervise under-18s in a safeguarding role. Where it is necessary for them to be present, supervising adults must adhere to the legal gathering limits.

## TRAVEL

30. Participants are encouraged to follow best practice for travel including minimising use of public transport. Car sharing is not permitted with someone from outside your household or your support bubble unless your journey is undertaken for an [exempt reason](#). Walk or cycle if you can. See the government's [safer travel guidance](#) for passengers for further information.

## BAFA MEMBERSHIP

31. 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.
32. 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.
33. 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.
34. 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.



## TEST AND TRACE

35. [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.
36. 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.
37. 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. This may be delegated across the club, for example to Covid-19 Team Leads or coaching staff, but must be accessible by the Club Covid-19 officer at all times.
38. 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.
39. Clubs may be spot-checked by BAFA to make sure this information is accurately captured and there may be sanctions failing to produce records or ensure members are registered.

## PARTICIPANT SELF-ASSESSMENT

40. Prior to attending practice or games, all participants in American football activity must self-assess themselves for symptoms of Covid-19. No one should leave home to participate in activity if they, or someone they live with, have symptoms of Covid-19 currently recognised as any of the following:
  - A high temperature
  - A new, continuous cough
  - A loss, or change, to their sense of smell or taste.

Any individual who displays such symptoms must follow NHS and PHE guidance on self-isolation.

41. In addition, any participants who have been asked to isolate by NHS Test and Trace because they are a contact of a known Covid-19 case, must not participate in activity.
42. Clubs should ensure that as a minimum a regular reminder process is in place to make sure participants take individual responsibility to complete a symptom self-assessment before attending practice or games. Other assessment processes including paper or online forms or apps may be used by clubs to manage self-assessment.
43. Participants resuming activity should be asked to confirm that they have read and understood the risks associated with playing American football and the transmission of Covid-19 and are happy to comply with the safety measures in place. This should be completed by a parent or guardian for members under 18. A template form is available here.

## **PHYSICAL DISTANCING – BEFORE AND AFTER PRACTICE OR GAMES**

44. BAFA clubs should adhere to the government managed social distancing guidelines in force at the time, before and after any activity, and during breaks.
45. 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.
46. No formal presentation ceremonies or other activities that encourage gathering such as group photographs should take place during or after an activity and the focus should be on reducing numbers in attendance at any one time.
47. Participants should be discouraged from socialising after practice or games and reminded that they must adhere to current government guidance on legal gathering limits.
48. Participants should be strongly advised to comply with public health restrictions and avoid high risk behaviour outside of your club setting to reduce the risk to their fellow club members when they do attend.

## **SAFEGUARDING**

49. 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)

50. 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.
51. Coaches and those working with children should familiarise themselves with the Covid- 19 resources for supporting young people developed by the [NSPCC](#).

## ON-FIELD ACTIVITY

### PERMITTED AMERICAN FOOTBALL ACTIVITY AND PRACTICE PLANNING

52. Participants are permitted to undertake non-contact flag and touch American Football activity in line with BAFA rules and regulations. This includes intra-club and inter-club non-contact friendly games, non-contact skill development (ie, ball handling, route running) or fitness activities.
53. Coaches should risk assess and plan appropriately for each session in advance, be aware of their 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 after sessions.
54. Head coaches and team management should ensure all session activities are clearly communicated in advance to coaching staff and players to set expectations. Holding coach and team meetings using virtual conferencing tools such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams prior to your first session is highly recommended where possible in order to brief participants and answer any questions.
55. 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.
56. Coaches must work to BAFA recommended coach to player ratios, which are:
  - For 4 to 8 years – one adult to every 6 children (1:6)
  - For 9 to 12 years - one adult to every 8 children (1:8)
  - For 13 to 18 years – one adult to every 10 children (1:10)
  - For 18+ years – one supervising adult to every 10 participants (1:10)

## PERMITTED NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS AND PITCH

57. Maximum non-contact practice or play groups of 15 individuals overall are permitted per 1/4 pitch or 30 individuals overall 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 minimum 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-a-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.

