



REFEREE SPECIFIC GUIDANCE ON RESTARTING NATIONAL LEAGUE SYSTEM FOOTBALL

This detailed guidance must be used in addition to The FA's returning to National League System (NLS) football, found [HERE](#).

Please remember, all Referees are reminded to only return to football when it's right for them to do so. There is no pressure to return and there will be no consequence or judgement for not returning. Everyone's health, wellbeing and safety are the priorities.

General Principles

The overriding principles to help safeguard the wellbeing of all match officials in the match day environment are to:

- minimise face to face contact where possible
- avoid lengthy periods of time in enclosed spaces
- ensure appropriate hygiene protocols are always in place
- encourage maintenance of appropriate social distancing measures

The FA and the Leagues are aiming for a September start of competitive matches in FA Competitions and the NLS; however, this is subject to change in accordance with Government guidance and approval for paying spectators, which may be published from time to time. NLS (or relevant FA Competition) fixtures are proposed to commence on:

- FA Cup: Tuesday 1st September 2020
- Step 1 & 2: No earlier than Saturday, 5th September 2020
- Steps 3 & 4: Saturday, 19th September 2020
- Steps 5 & 6: From Saturday 5th September 2020

Should Government guidance change in response to the current Covid-19 Alert Level, The FA guidance will be updated accordingly.

Thank you in advance for playing your vital part in helping our great game get going again. By observing Government guidance and the football-specific protocols, let's work together to ensure the transition back to competitive football is as smooth and safe as possible.

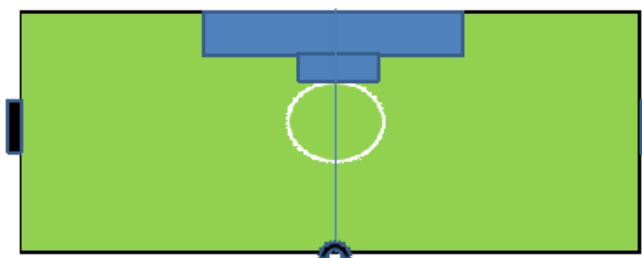
Should you need any support or advice, please contact your FA appointments officer, League/Pool referee appointments officer or County FA Referee Development Officer.

Before the match

Every match official should check for symptoms of Covid-19 in line with current UK Government guidance and take their temperature before leaving home for the game and no later than 5 hours before the designated kick-off time. If the match official is symptomatic and/or living in a household with a possible Covid-19 infection, or aware that their temperature exceeds a recorded temperature of 37.8 degrees, they must advise the relevant appointments officer immediately that they are unable to fulfil the appointment.

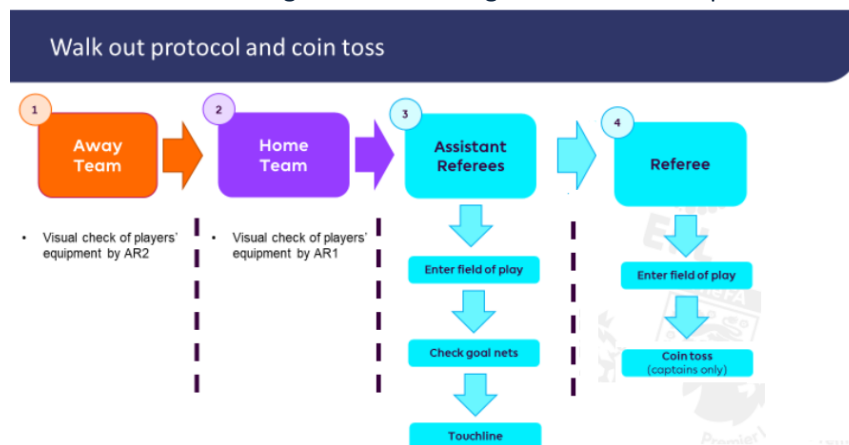
In addition, any participants who have been asked to isolate by NHS Test and Trace because they are a contact of a known Covid-19 case, must not exercise outside their home or garden and must not exercise with others. No-one should leave home to participate in football if they, or someone they live with, has any of the following:

- A high temperature (above 37.8°C);
 - A new, continuous cough;
 - A loss of, or change to, their sense of smell or taste.
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- All match officials are required to travel separately in their own vehicle, unaccompanied, directly to the stadium on the day of the match. If within your household or social bubble there are other match officials appointed to the same game, you can joint travel with them. This will be reviewed along with government guidance. The use of public transport is not currently recommended, but if essential a face covering must be worn. This will be reviewed along with government guidance. Any transport or accommodation questions or specific circumstance cases should be directed to the appointment officer.
 - Match Officials are expected to arrive at the stadium no later than 75 mins before kick off.
 - Social distancing should be maintained at all times, where possible. Where not possible, 'one-metre plus' distancing should be observed.
 - Should a Referee Developer (Observer, Coach etc.) be appointed or attending the fixture, their contact with the Match Officials should be minimal and maintaining a social distance.
 - The Referees pre-match instructions should take place outdoors, whilst maintaining social distance.
 - The Covid-19 officer of each club must provide a safety briefing to the Match Officials before the commencement of any fixture.
 - Where possible, arrangements will be made for the payment to be paid electronically. Match Officials should agree with the home club in advance of matchday whether payment will be by cash or BACS / Electronic payment. If payment is by BACS / Electronic payment, a payment timeframe should be agreed, up to a maximum of 48 hours post-match. If payment is not received within the agreed timeframe, Referees should contact the appointments officer.
 - Referees should wear face coverings upon arrival at the ground and at all times until they start their warm up.
 - Match Officials should agree with both clubs for a designated warm up area, as per the below diagram



