

Action plan summary Australian Rules Football



In Association with:



Compiled by – AFL England and AFL London representatives

With input from all clubs across the country

September 2020 - updated January 2021, February 2021 and March 2021

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Introduction

This document is a summary of the Australian Rules Football (AFL) action plan aligned to the return to recreational team sport framework which was submitted to the DCMS for approval on 9 September.

That framework required all team sports to produce an action plan outlining a safe return to play an associated game guidance the AFLs action plan and game guidance. Given the huge challenges faced by government because of the global pandemic we are grateful to the staff of the DCMS for the response time taking all the can circumstances into account.

The purpose of this action plan and guide is to provide the necessary mitigations to enable the safe return of AFL in England within a team sports environment as part of the easing of social restrictions from July 4 2020 onwards.

Most of the AFL activities take place in the summer. The start of the main summer season coincided with the beginning of lockdown. With the season traditionally running until August as a nation we have decided to forego all league activities for the year and concentrate on getting ready for 2021.

The action plan summary outlined in this document is designed to minimise the COVID-19 transmission risk whilst taking part in recreational team sport and enable participants to make an informed decision about their own risk.

These mitigations allow for maximum groups of participants as set out in relevant guidance to gather on the playing area and for social distancing to be breached in the narrow circumstance required by AFL during training and play.

The action plan and guidance set out how we plan to facilitate a safe return to AFL and any adaptations required. The action plan and risk mitigation proposals recognise that practise may need to be adapted or curtailed and this information communication to participants swiftly, if the overall threat level or community prevalence of COVID-19 dictates. This includes the possibility of practises needing to be curtailed on a local as well as national level as circumstances dictate.

As part of this action plan we provided an assessment of the transmission risk that a return to community AFL presents. This assessment was based on the team sport risk exposure framework.

All activity taking place as outlined within the action plan must be sanctioned by and with oversight of the AFL England and league Presidents (contact details included in the appendix)

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Phased return to training

We have set out a 7 stage approach to return to all AFL activities. Whilst Stage 1 and part of the stage 2 activity are currently permitted we have included those elements with the action plan for completeness and to recognise that there remains a possibility there could be a regression as well as progression, on a local or national level, depending on the prevalence of COVID-19 within the community.

Government alert level 5 - lockdown, social distancing, no organised AFL. Individual or family group activity only		
AFL Stage 1 Wellbeing, Active and engaged	Keep in contact – ensure all players are active and engaged	Group virtual sessions
	Focus on physical and mental wellbeing	Ensure all able to exercise
Government alert level 4/3 - Social distancing continues. Non contact group activities		
AFL Stage 2 Small group and team activities	Progression from small groups to team-based fitness and skills	Encourage home-based virtual activities
	Non-contact with social distancing measures in place	Continue to focus on wellbeing of players
Government alert level 3/2 - Gradual relaxation of restrictions, minimal social distancing and enhance tracing		
AFL Stage 3 Small group and team activities Contact restrictions	Social distancing removed but full contact sport still restricted	Intra-club activities only
	League and competition based activity still prevented	Limited contact training
Government alert level 2/1 - Minimal social distancing, routine monitoring		
AFL Stage 4 Phased return	Phased return if there is still a perceived risk	Temporary rule changes to reduce Face to face contact time
	Localised activity allowed	Return to full competition once safe

The Government announced recreational team sport will be permitted from 11th July 2020. Inherent in this document is a recognition social distancing can be breached in certain narrow circumstances required by AFL during training and play.

Set out below is the return to play timetable. This timetable set out when various parts of the game can safely return based on the mitigation of transmission risk and the prevalence of COVID-19 within the community being low enough that the government alert levels remain at 3 or below.

In the event there are localised lockdowns in place the level of AFL activity will reflect the government advice at any given time relating to those specific areas.

