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**COVID-19 Interim recommendations for sports activities for  
children and adolescents in the context of the COVID-19  
pandemic**

**Version 1.6 30.09.2021**

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*This document summarises interim recommendations for sport for children and adolescents up to  
18 years old during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

Version	Date	Changes from previous version
1.6	30/09/2021	Added reference to gov.ie website where pods are discussed  Added updated recommendations regarding contact tracing of those aged >3 months up to and 13 <sup>th</sup> birthday
1.5	05/05/2021	Removal of rowing from the examples of a Contact Sport
1.4	28/04/2021	Added in updated recommendation that use of face coverings should be replaced with surgical face masks for some high risk members of the general public.
1.3	27/11/2020	<p><b>Title and header:</b> Updated</p> <p>References to the Government's Framework for Restrictions added</p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> Changed Summary heading to Purpose. Updated contents to reflect ongoing sporting activity, instead of return to sport.</p> <p><b>Scope:</b> New section</p> <p><b>Key Points:</b> Expanded details and updated to include the responsibilities of each organisation and attendees.</p> <p><b>Risk Assessment:</b> Expanded details of factors taken into account in risk assessment.</p> <p><b>Measures to reduce the risk of COVID-19:</b> Clarification of who should not attend events. Expanded details related to travelling to events. Added recommendations for numbers attending events, cleaning, appropriate hand hygiene, physical distancing and ventilation. Clarification that everyone involved in an event should make a declaration that they are symptom free. Added measuring temperature is not required. Clarification that sharing of items is discouraged, participants/coaches should have own items when possible and how to proceed when items must be shared. Clarification on when face coverings should be worn. Added physical distancing may not always be possible during contact sports and team huddles should be limited. Updated to include CDC scientific brief on masks. A special note on celebrations added. Removal of general infection prevention and control information in snooker and pool section that is available elsewhere in this guidance.</p> <p><b>Contact Tracing Measures:</b> Added parents and coaches should be included in log. Added use of COVID-19 Tracker App should be encouraged.</p> <p><b>Communication with parents, children and coaches:</b> Addition of coaches to heading and contents of this section. Changed advice for those with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 from 14 days self-isolation to contacting their doctor and following the advice given by the doctor on testing and duration of self-isolation.</p> <p><b>How to manage an individual with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 :</b>Change of heading from how to manage a child, parent, or spectator with COVID-19 symptoms. Addition of, if appropriate for age, when to ask an individual to wear a face covering.</p>
1.2	08/07/2020	<p>Added appendix re legal underpinning of holding log of names for contact tracing purposes in a national pandemic.</p> <p>In section 6, clarified that the risk assessment and close contact decision making will be carried out by the Public Health Medical Team.</p>
1.1	23/06/2020	Added note on snooker, pool and the cleaning of tables

All HPSC guidance should be read and interpreted in conjunction with the [Government's Framework of Restrictions](#)

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## Key Points

- Sports activities and physical activity are very important not only for physical health but also for mental health and wellbeing. This guidance is designed to enable these activities to be undertaken in a safe manner, wherever possible.
- It is the responsibility of each organiser of the sporting activity to comply with all legal obligations and to determine how best to organise sports activities that are safe and in line with national policy and guidance.
- It is the responsibility of each organisation to communicate to their participants what is required of them as outlined in this guidance and in the [Government's Framework of Restrictions](#).
- Adults and children (sport participant, coach or spectator) are advised not to attend an event if they have COVID-19, have symptoms of COVID-19, if they are contacts\* of COVID-19, if they are waiting for the results of a test for COVID-19, or if anyone in their household has suspected COVID-19\*.

\*Contact tracing guidelines for those who are fully vaccinated and for those who are [aged >3 months – under 13 years of age](#) will vary. Please see [here](#) for further information.

Symptomatic individuals and COVID-19 detected cases should [self-isolate](#), regardless of vaccination status.

- Supervisors are advised to observe children for symptoms. Physical distancing (where possible), hand hygiene and good respiratory etiquette is advised to be observed by all (children, parents, coaches and spectators).
- It is important to provide as much information as possible to support people at higher risk, in particular people with certain [medical conditions](#), in understanding the risk to them/their child related to participation in sports or sports related activity.

