



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

**9<sup>th</sup> Edition - Update 5<sup>th</sup> November**

**2021 INTRODUCTION**

- This Protocol applies to all training sessions and matches from Friday 5<sup>th</sup> November 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 Friday 5<sup>th</sup> November 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 9<sup>th</sup> Edition ahead of any return to games from Friday 5<sup>th</sup> November 2021.
- 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.
- COVID-19 Compliance Officers should be familiar with the Updated FAI Safer Return to Training & Play Protocol 8<sup>th</sup> 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.
- Wear a face mask in all indoor settings.
- Sanitize your hands regularly.
- Where all individuals are vaccinated the full use of showers and changing rooms is permitted.
- Where individuals have mixed immunity status the use of these facilities should be pod based.
- The type of protective measures implemented will be determined by the type of facility users ( i.e. vaccinated / mixed immunity).
- Sample protective measures may include:
  - Limit overall duration of individuals in a changing room for example implement a 15 minute window / 5 minute shower rule etc.
  - Implement adequate social distancing measures in changing areas for example the use of every second changing space/lockers/shower head etc.
  - Recommend the wearing of masks in shared areas (showers an exception).
  - Provide clear signage highlighting any relevant space capacities and time durations.
  - Close off any unnecessary spaces or those not in use/not permitted.
  - Monitor toilets with agreed capacity numbers and limit to participants/patrons only.
  - Implement flow management systems where necessary.
  - To improve ventilation consider an open window / open door policy (subject to privacy).
  - Provide sanitisation stations as appropriate on entrances and in shared areas.
  - Continue to promote hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette through signage, posters etc.
  - Ensure deep cleaning of shared areas on a regular basis
- Observe 2 metre social distancing in dressing rooms and all indoor facilities at all times.
- 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](http://www.fai.ie)

#### **4 -Training Groups / Numbers / Indoor Training**

- 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**

- The use of the EU Digital COVID Certificate (vaccine or recovery certificate) will be required for accessing indoor sporting activities and events.
- Where individuals have mixed immunity status, pods of up to 6 participants will be permitted (excluding adult coaches/instructors).
- Multiple pods will be permissible subject to protective measures.
- The overall number of pods will have regard to the size of venue and there should be substantial social distance between individual pods.
- 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.
- Hand sanitizer must be available at all indoor training areas.
- Vaccinated spectators attending indoor sporting events should be fully seated.
- 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.

## **Indoor Youth Sport** – Games and Competitions

### **Underage Participants - Children under 18 Years Old**

The current “pod of six” system can be adjusted to allow for indoor games and competition activities according to the laws of the game.

The ‘pod of six’ system should be retained for all other settings such as training activities.

The continuation of the pod system for more frequent activity will assist in minimising the overall risk and facilitate contact tracing.

### **Mitigation Measures for Inclusion in Indoor Youth Sport Protocols**

Staggered start and finish times combined with appropriate entry, exit and traffic management protocols to minimise the unnecessary interaction of participants at any one time.

The pre-booking of activity including the health screening of participants along with coaches & support personnel. Symptomatic individuals not to participate in or attend sporting activities.

Consideration of indoor space densities when determining overall numbers.

Reduction in the overall duration of activities.

Ensuring that indoor spaces are well ventilated.

Participants to arrive prepared to play; limited use of changing room or showers

The ongoing promotion of good respiratory & hand hygiene.

The wearing of face coverings by coaches and support personnel.

Additional signage, hand sanitization stations and deep cleaning implemented.

The use of physical distancing during warm-ups, rest times and off the field of play.

No handshakes, high fives, fist pumps, chest bumps, huddles, group celebrations, etc.

The use of dedicated COVID 19 Officers to ensure implementation and compliance of measures

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

- Matches can resume from Monday 7<sup>th</sup> 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 - COVID-19 Travel Advice \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie/en/publications-and-resources/articles/covid-19-travel-advice/)
- Football clubs organising transport to/from events should implement protective measures such as mask wearing etc. as appropriate.
- In line with the return of public and private transport participants may wish to return to the use of carpooling.
- If carpooling consider use of a pod system in which the same participants pool together for all activities.
- Private transport (carpooling) carrying those not yet vaccinated or of mixed immunity should be aware of the higher risk. The use of appropriate face coverings is recommended.
- Protective measures such as physical distancing, mask wearing etc. should also be implemented.
- Travel in your gear.
- Bring your own labelled food and water in a sealed bag.
- On arrival observe and obey COVID-19 signage.
- Players 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

- Outdoor group activities should continue to implement the relevant protective measures as outlined above.
- Proof of vaccination or recovery will no longer apply for spectators attending outdoor events.
- Fixed capacity limits will no longer apply for spectators or participants at outdoor events.
- 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](mailto: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.

### Use of Masks

The use of masks in indoor settings particularly for those not participating in activity continues to be recommended. The use of masks on public transport remains a requirement, while the use of masks in shared private transport continues to be strongly recommended. Medical staff should continue to use masks and appropriate PPE when treating participants.

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