



Department for
Digital, Culture,
Media & Sport

Elite Sport - Return to Domestic Competition Guidance

May 2020

Introduction

The following guidance covers Stage Three of the proposed five stage framework for returning to full unrestricted elite sporting competition and has been produced by a working group of leaders, Chief Medical Officers and partner organisation representatives across Olympic, Paralympic and professional sports in collaboration with the DCMS, PHE, DHSC and UK Sport.

Stage Three is a framework to progress from Stage Two, to the return to Domestic Competition – No Spectators (RTDC) for elite teams/athletes. The guidance for Stage One and Two activity must remain in place to underpin the progression to Stage Three.

The purpose of this Stage Three guidance is to define a set of minimum standards for RTDC for all parties. It is expected that the guidelines are considered by the Competition Delivery Partners and Elite Sport Organisation(s) and applied to their individual Competitions.

All existing government and Public Health England (PHE) guidance continues to apply unless otherwise specified. This guidance does not constitute legal advice or replace any Government or PHE advice; nor does it provide any commentary or advice on health-related issues. Competition Delivery Partners and other User Groups should seek independent advice prior to implementing any RTDC plan.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a rapidly developing situation and it is likely that this guidance and the reference sources it refers to will be regularly updated.

Definitions

****Competition****: The activity taking place at the Competition Venue(s) during the Competition Period, either at (a) a single venue on a single day; (b) a single venue over multiple days, or (c) multiple venues over multiple days.

****Competition Delivery Partners****: The Competition Organiser and the Competition Venue Operator.

****Competition Period****: The period taken to set up and prepare the Competition Venue, to host the Competition and reinstate the Competition Venue after the Competition.

****Competition Venue****: The venue(s) permitted to host the Competition, or set aside by the Competition Organiser for any elite athletes to train for the competition.

****Competition Venue Operator****: The Competition Venue Operator owns or is licensed to operate the Competition Venue during the Competition Period and should (where it is not the Competition Organiser) enter into an agreement with the Competition Organiser for the use of the Competition Venue. They should be in control of the Competition Venue during the Competition Period. They may also contract suppliers to support competition delivery.

****Domestic Competition****: No Spectators: Domestic sporting competition exclusively involving Elite Athletes, hosted within the UK, where no cross-border travel (from outside the UK & Ireland) is required for the Competition to take place. Access to the Competition will be restricted to individuals with essential functional roles.

****Elite Athlete****: An individual as defined as an Elite Athlete in the Stage One guidance.
Competition Organiser: The Competition Organiser will organise the Competition and liaise with all User Groups essential to its delivery and any relevant Elite Sport Organisations. Where they do not own the Competition Venue, they should contract with the Competition Venue Operator under a venue use agreement (or equivalent). They may also contract suppliers to support competition delivery.

****Elite Sport Organisations and Individuals****: The organisation and/or individual that is responsible for entering the team and/or athlete(s) into the Competition. These may include, but are not limited to, National Governing Bodies, professional leagues and clubs and individual elite athletes. Where an individual elite athlete is unable to fulfil the responsibilities of the Elite Sport Organisation, they should consult with the Competition Organiser and/or their National Governing Body to agree how those responsibilities can be met.

****User Groups****: The essential groups in attendance during the Competition. These may include, but are not limited to, the Competition Delivery Partners, teams/athletes, team support staff, competition officials, volunteers and staff, contractors/suppliers, anti-doping officers, medical providers and media and broadcast.

1. Minimum Standards

- Competitions are typically delivered in partnership by multiple organisations and delivery models can be complex. There may be cross-over in responsibilities between the Competition Delivery Partners and the Elite Sport Organisations. It is critical that all Elite Sport Organisations and User Groups work collectively to ensure that the Competition can be staged safely.
- All User Groups must be appraised of risk and mitigation plans and given the opportunity to actively 'opt in' to RTDC. If any of the Competition Delivery Partners or key User Groups choose not to 'opt in', consideration must be given to the integrity of the Competition, the ability to implement this guidance and whether the Competition can safely proceed.
- The following minimum standards must be in place before progressing with RTDC plans:
- Agreement over the roles and responsibilities and command, control and coordination (C3) arrangements between the Competition Delivery Partners and the Elite Sport Organisation(s)