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## 1. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline the necessary measures which are advised to be taken during the engagement of children and adolescents (up to the age of 18 years) in play and sports activities in the community, such as organised sports and holiday camps, to ensure the lowest possible risk in the context of COVID-19. These measures are aimed at minimising the risk of COVID-19 associated with sports amongst children and adolescents, their families and the wider surrounding community, while recognising the importance of those activities for health and wellbeing.

## 2. Scope

This guidance document is intended to support those responsible for planning, organising and managing or participating in sporting events for children and adolescents. Unless otherwise mentioned, the words child and children refer to anyone under the age of 18 years old. This guidance should be read and interpreted in conjunction with the [Government's Framework of Restrictions](#).

## 3. Risk assessment

For each activity or event, it is advised that an up-to-date risk assessment should be conducted to determine the risk level for COVID-19 transmission related to the particular activity or sport, and what additional measures are needed to reduce this risk. The risk assessment process will generally be a pragmatic review of what is planned and the associated risks. The nature of the process should be proportionate to the scale of the activity or event and, in particular for club and local events, does not require excessive documentation. This risk assessment is advised to be undertaken and should be in line with current government framework of restrictions.

Different activities and sports carry different degrees of risk related to the level of close contact involved, numbers participating, duration of the activity, the equipment and the setting (for example, indoors or outdoors).

The risks associated with social interaction in the context of assembling of participants and spectators, preparing to participate, celebrating a win and preparing to leave may be as great or greater than the risks associated with the activity itself.

**Outdoor sports are generally associated with lower risk, therefore outdoor activities are preferable whenever possible.**

Team sports can largely be categorised into contact and non-contact sports, with contact sports carrying a higher risk of virus transmission:

- **Contact sport** is an activity, particularly a team activity, in which by participating you are coming into close contact with others as part of competing or taking part in that activity – for example, physical contact sports like rugby, football, basketball, hockey or judo.
- **Non-contact sport** is an activity in which you can comfortably maintain a 2-metre distance from others while participating – for example running, tennis, cycling, golf or gymnastics.

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In the United Kingdom, a Team Sports Risk Exposure Framework (TS-REF-2) has been adopted by Public Health England for use within both elite and community sports to establish both the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission during specific sporting activities, and to identify and isolate increased risk contacts during sport. TS-REF-2 considers the transmission risk of SARS-CoV-2 during indoor and outdoor activities and can be found at <https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/early/2021/06/29/bjsports-2021-104225>.

## 4. Measures to reduce the risk of COVID-19

It is important to try to reduce the risk of spread within sporting events. Although legal restrictions have been lifted, the following is advice to reduce the risk of spread.

### Going to and coming from the event

- Adults and children (sport participant, coach or spectator) are advised not to attend an event if they have COVID-19, have symptoms of COVID-19, if they are contacts\* of COVID-19, if they are waiting for the results of a test for COVID-19, or if anyone in their household has suspected COVID-19\*.  
\*Contact tracing guidelines for those who are fully vaccinated or have had previous COVID-19 infection within the past 9 months will vary. Please see [here](#) for further information.  
Contact tracing guidance for those who are aged >3 months – under 13 years of age can be found [here](#).
- Depending on your level of comfort and the vaccination status of the people, you're able to car-pool with members outside your household. However, the following is advisable:
  - The vehicle should be cleaned frequently, this includes cleaning in between journeys. Household cleaning products should be used – taking special care to clean frequently-touched surfaces such as door handles (inside and out), window buttons and seat belt buckles. Wash your hands thoroughly after doing this
  - The driver and passengers may wear face coverings if appropriate (for example, if not fully vaccinated)
  - Try to share transport with the same people each time and/or have a small number of passengers
  - Keep windows open for ventilation, where safe to do so
  - Depending on the type of vehicle, have passengers facing away from each other
  - Seat passengers at the maximum distance possible from each other
- If the parent is staying at the event, they are advised to observe social distancing.. If spectators are attending, including members of participants' households, the overall numbers present should comply with [current government](#) and public health guidance, and requirements related to social distance and use of face coverings should be observed.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.higa.ie/reports-and-publications/health-technology-assessment/evidence-summary-spread-covid-19-children>

- Encourage parents to observe social distancing when dropping and collecting children from the venue.

