

Return to Sport

Guidance Note

December 2021

(Updated to include [December 17th](#) revisions on sporting events)

Introduction

Sporting Organisations should continue to implement strong protocols with regard to training, competition and other sporting activities. These will include:

- The collection of contact tracing data.
- 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.
- The wearing of face coverings in relevant settings.
- Ensuring that indoor spaces are well ventilated.
- Consideration of indoor space densities and duration of indoor activities.

Monitoring, oversight and compliance activities should continue to be reinforced by Sporting Organisations. Up to date and active Communication on existing measures will also assist with the ongoing promotion of public health measures at a local level.

In addition to the protective measures outlined above the Return to Sport Expert Group strongly recommends that all eligible individuals consider vaccination as a matter of priority. This will maximise availability of indoor sporting opportunities and the number of participants.

Summary of the Measures currently in place.

Outdoor Sport - General

- 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.
- Between December 20th 2021 and January 30th 2022 attendance at outdoor sporting events are limited to 50% of venue capacity or 5,000 attendees, whichever is the lower.

Indoor Sport - General

- 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.
- For Vaccinated participants no fixed capacity limits apply to these activities.
- Vaccinated spectators attending indoor sporting events should be fully seated.
- Between December 20th 2021 and January 30th 2022 indoor sporting events will not take place after 8pm. In relation to events happening earlier in the day, spectator attendance should be limited to 50% of venue capacity or 1,000 attendees, whichever is the lower.
- The 8pm time restriction does not apply to indoor sports training. This training can continue in line with previous guidance and with protective measures in place (i.e. use of pods where applicable, cleaning/hygiene, ventilation, mask use etc.).

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 only, according to the ordinary rules and limits of the sport concerned, with all other protective measures remaining in place.
- The ‘pod of six’ system should be retained for all other settings such as training activities and games as part of training.
- 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.

Underage Spectators at Indoor Sporting Events

Accompanied minors (i.e. children under 18 years old accompanied with a fully vaccinated/proof of immunity adult) attending indoor sporting events in a spectating capacity are not required to be fully vaccinated or recovered to attend events and do not need to show a COVID-19 pass.

Unaccompanied minors (children under 18 years old) attending indoor sporting events in a spectating capacity are required to be fully vaccinated or recovered to attend events and must show a COVID-19 pass. They must also have photo ID to prove that the COVID-19 Pass relates to them.

Transport To and From Activities & Events

Sporting Organisations organising transport to/from events should implement protective measures such as mask wearing etc. as appropriate.

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. If carpooling consider use of a pod system in which the same participants pool together for all activities.

Showers / Changing Rooms

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.

Indoor Meetings & Educational / Coaching Courses

Sports may wish to continue to conduct Meetings & Educational / Coaching Courses remotely or outdoors.

Coaching or Educational programmes that contain a practical element should be delivered in line with other sporting measures permitted i.e. the use of pods of 6 for mixed immunity participants. Appropriate protective measures and COVID protocols should be in place.

Ongoing consideration to Room densities, meeting durations and ventilation should continue throughout the Winter months.

Substantial Distance amongst Pods

Indoor activities made up of Mixed Immunity Participants should continue in pods of up to 6. Multiple pods will be permissible and should take into account the overall size of the venue. Substantial social distancing between individual pods should be implemented. The levels of 'substantial distance' will differ depending on the nature and intensity of the activity.

To any independent onlooker it should be clear that the pods are completely separate groups operating independent of one another with no interaction or sharing of equipment and there is no opportunity for them to mix or stray into one another's group or playing space.

In addition it is not recommended that Coaches/instructors participate in multiple pods. A single Coach/Instructor may however coach/instruct/oversee/ supervise more than one pod. This Coach/Instructor should ensure that they are not directly engaging with or in close proximity to any individual members of the pod. To any independent onlooker it should be clear that the Coach/Instructor is completely separate to the groups he/she is overseeing.

Sharing of Equipment

Sport particularly competitive team sport will require a certain degree of equipment sharing. Where this can be reduced or limited for example in individual sport or in training activities, it may help decrease overall risk. Where there is any sharing of equipment, appropriate sanitisation practices should remain in place.

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.

Ventilation

Ventilation will remain a core component of the COVID-19 response.

The HPSC has updated its guidance on the subject as of November 18th 2021. A full copy of the document can be found at the link below.

[Guidance on non HCbuilding ventilation during COVID-19.pdf \(hpsc.ie\)](#)

Changes from previous version include:

- Update key points
- Update modes of transmission to include airborne of respiratory liquid particles
- Update ventilation & COVID-19
- Update conclusion and references