Social distancing measures should continue to be observed during the warm up

- Referees are advised to bring their own drinks and refreshments, in a named container.
- Match Officials are advised to arrive at the ground in tracksuit, polo shirt and trainers. This will allow for quick use of the changing rooms to change to warm up and match kit.
- Referees may be asked by the home club or hosting venue to participate in track and trace.
- The exchange/collecting of any paperwork (teamsheets, expense cards etc.) should be done outdoors at a distance, with minimal contact. This could be by using other methods, such as a photo, email or text.
- Referees should clean Assistant Referee flags before and after use.
- It is the responsibility of each player to ensure that their equipment is in order and complies with the Laws of the Game. Assistant referees are required to perform a cursory visual check of the players' equipment at the changing room door as the players exit the changing rooms to enter the field of play. There should be no physical contact with the player or equipment. Face masks will be worn by the assistant referees during this process. AR1 to check 'Home Team' and AR2 to check 'Away Team'. Once the check is completed the Referee and Assistant Referees should follow the walk out protocol as set out below observing social distancing measures where possible.



- The Respect hand shake pre match will be suspended until further notice
- Referees are encouraged not to handle the ball pre-match and use their feet or leave it to the teams.

During the match

- Referees are encouraged to referee the game as 'normal', without overthinking situations. The Laws of the Game and practical application, including the decision-making principles remain unchanged. Whilst there will be certain guidelines to consider, the principles and DNA of English refereeing have not changed. Competitive contact match play is now permitted, however, in all settings before and after matches all participants should practise social distancing.
- Clubs will need to provide seating outside of the dugout in order to provide adequate social distancing for substitutes and coaching staff. Technical areas are allowed to be extended for this purpose.
- When speaking to players in play or at stoppages, Referees should observe 'one-metre plus' distancing. Interactions with Referees and Assistant Referees should only happen with players observing 'one-metre plus' distancing.
- When issuing misconduct (yellow/red cards), Referees should observe 'one-metre plus' distancing.
- In situations where players approach and surround a match official in a confrontational manner, the referee should take appropriate action at the time of the incident and report any surrounding to The FA in the normal way for their consideration. Referees are encouraged to respond strongly to any player or club official who encroaches into their or their colleagues personal space contrary to Government guidelines. This may include taking appropriate disciplinary action.
- Referees are asked to avoid spitting, as well as reminding the players of the same responsibility. However, spitting on the floor is not an act of misconduct, unless it is at someone when it is punishable with a red card, as per the laws of the game. Other acts of spitting or similar actions e.g. nose-clearing are strongly discouraged for all participants. No disciplinary action is required for a player, substitute or club official in the event that such a general spitting action takes place. If advice is offered and clearly ignored, then the referee should make specific mention in their match report to the competition
- Coughing at someone, in an extreme case, where the referee is certain that someone deliberately, and from close range, coughed into the face of an opponent or match official. The Referee should take action under the Law 12 'Using offensive, insulting or abusive language and/or gestures' – the action of moving the head/mouth towards someone and then coughing would fall within the 'spirit' and general definition of a gesture which is "a movement of part of the body, especially a hand or the head, to express an idea or meaning". If the incident was not severe enough to merit a sending-off (RC), a caution (YC) could be issued for 'unsporting behaviour – shows a lack of respect for the game'. However, Referees should not be looking to punish 'routine' coughing (in the same way that there is no disciplinary sanction for spitting which is not at someone); action can only be supported where it is clear it was a clear act against someone else.
- The substitution procedure must be conducted, observing 'one-metre plus' distancing.
- Injury management of players should be verbal and observing 'one-metre plus' distancing.
- Match officials are not responsible for ensuring compliance with social distancing during goal celebrations, this is the responsibility of the player. Match officials should continue to

monitor goal celebrations with empathy for the game and take appropriate action only when necessary e.g. a caution where a shirt is removed.

- There is no change to the management of Temporary Dismissals (Sin Bins) for Match Officials. Any sin binned player, once off the field of play should comply with the guidance given to teams for substituted players to social distance. Compliance with this is the Teams responsibility.
- No club personnel will be permitted to wait in the tunnel area to engage with the match officials. Any breach of this should be included in the match report submitted by the referee
- **Referees are not responsible for any breaches of Covid-19 guidelines on matchday. These must be reported to The FA by the Referee in the post-match MOAS report.**

After the match

- Post-match handshakes must not take place.
- Club personnel, including managers/coaches, and any other persons must not enter the match officials changing room post-match or at any other point. Any breach of this should be included in the match report submitted by the Referee.
- Hands should be washed at the earliest opportunity and personal equipment should be wiped down with a disinfectant.
- Assistant Referee flags and any other shared equipment should be cleaned with disinfectant at the first opportunity.
- If showers are needed, they should be used by one person at a time, with the remaining officials maintaining a distance of at least 2m from the shower area.
- Face coverings should be worn by Referees at the first opportunity post-match until departing the ground.
- Should a Referee Developer (Observer, Coach etc.) have attended the fixture, their contact with the Match Officials post-match should be minimal and maintaining a social distance. Further contact can be established via phone or video conferencing.
- If cash payment is agreed, this should be done with minimal contact and always in an envelope.
- Post-match hospitality may be offered by clubs in accordance with the latest Government guidance, where bars and restaurants have been able to open since 4 July, which includes any food or drink facilities inside a clubhouse.
- All match officials, should leave the stadium independently, continuing to adhere to social distancing measures, and travel directly home.
- Match kit, Assistant Referee flag fabric and match attendance attire should be washed on return home at a temperature of at least 60 degrees.