



**COVID-19**

**RETURN TO TRAINING AND PLAY**

**FOR**

**INTERCOUNTY**

**MATCH OFFICIALS**

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## Section 1 – MEDICAL INFORMATION

### 1. Background Information

COVID-19 is a viral infection which is highly infectious and contagious. COVID-19 disease is caused by infection with a virus, technically named SARS-CoV-2 virus, is a newly identified (novel) virus and the seventh (7th) Coronavirus known to infect humans. The resulting viral illness is referred to as COVID-19 disease. This virus is in the same coronavirus family as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (SARS-CoV or SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV or MERS), which caused the two previous coronavirus epidemic outbreaks, and have similar physical and biochemical properties and comparable transmission routes as COVID-19.

There is no effective treatment or vaccine. Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience no symptoms or mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Those who are infected may be infectious for 48 hours before symptoms appear. Based on current knowledge, younger healthy people are less likely to develop severe symptoms. ***However, if infected, they may spread the disease to their families, friends, colleagues, and teammates.***

### 2. Transmission of Virus

COVID-19 viral disease is most likely spread from person to person through:

- when an infected person coughs or sneezes
- close contact with an infected person while they are infectious (in particular by spending more than 15 minutes of face-to-face contact within 2 metres of an infected person or living in the same house or shared accommodation)
- touching surfaces that are contaminated by droplets coughed or sneezed from an infected person and bringing your unwashed hands to your face

### 3. Symptoms

It can take up to 14 days for symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) to appear. Individuals may have no symptoms but have the virus and pass the infection to others. Virus shedding appears to be highest at the time of symptom onset and just before the onset of symptoms.

**Common symptoms** of coronavirus include:

- a fever (high temperature of 37.5° C (degrees Celsius or above)
- a cough - this can be any kind of cough, not just a dry cough
- shortness of breath or breathing difficulties
- loss of sense of smell (anosmia)
- loss of sense of taste (ageusia) or distortion of sense of taste (dysgeusia)

**Less common symptoms** of coronavirus include:

- diarrhoea
- aches & pains
- conjunctivitis
- rash
- chilblains on fingers/toes

#### 4. **Staying Safe - 5 Rules to Follow**

Safe return to contact sports is the personal responsibility of each player and backroom member.

##### **(1) Wash your hands frequently**

Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water (for 20 seconds). Washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rub kills viruses that may be on your hands.

##### **(2) Maintain social distancing**

Observe social distancing guidelines and keep this distance between yourself and others, especially anyone who is coughing or sneezing. When someone coughs or sneezes, they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the droplets, including COVID-19 if the person coughing has the disease.

##### **(3) Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth**

Hands touch many surfaces and surface to hand transfer can spread the virus. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and can make you sick.

##### **(4) Practice respiratory hygiene**

Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. If using tissues, you should dispose of the used tissue immediately and wash your hands. By following good respiratory hygiene, you protect the people around you from all viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19.

##### **(5) If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical care early**

CALL YOUR GP - DO NOT VISIT THE DOCTOR'S SURGERY OR GAA FACILITY. Stay home if you feel unwell. Follow the directions of your GP and public health service. This will protect you and help prevent spread of viruses.

#### 5. **Health Questionnaire/Temperature**

Prior to each game, and until further notice, Referees and Match officials must complete the self-administered standard risk assessment health questionnaire– see Appendix 1. Symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat, general weakness, shortness of breath, and change in taste or smell will be identified. Each participant is also required to check their temperature on the health questionnaire. The presence of symptoms, or temperature over 37.5°C precludes attendance. In such circumstances, the individual should telephone their GP for advice and management.

**REMEMBER: Positive symptomatology or temperature over 37.5°C precludes attendance.**

In such circumstances, **THE GP SHOULD BE TELEPHONED** - DO NOT ATTEND SURGERY OR GAA FACILITIES.

MORE INDEPTH MEDICAL INFORMATION ON COVID-19 IS AVAILABLE ON THE GAA WEBSITE AT THE FOLLOWING LINK:

<https://www.gaa.ie/api/pdfs/image/upload/dbrquujnn6bwinpfl1u0.pdf>

## *Close and Casual Contacts*

### **Importance of 'Casual' vs. 'Close' contact**

It is important to ensure insofar as is possible that playing and training activities allow Public health to deem participants as 'Casual' contacts in the event of a positive case of Covid within the team environment.

Failure to do so could result in a member of Match Officials Team being forced to isolate for 14 days and ultimately their inability to fulfil fixtures and exclusion from taking part in matches.

The success of the existing Club Return to Play Protocols, and the ability of County Boards through our respective club units, to complete their program of games has been largely predicated on the basis that contact between those involved has generally been deemed 'Casual' and not 'Close' once all of the recommended control measures are adhered to.

This has allowed reported incidents to be dealt with on an individual basis, without putting the team, extended club members or opponents in jeopardy from a contact tracing point of view.

### **Potential 'Close' Contact scenarios**

The following scenarios, which in general did not apply during the Club season, require careful planning and the implementation of strict control measures by those involved with inter - county Match Officials.