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	What	When
Stage 1	Home based virtual activity	Permitted
Stage 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Six individuals from different households may now meet up and engage in individual training. The two metre social distancing rule still applies and if a coach is involved they are part of the group of six. Equipment sharing (including balls) should be kept to a minimum and strong hand hygiene practice should be in place before and after. As physical contact with anyone outside of your house is currently not permitted, playing of any games (small sided or full) is also not permitted at this time. While permissible for multiple small groups to be engaged in training at the same site, clubs must risk assess this properly and ensure that safe and adequate distancing between groups is strictly observed. This will be dependent on the activity being undertaken; however, the AFL London guidance would be that no more than one group should be active on each quarter of rugby pitch. A register of attendance is to be completed at every session and held by a member of the club. These records will be used in case there is the need to contact people if a case of COVID19 is suspected/or confirmed There needs to be a cleaning station available to all which includes hand sanitizer, a antibacterial spray for the footballs (eg Dettol) and disposable gloves should a player wish to wear them and hasn't brought their own. 	Permitted (limited to max 6)
Stage 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No contact activity Max 20 in a training group per half pitch Max 16 min continuous activity at any one time Social distancing measures remain in place Touch Kanga footy style drills allowed Avoid team huddles Avoid touching the face No spitting or gum chewing Cleaning station remains in place Register of attendance remains in place 	19 April 2021
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	What	When
Stage 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low and medium risk training activities included • Limited F2F and close contact exposure could be permitted for training only • Max 30 in a training group per half pitch • Max 16 min continuous activity at any one time • Social distancing measures remain in place • Avoid team huddles • Avoid touching the face • No spitting or gum chewing • Cleaning station remains in place • Register of attendance remains in place • Intraclub matches without contact can resume 	Provisional - when step 3 of government roadmap reached (not before) (17 th May)
Stage 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As stage 4 but allowing contact for tackling • Intraclub full contact matches allowed 	2 weeks after stage 4 reached (31 st May)
Stage 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New training drills for contact included • Friendly matches within league set up (detailed within this document) can be organised - keeping travelling a minimum 	2 weeks after stage 5 reached (14 th June)
Stage 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Return to play – league and competitions 	Not before step 4 of Government roadmap reached (21 st June)

A full review of each stage of the process will be conducted and sign off requested ahead of any new measures being brought in.

All activity (stage 1 and 2) which takes once the current lockdown is lifted will be delivered locally - where possible within the same local authority. This will minimise the impact of any local lockdowns and reduce the risk of the spread of the virus by activity taking place over a wider geographical area.

There will be no return to a competitive playing structure organised by member of affiliate leagues until 21 June 2021.

All clubs will need to ensure Public liability insurance is in place and valid ahead of any commencement of training and games – a copy of the certificate should be sent to AFL England for confirmation.

Leagues in place – affiliated AFL England leagues



- AFL London - established 1990
- 18 a side competition
- 9 clubs
 - 18 Men’s teams across 3 divisions
 - 9 Women’s teams across 2 divisions

Associated clubs - West London wildcats, Wandsworth Demons, Wimbledon Hawks, Sussex Swans, London Swans, South East London Giants, Reading kangaroos, North London Lions and Portsmouth Pirates



- Central and North East League Men’s - established 2010
- 9 a side competition
- 4 clubs
 - 5 Men’s teams - 1 division
 - 1 Women’s teams

Associated clubs - Huddersfield Rams, Manchester Mosquitoes, Wolverhampton Wolverines and Nottingham Scorpions, Lincolnshire Vikings



- Southern England and Wales Men’s- established 2007
- 9 a side competition
- 5 clubs
 - 4 Men’s teams - 1 division

Associated clubs - Bristol Dockers, Cardiff Panthers, Chippenham Redbacks (AKA Bath and Wiltshire Redbacks) and Vale Vikings



- Southern England, Wales and CNE Women’s - established 2018
- 9 a side competition
- 4 clubs
 - 4 Women’s teams – 1 division

Associated clubs - Bristol Dockers, Cardiff Panthers, Sussex Swans and Nottingham Scorpions

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- National University league - established 2018
- 9 a side competition
- 4 clubs
 - 4 Men's teams - 1 division
 - 4 Women's teams – 1 division

Associated clubs - University of Oxford, University of Cambridge, University of Birmingham and South Wales Universities



- AFL Scotland - league - 1 team located in England
- 1 club to be covered - Tyne Tees Tigers