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- If the activity or any part of the activity is indoors this also allows for time to clean all frequently touched surfaces and equipment prior to the arrival of the next group. It is advised to take this opportunity to increase ventilation of the indoor space.
  - Children are advised to arrive, train and leave in their sports gear to avoid use of enclosed settings like changing rooms.
  - Close shared spaces such as changing and locker rooms, if possible. If not possible, stagger use between different groups, ensure that hand hygiene facilities are available and used at the entrance, ensure adequate distancing, maintain as much ventilation as possible and clean all contact surfaces thoroughly between use.

## A special note on celebrations

Measures to reduce the risk of spread of COVID 19, outlined in this document, are advised to be observed even in times of celebration.

## Personal hygiene measures

- Everyone should be encouraged to cover their coughs and sneezes with a tissue or use the inside of their elbow. Used tissues should be thrown in a waste paper bin and the child should be reminded to wash their hands immediately with soap and warm water or hand sanitiser that contains at least 60% alcohol. This hand sanitiser should be readily available and easily accessible.
- Where possible, facilitate hand-washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds for everyone on arrival and departure from the location where the activity is taking place, as a minimum.
- Support healthy hygiene by providing all supplies including soap, paper towels, tissues, and no-touch/foot pedal rubbish bins. If hand-washing facilities are not available, hand sanitiser containing at least 60% alcohol should be used as an alternative.
- Regardless of availability of hand-washing facilities, hand sanitiser should be readily available to all children, parents and coaches, that can be used regularly after handling equipment, coughing or sneezing or having direct contact with others.
- Children should be supervised when handwashing or using hand sanitiser.
- Everyone should wash their hands before eating and should not share food or drinks.
- Discourage sharing of items, especially drinks, foods and items that are difficult to clean or disinfect. Each child and coach should bring their own water-bottle clearly labelled with their name. Don't allow sharing of towels, clothing, or other items used to wipe faces or hands.
- Spitting should be strictly forbidden.

## Face coverings

- Everyone should comply with the law and [government guidance](#) on use of cloth face coverings for activities that take place indoors.
- Where physical distancing is not possible, cloth face coverings or masks should be worn by coaches, officials, parents, volunteers and any other spectators present. There are certain groups of people for whom the use of surgical face masks rather than cloth face coverings is now recommended by NPHET. Surgical masks rather than cloth face coverings are now recommended to be worn by people who are in high risk and very high-risk cohorts and older



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age groups when in crowded outdoor spaces or confined indoor community spaces. For further information, please see relevant guidance [here](#).

- CDC recently published a scientific brief, available [here](#), that concluded that community mask wearing can reduce the spread of SARS-CoV-2 by both decreasing the spread of the virus from the person wearing the mask and providing personal protection for the mask wearer.
- Face coverings are not recommended to be worn by children under 13 years.
- Face coverings may also be challenging to wear while playing sport, in particular swimming and many activities that require intense effort. Unless there is a safety concern however, children older than 13 years should be allowed to wear a face covering if they wish.
- People wearing face coverings should be reminded to not touch the face covering and to wash their hands frequently. Information should be provided to all parents on the [safe use of face coverings](#).

## Social distancing measures

- As much as possible, try to maintain social distancing of 2 metres between sports participants and coaches. This will not be possible during contact sports.
- Display physical guides, such as signs or markings on floors or pitches, to make sure that coaches and players are aware of the 2 metre distance that is required for social distancing.
- Team huddles during games are not advised and if necessary should maintain distance between participants.
- For close contact sports, focus on fitness and skills, which can allow maintenance of social distancing during practices, rather than on contact activities, when it is practical to do so.
- Organise players into small groups or pods where recommended indoors as per [Government guidelines](#), remain together and work through stations, rather than switching groups or mixing groups. This way each child will have contact with only a portion of the group at each training session.
- Create distance between children when explaining drills or the rules of the game.
- Social distancing must be maintained when children are not playing. For example, if there is a match underway and some children are waiting on the sidelines as substitutes they are advised to maintain social distance from one another. They can be encouraged to practice drills or exercises while waiting on the sidelines, or if too young to maintain social distancing alone, they should be accompanied by an adult.
- The ability of children to socially distance will depend on their age. For young children, it may be necessary to ask parents to monitor their children to ensure that they maintain social distancing.
- Identify adult coaches or volunteers to help maintain social distancing among children, coaches, referees and spectators.
- The number of children sitting in confined player areas (e.g. dugouts) should be determined by how many can safely be in the area while still maintaining social distance. Allow players to spread out into spectator areas and along the sideline if needed.