- All relevant standards defined in Stages One and Two for RTT must continue to apply. Elite Sport Organisations must take into account the presence of other User Groups (from Stages One and Two) and that, during the competition phase, movements on the field of play are less controllable. The latter should influence the delivery of Social Distancing requirements within the domestic competition environment.
- An appropriate Competition Venue which can comply with these guidelines and reasonably accommodate modifications required to implement Social Distancing protocols. The Competition should not in any way limit the use of the Competition Venue to support the NHS or key workers requirements.
- That any concessions required to comply with government/PHE guidelines (relating to sport-specific rules, technical requirements or equipment) are obtained from the national/international governing body for that sport
- Confidence in the event management planning that there will be no detrimental impact of hosting the Competition on the wider community and healthcare systems
- Ensuring that the required PPE for practitioners or staff can be procured without taking away supply intended for key workers
- A decision-making structure and agreed procedure in place to modify, restrict, postpone or cancel the Competition
- Where the Organiser and the Venue Operator are not the same person, those two parties should enter into a venue use agreement to ensure that all relevant matters (including those set out in this guidance) are appropriately addressed

2. General Guidance

Social Distancing will be maintained wherever possible during the Competition Period. Furthermore, a key principle of the Stage Three guidance is that maintaining Social Distancing between the competing athletes, their support staff and personnel from all other User Groups in the Competition Venue will be a priority. Where Social Distancing is not possible, including on the field of play and in team areas, a full risk and mitigation strategy must be put in place.

Appropriate risk mitigation through screening of individuals prior to entry into the Competition Venue must be implemented and this may include, but not be limited to, COVID-19 symptom questionnaires. Where Social Distancing cannot be maintained at all times during the Competition, higher levels of surveillance may be implemented for a) current and b) past COVID-19 infection than at Stage Two. This will evolve in line with government and PHE guidelines and subject to ongoing audit and review.

All individuals must abide by government and PHE guidelines whilst away from the Competition Venue.

Any personnel with known or suspected COVID-19 are not permitted at the Competition Venue and should be placed or remain in isolation and follow the latest government and PHE guidelines. Personnel should follow the protocols put in place by the Competition Organiser and/or Elite Sport Organisation.

As all sports bodies will fully recognise, ensuring the mental health of their athletes and staff is as important as their physical health. Awareness and focus on this is all the more important in times of uncertainty. You are advised to factor government [guidance](<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-the-public-on-the-mental-health-and-wellbeing-aspects-of-coronavirus-covid-19>) on these issues into your planning and to consider providing active support for workers around mental health and wellbeing which could include advice or telephone support.

3. Specific Guidance

Each Competition Delivery Partner and Elite Sport Organisation should appoint a named COVID-19 Officer (CO) for every competition in which such a body has an interest. The CO appointed by the Competition Organiser should be responsible for oversight of the risk and mitigation planning, communicating information to all User Groups and ensuring that the necessary standards are met. This individual does not necessarily have to be medically trained.

Each Competition Organiser should appoint a named COVID-19 Medical Officer (physician) familiar with the [emerging evidence related to post-COVID-19 pathology](#), to have oversight of individuals with [suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 and ensure any suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases are managed in line with COVID-19 case management protocols and latest government guidance. Each Elite Sport Organisation should, as part of the Stages One and Two RTT guidance, have appointed a COVID-19 Medical Officer and these appointees should liaise closely with the Competition Organiser's COVID-19 Medical Officer. Sports which do not have a Medical Officer to cover these responsibilities should secure medical cover to oversee these processes prior to resuming Competition.

The Competition Delivery Partners, in collaboration with the Elite Sport Organisation(s), should develop a COVID-19 competition venue operations plan, and a COVID-19 risk assessment and mitigation plan. These should include the following considerations as a minimum:

- * A code of behaviour which provides guidelines for all User Groups and the details of sanctions in place for breaches of protocol
- * Details of all User Groups that will attend the Competition
- * An appropriate education programme for all User Groups with an emphasis on the maintenance of strict and frequent personal hygiene measures, particularly handwashing

- * Processes and activities where Social Distancing cannot be easily maintained should be risk assessed and mitigated
- * Limiting all non-essential activities, including catering, where possible
- * Agreeing measures with the public services, such as police and ambulance providers, to minimise potential calls on their resources
- * A map of the Competition Venue defining all areas/zones, routes and access/egress points
- * The maximum capacity and layout for each room/area/zone within the Competition Venue to allow Social Distancing to be maintained
- * Information on the management, movement and scheduling of User Groups and vehicles to allow Social Distancing to be maintained, wherever possible. A one-way system for people and vehicles should be established, where possible, and measures implemented to reduce crossover of different User Groups.
- * Broadcast and media management plan to ensure that Social Distancing and hygiene requirements are met and minimise crossover with other User Groups
- * A security plan, screening process and accreditation system that defines the access control system for the Competition Venue and the zones that are implemented to limit crossover between User Groups. As recommended in the Stage 1 and Stage 2 guidance (for elite training centres) the Competition Venue should be divided into at least two zones by an outer and inner cordon. The outer cordon will usually be the site perimeter and should be a physically secure barrier monitored by security staff. The inner cordon should be secure and monitored and will generally include the Competition Venue buildings and field of play. The area inside the inner cordon is designated the 'green zone'. The area between the outer and inner cordon is designated the 'amber zone'. Areas outside the outer cordon are designated the 'red zone'. This can be adapted to best suit the requirements of the Competition – and where there is capacity to implement further zoning. However, the outcome should always be to maximise the opportunity to comply with Social Distancing requirements.
- * Measures to ensure that plans do not conflict with the Competition Venues' existing security and emergency action plans, and fire regulations
- * A transport plan addressing travel to and from the Competition Venue for User Groups to minimise the usage of shared or public transport. Car parking should be within the Competition Venue zone
- * A signage plan to support the implementation of the guidelines
- * The stages required for all User Groups before entering and leaving the field of play
- * Agree Social Distancing measures and protocols for staff, officials and players on the bench and/or field of play, to include: personal conduct during disputes between