- Use of dressing rooms (including showers)
- Pre and Post match/training meals
- Meetings for game preparation
- Collectively travelling to and from games
- Overnight accommodation

The amount of time Referees and other match officials spend together in a confined space (team meetings, travelling, in dressing rooms, in showers etc.) should be controlled and minimised. Social distancing and hand hygiene should be practiced whenever possible, and masks as per national guidelines should always be used in closed spaces.

**All Match Officials must have completed the Health Questionnaire before each game they are attending.**

## **Section 2 – MATCH ARRANGEMENTS**

### **1. Gaelic Games Match Officials Covid Pre-Match Requirements**

- Health Screening Form should be completed by all match officials, prior to first game and then revisited prior to every game before accepting an appointment.
- For all competitive matches and challenges games, the referee should be approved by the Relevant Referee Covid Supervisor and have completed regulations.

### **2. Match Day and Stadium Provisions**

- Parking areas will be provided for all match officials in proximity to the ground, where possible. All relevant parking and access passes should be distributed in advance.
- The Referee Administrator or nominee is responsible for the match officials and all arrangements on the day, regarding use of dressing rooms, refreshments, radio equipment.
- A complete and accurate list of names of Match officials must be provided in advance of the game, which will be circulated to the referee co-ordinator & event control.
- A designated entrance for officials will be allocated in advance.
- Match officials are required to check in and confirm their attendance with the referee administrator or match coordinator on their arrival.
- Hand sanitising facilities will be available to the referee and all match officials in all key areas.
- Dressing rooms will be cleaned in line with public health guidance after each session and/or match.
- One person will be designated in charge of cleaning and disinfecting of any shared equipment before, during and after all games.

### **3. Travelling to Ground**

- To minimize risk, match officials should travel to matches individually, unless they are members of the same household
- Match Officials should arrive no more than 45 minutes prior to game commencing and should depart directly after the game

### **4. Pre/Post Match Meals**

- Numbers should always be in line with what can be facilitated to maintain appropriate social distancing

### **5. Dressing Room Use**

- Dressing rooms are not currently in use for club games. However, in the Autumn and Winter months it will be essential to have the shelter of dressing rooms
- Time spent in dressing rooms should be minimised as should numbers occupying dressing rooms. Teams will need to regroup at half time and in the event of extra time. Access should be limited only to the match officials on duty and a maximum of two additional people, depending on the dressing room size. Where the dressing room does not allow for adherence to social distancing guidelines, meetings should take place outdoors.

- No children are allowed to enter the dressing room.
- No warmups should take place in the dressing
- Each match officials should be responsible for his/her own gear when officiating at a game, including umpires.
- If the Referee is using a radio system, then each team member should have new or sanitised earpieces to use and this should be disposed of or sanitised again after every game.

## **6. Showers**

- Currently, match officials must travel home to shower. For the intercounty season, and where feasible, match officials are advised to shower at home. However, it is accepted, that this will not always be possible and thus alternative provisions should be in place.
- Depending on the available facilities one person should shower at a time.
- The Covid relevant risks associated with showering can be significantly reduced if match officials apply soap/sanitizer, enter the shower area for a -short period, and exit in a single line. The rationale is that liberal application of soap/sanitizer and minimal time in the shower, while not eliminating the risk completely, reduces risk to acceptable levels.

## **7. Pitch-side**

- Single-use bottles or personal should be used for fluid intake
- Face mask/covering should be worn at all times by the side-line officials, umpires & referee administrator/nominated person.
- The signing of team sheets should not take place in the dressing rooms and should be done on the pitch.
  - For Senior Championship Fixtures, where the team sheets are required to be submitted 40 mins in advance, event control will designate a suitable location for the secretaries/team official to meet with the match referee or coordinator.
- Risk associated with team sheets and substitution slips is minimal but when receiving the team list the referee/fourth official should sanitise their hands before & afterwards
- Designated seating should be provided for the side-line officials & referee administrator/nominated person.

## **8. Games**

- Social Distancing rules should be observed when dealing with all players, team managers and county officials at the venue and especially when briefing your team on the day
- It is important that referees are strong in relation to the application of the rules and to ensure that players or mentors do not get too close if arguing over a decision
- The rules in each association deal with, deliberately spitting at, or any deliberate physical contact with a match official as a red card offence

## **9. Flu Vaccinations**

- While it is a matter for the individual match officials involved, Flu vaccinations are recommended for all in an at-risk group.
- Further information can be found at [HSE Flu Vaccine Information](#)

## ***10. Post-Match***

- If a referee becomes unwell after a game, they should first contact their GP/HSE/NHS and then inform the Referee Covid Supervisor who will liaise with Teams involved. The club will then follow advice provided to them by the HSE/NHS on the next steps.

## ***11. INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY***

- It is emphasized that standard precautions are taken with regards to hygiene, social distancing, face coverings, and that minimal time should be spent in confined spaces.
- All officials need to be aware that their activities, away from the field of play can impact on risk and therefore on the team of officials and matches.