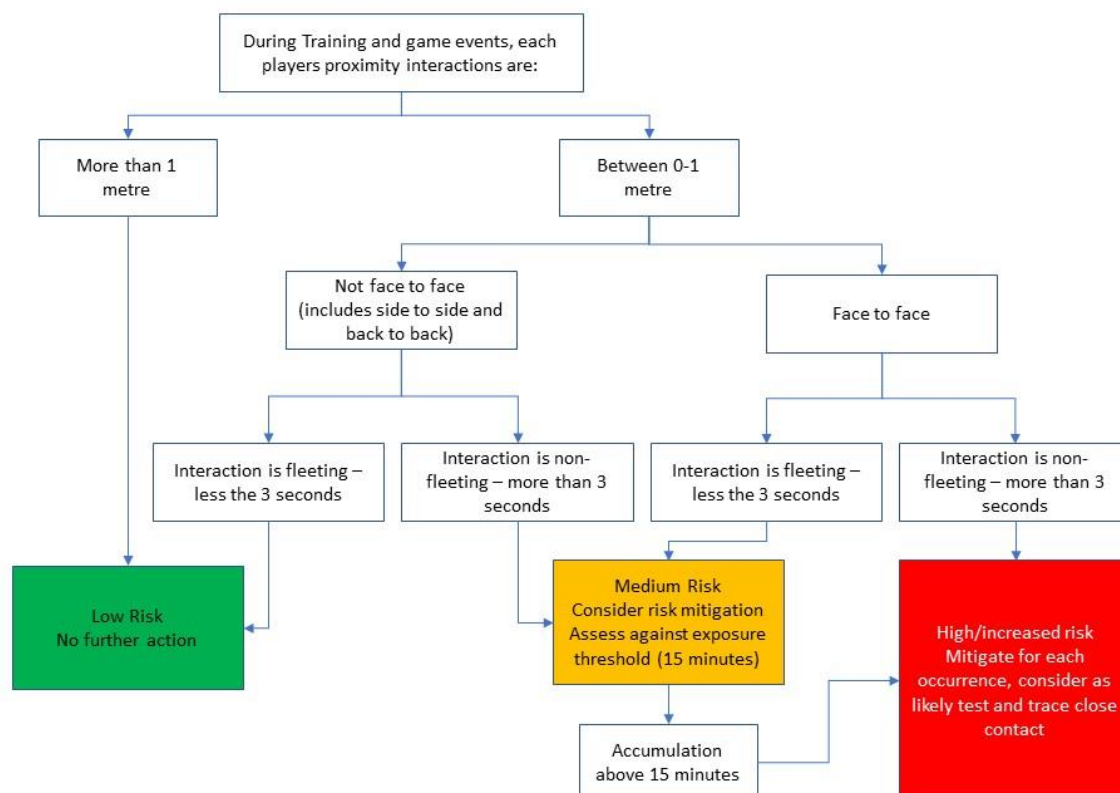
National teams - covered by AFL England

6 national teams are insured under the AFL England policy

- England Vixens and England Dragonslayers - 9 a side teams
- Great Britain Bulldogs and Great Britain Swans - 18 a side teams
- Welsh Red Dragons and Welsh Wyverns - 9 a side teams

Assessment of transmission risk summary

To return safely an assessment of the transmission risk that a return to AFL present is detailed below. This assessment has included analysis of the team sport risk exposure framework as set out below:



The analysis carried out has considered the following key elements of the framework:

Droplet transmission – the risk associated with each action in an activity based on duration and proximity of participants. By using the team sport risk assessment framework we have determined the risk of actions in the play and training environment and in doing so determined the overall level of risk of taking part in AFL activity:

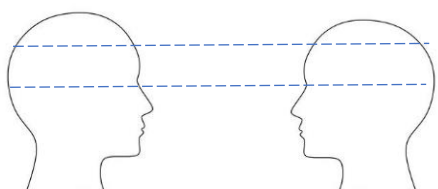
Fomite transmission - the risk associated with the handling and transfer of equipment in AFL. We have assessed the risk of the handling and transfer of equipment in AFL. This is primarily the ball.

Population - the number of participants likely to take part in the proposed activity plus known risk factors of participants with underlying health conditions or high-risk groups, who wish to participate.

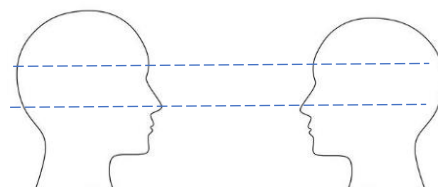
Environment – this is dependent on the type of activity taking place

Droplet transmission

Using the team sport risk exposure framework and face to face guidance below we have analysed the risk factors for the different types of training and play within AFL.



Greater than 1 meter – less than 3 seconds



Less than 1 meter – greater than 3 seconds



Fomite transmission

The mitigation against the possibility of fomite transmission is below - use of equipment is limited and will be avoided where possible - where equipment is shared – primarily the ball it will be cleaned throughout training sessions and during matches at each break.

- Cleaning during play might occur if for instance a ball goes out of play and is replaced by another clean one.
- Clothing might be changed at half-time.
- Equipment rotated every 3 days to allow viral decay.
- The benefits of hand hygiene to protect individuals and equipment are so substantial it is recommended that training and competition have routine hand sanitising breaks incorporated in a similar fashion to water breaks. Based on 15 minute quarters this will be completed at every quarter break. For longer matches of 25 minutes, water carriers will carry hand sanitizer.

Population risk

Due to the number of people playing the game we have analysed the population risks across the game and training. We have identified 2 relevant populations playing AFL. These are:

Low risk – open age 16+ with no pre existing medical conditions

Increased risk – adults with pre-existing medical conditions

Ensuring that clubs are aware of the medical needs and of any pre-existing conditions is key to understanding what risk category each club would fall into.

Environment risks

Following the government announcement on the 9 July 2020 informing us the measures that have been put into place to work towards re-opening grassroots sports and leisure facilities - any risk mitigation would need to be discussed with those that run the facilities used by any club.

Mitigating Risk

As part of this action plan we will outline the various mitigating factors that have been put in place to minimise the COVID-19 transmission risk whilst taking part in each of the AFL activities.