players or between players and referees; and scoring celebrations.

- * The arrangements for team and tactical meetings at the Competition Venue

- * Measures to ensure that the Competition, preparation or recovery sessions should take place outdoors to optimise ventilation, where possible

- * The time spent in dressing room areas by athletes/teams/staff should be preferably avoided, but if not avoidable then minimised with strict social distancing. Whilst showers can be used in line with Government guidelines, the Competition Venue may opt not to provide them. Steam rooms and saunas will not be available at this time.

- * Planning for recovery modalities (noting that cryotherapy chambers, cold-water immersion facilities and saunas may not be available at the Competition Venue)

- * A review of close and face to face contacts for players and support staff during the Competition Period, following the protocols defined in RTT guidelines. This should take account of any relevant epidemiological or aerobiological data from monitoring studies.

- * The Competition schedule should consider any existing data that identifies that certain characteristics of the athlete or Competition is associated with higher rates of injury

- * A medical plan that ensures that an appropriate level of medical staffing is in place within the Competition Venue to manage any injuries or illness and the demands of any COVID-19 symptom screening process. At least one first responder should be wearing appropriate PPE beside the field of play. A 'clear surfaces' policy to facilitate cleaning should be followed in treatment areas.

- * Measures to ensure any required practitioners or staff who have been assessed as requiring PPE will have access to it and are appropriately trained in their usage and disposal, as per the latest PHE guidance.

- * Plans for physiotherapy and soft tissue therapist treatments. This should be limited to an essential need only and the need for routine or maintenance therapy should be risk assessed on a case-by-case basis. Team/athlete medical staff must take precautions in keeping with the latest PHE advice such as the use of health care setting and athlete infection risk appropriate PPE that is also influenced by the procedure or treatment being conducted at that time.

- * Arrangements for an isolation room and protocols to manage any person who becomes symptomatic at the Competition Venue, as per government [guidelines for employers and businesses](#)

- * Arrangements to ensure that there is an uninterrupted supply of personal and hand hygiene equipment and consumables at the Competition Venue at all times

* Measures to ensure that all areas of the Competition Venue are cleaned at the standard defined in the government [guidance for post-COVID-19 case non-hospital facilities](#) cleaning (prior to the Competition Period) and [government guidance for non-hospital facilities cleaning](#) (before and after the Competition). For all clinical areas, the relevant PHE standard will apply. High contact surfaces such as door handles, and light switches should be considered a priority for disinfection on a frequent basis.

* Measures to ensure that a risk assessment and mitigation (including hygiene protocol) are undertaken on all sport-specific equipment items provided by the Competition Delivery Partners or Elite Sport Organisation(s)

The Competition Delivery Partners and Elite Sport Organisations should also:

* Ensure that consideration is given to relevant insurance cover being in place

* Implement an anti-doping testing programme and liaise with the anti-doping authorities to ensure that:

* it complies with all relevant hygiene measures and PHE guidance and

* the necessary permissions for anti-doping officials to enter the Competition Venue are obtained

* Ensure compliance with statutory requirements, where relevant, including the Health & Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and any local authority-enforced health and safety requirements. See also [BEIS \[Guidance on working safely during COVID-19\]](#)

* In the case of Competition Venues which are issued General Safety Certificates, consult their certifying authority at the earliest opportunity to determine what amendments should be required to the General Safety Certificate in order to comply with any local authority stipulated changes resulting from this guidance.

* Periodically review their risk assessment and mitigation plans to assess their effectiveness, updating them for each Competition.

Authorship

The guidance has been produced by a working group of leaders, Chief Medical Officers and partner organisation representatives including institutes, athlete representative bodies and sport venue hosts across Olympic, Paralympic and Professional sports in collaboration with the DCMS, PHE, DHSC and UK Sport.