## TEAM EQUIPMENT

58. Clubs should carry out the following to make sure all equipment is regularly sanitised:

- Balls should be regularly sanitised throughout, including at the start and at the conclusion of activity.
- 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 cones) is sanitised.

59. Cones should be put out and collected by the same person on each pitch - preferably by a coach.

## PHYSICAL DISTANCING – DURING PRACTICE OR GAMES

60. Close contact face-to-face exposure between participants must be limited to fleeting duration only throughout activities – a max of no more than 3 seconds during drills is recommended.

61. Normal physical distancing and legal gathering limits apply before (including warm ups) and after any activity takes place or when taking breaks.

62. Particular attention must be paid to ensure participants who are not currently active don't congregate in groups and breach social distancing rules – avoid queues to participate in drills, ensure practice plans are designed to avoid this and keep people moving, set clear expectations before practice and consider additional mitigations such as encouraging participants to wearing a face covering when not active.
63. Coaches and others supporting organised activity should attempt to keep physically distant at all times when giving players instruction, observing and giving feedback, but it is recognised that this will not always be possible. In such circumstances the responsible Club Covid-19 Officer should consider appropriate mitigating actions as part of their risk assessment, for example, recommending the wearing of a face covering.
64. 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.
65. Team scoring celebrations involving person-to-person contact are not permitted.
66. No pre or post-game handshakes, or alternatives of any sort e.g. elbow bump or foot taps are permitted.

## **PARTICIPANT EQUIPMENT AND ETIQUETTE**

67. Participants should be encouraged to bring their own hand sanitiser to practices and games and use it at regular intervals in activity.
68. Participants should bring their own clearly labelled or otherwise highly distinguishable water bottle to practice and not share it under any circumstances. No communal water buckets or bottles are to be used.
69. 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.
70. 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.
71. 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. Coaches and participants who are not currently active should refrain from shouting, and players active on the pitch should avoid shouting or raising their voices where possible, and especially facing each other during.

72. No spitting or mouth rinsing is permitted during practice or play

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

73. Injuries during practice and play should still be treated as participant wellbeing is utmost. Physios and other medical personnel should take care to protect themselves and others through rigorous cleaning and personal hygiene, including increasing the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting equipment and surfaces. Wearing face coverings is recommended for both medics and patients, where this is possible and practical.

74. After contact with an injured participant, physios and other medical personnel should clean their 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. They should also avoid touching their mouth, eyes and nose.

75. Physios or other medical personnel, should keep a record of each participant they have come into contact with for test and trace purposes.

76. See [further information](#) for those who may need to act as a 'first responder' role in a sports setting.

77. 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.

## **ORGANISING INTER-CLUB NON-CONTACT FRIENDLY GAMES**

78. Inter-club locally organised non-contact friendly games are now permitted, as long as the following guidance is strictly adhered to:

- Teams and individuals must stay local wherever possible – for example, in the same or in a neighbouring local authority area.
- Teams and individuals should not currently travel to Wales or Scotland to take part in American football games
- A separate risk assessment must be completed ahead of any planned games
- 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 should be extended the full length of the playing areas 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, is not currently permitted.

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.

## MORE INFORMATION

For additional information, please visit [www.britishamericanfootball.org/Covid-19](http://www.britishamericanfootball.org/Covid-19)

If you have any questions, please contact:

[covid-19@britishamericanfootball.org](mailto:covid-19@britishamericanfootball.org) - for Covid-19 safety and other off-field activity related questions

[info@bafca.co.uk](mailto:info@bafca.co.uk) - for coaching specific queries

[adultflagfootball@britishamericanfootball.org](mailto:adultflagfootball@britishamericanfootball.org) - for queries relating to mixed or women’s adult flag football

[sreeni.shaji@britishamericanfootball.org](mailto:sreeni.shaji@britishamericanfootball.org) - for queries relating to U11,U14 or U17 flag football

[registrations@britishamericanfootball.org](mailto:registrations@britishamericanfootball.org) – for questions relating to BAFA team or individual membership