We will be asking participants to confirm that they have read and understood the risks associated with playing AFL and the transmission of COVID-19. Registers of attendance will be held by each club for training and games and these will be made available when required (see track and trace for more information)

Pre-attendance symptom check

All participants (players, coaches, officials, volunteers and spectators) should check for symptoms of COVID-19, in-line with government guidelines

Each of the above will - Upon signing the register to confirm attendance at training, acknowledge the contagious nature of the Coronavirus/COVID-19 and that the UK government and many other public health authorities still recommend practicing social distancing. They further acknowledge that AFL London and club has put in place preventative measures to reduce the spread of the Coronavirus/COVID-19. They understand that the risk of becoming exposed to and/or infected by the Coronavirus/COVID-19 may result from the actions, omissions, or negligence of myself and others, including, but not limited to, club staff, players and their families.

They are also confirming that:

- They are not experiencing any symptom of illness such as cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fever, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, or new loss of taste or smell.
- They have not travelled internationally within the last 14 days.
- They do not believe I have been exposed to someone with a suspected and/or confirmed case of the Coronavirus/COVID-19.

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- They have not been diagnosed with Coronavirus/Covid-19 and not yet cleared as non contagious by UK or local public health authorities.
- They are following all UK government recommended guidelines as much as possible and limiting my exposure to the Coronavirus/COVID-19.

Track and trace

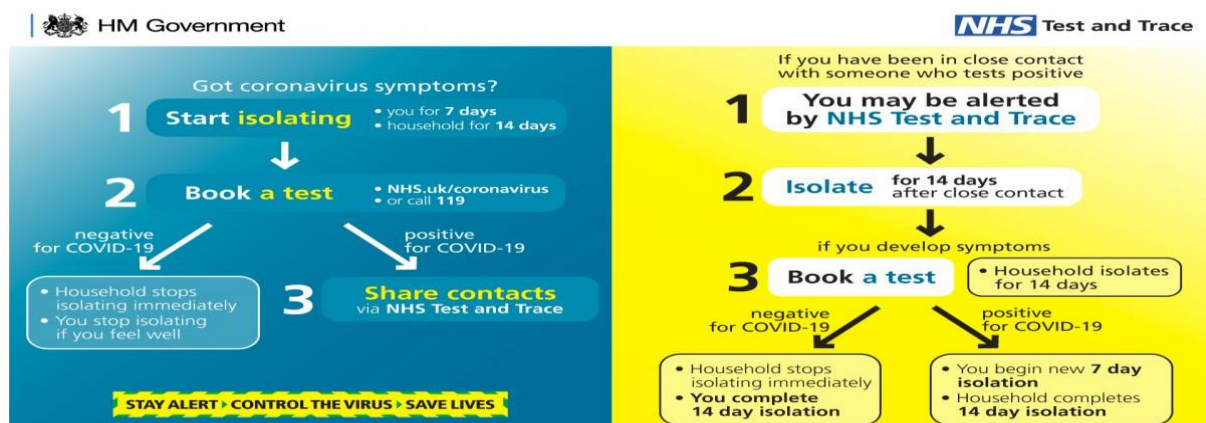
All clubs will be required to appoint a Club Covid Officer – details of each clubs contact will be shared once assigned.

All participants (players, coaches, support staff) in the training session have responsibility to notify the Club Covid Officer should they display symptoms of COVID-19 within 48 hours of a training session and or match.

Anyone with symptoms should ask for a test online or call to arrange a test by calling 119. They must complete the test within 5 days of the symptoms starting.

Club Covid Officer to direct the infected individual to the National Government's Test and Trace procedures. In England this will mean that individual will have a test within 48 hours. Each nation: England, Scotland, Wales and NI, have different procedures currently.

- In addition to the above advice, Club Covid Officer to contact all individuals that attended the training session and or match in question to advise that an individual within that group has reported symptoms. If the individual is a coach, then all participants of all sessions will need to be contacted.
- If a member of the club presents with symptoms within 48 hours of a training session/game and has been in contact with players and officials in the interim, then training/practice/matches played by the club must be suspended and a period of isolation as set out by the government followed, currently 7 days for an individual and 14 days for members of the household.
- The name of the infected individual is not to be disclosed to protect anonymity.
- All attendees of the session should be advised to isolate for 14 days (as per government guidelines) in case symptoms arise.
- In the event there is a confirmed positive case then the Club Covid Officer should complete the COVID-19 Incident Report Form available - this will be developed by AFL England as a google drive document



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Rule adaption

This mitigation would be achieved by making the necessary COVID rule amendments removing high-risk factors, including:

- Pre-game huddles and drinks breaks
- Celebration and gathering after scoring a goal
- Having a robust ball and equipment cleaning process
- Clear separation policies for injuries or breaks in play