## Cleaning and disinfection measures

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- It is advised to designate one staff member/coach to be in charge of cleaning and disinfecting of any shared equipment before, during and after all sessions/activities.
  - Minimise equipment sharing, and clean and disinfect shared equipment between use by different people.
  - Jerseys or bibs should not be swapped during a training session or game and should be washed at the highest temperature after every use. Where possible it is preferable that each participant has their own jersey or bib.
  - Develop a schedule for increased, routine cleaning and disinfection of all frequently touched surfaces.
  - Ensure safe and correct use and storage of disinfectants, including storing products securely away from children.
  - In addition to cleaning and disinfecting equipment, provide and encourage children to use hand sanitiser to disinfect their hands after playing contact sports or activities or using any shared equipment.
  - Use gloves when removing rubbish bags or handling and disposing of any rubbish and wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds afterward.

### **Additional measures**

- Ensure adequate supplies of shared items (e.g. protective gear, balls). Alternatively, limit use of supplies or equipment to one group of players at a time and clean and disinfect between use.
- Where possible, for items that may be difficult to decontaminate such as helmets, children must provide their own.
- If there are circumstances where this is not possible each item should rotate amongst the smallest possible number of people and should be thoroughly cleaned between uses. For example, if a set of helmets must be used for two or three teams, the helmets should if possible be designated and labelled by position for (example goalkeeper, corner forward) so that they are not redistributed randomly between different users each time.
- Ensure that each child's belongings are separated and in individually labelled containers or bags to avoid confusion between belongings and sharing of items.
- For sports involving large teams, consider decreasing the sizes of teams for matches.
- Display awareness posters with messaging related to hand hygiene and cough etiquette at entrances and exits and in toilets.

### **A special note on boxing equipment (or similar equipment)**

It is advised that each sports participant should have their own headgear and pair of boxing gloves that are exclusively for their own use.

## **5. How to manage an individual with symptoms consistent with COVID-19**

- Immediately separate any child or other person displaying or complaining of COVID-19 compatible symptoms from other children, parents, coaches and spectators.

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- It is recommended to ask this person to wear a surgical face mask if possible and appropriate for their age.
  - Provide the ill person with tissues and hand sanitiser and ensure that all tissues are disposed of in a waste bag that can be tied and marked as separate from other waste.
  - If they are well enough to go home, arrange for them to be transported home by a family member as soon as possible and advise them to inform their general practitioner by phone of their symptoms.
  - If they are too unwell to go home or if advice is required, contact 999 or 112 and inform them that the sick person is suspected to have COVID-19.
  - If the ill person has a positive test for COVID-19, a Public Health medical team will perform a risk assessment to determine the appropriate containment and mitigation measures which will include the identification of close contacts as per national guidance.

## 6. Contact Tracing Measures

- A log of all children, parents, coaches and spectators attending every session, with contact information for contact tracing purposes is advised. This is to support safety and welfare of children.
- It is advised that there should be a system in place where this log is updated in real time for any necessary changes, for example if a child's parent is unable to accompany them at short notice and they are accompanied by a different person, this should be updated in the log in real time.

### Close contacts

- Advice for close contacts varies depending on a number of factors including setting, previous infection, vaccination status, and whether the contact(s) have been exposed to a confirmed case who has travelled from a designated state.
- If there is a confirmed case, a Public Health medical team will perform a risk assessment to determine the appropriate containment and mitigation measures which will include the identification of close contacts as per national guidance.
- For advice on contact tracing for children aged > 3 months and under 13 years, please see [here](#).
- For advice on contact tracing for those who are fully vaccinated or have had previous confirmed COVID-19 infection in the past 9 months, please see [here](#).
- For advice on contact tracing for those who are not fully vaccinated or have not had previous infection in the past 9 months, please see [here](#).

## 7. Communication with parents, children and coaches

- Ensure that parents, children and coaches are fully aware of all symptoms of COVID-19. The most common signs and symptoms of COVID-19 are available on the [HSE website](#).
- Ensure all parents and coaches understand the need to immediately self-isolate and to phone their doctor in the event of onset of any signs or symptoms that suggest COVID-19. They should follow their doctor's advice regarding testing and duration of self-isolation. They should restrict their movement if they have had recent close contact with a suspected or

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confirmed case of COVID-19. Further information on when and how to [self-isolate](#) and [restrict movement](#) are also available on the HSE website.