

NHSC Guidelines for Return of Spectators from 7th June 2021

Purpose and Scope

This guidance document, which has been reviewed by the National Health & Safety Committee on behalf of the Gaelic Games Covid-19 Advisory Group, is intended for all those associated with the organisation of GAA, Camogie and LGFA matches for the 2021 season. These guidelines which are not exhaustive, outline the key safety and operational elements that Ground Management/Event Organisers should currently consider when planning games in the context of Covid-19.

The efforts of staff, volunteers, players, coaches, medics, backroom personnel, match officials, contractors, administrators, and spectators in 2020 in ensuring that the guidelines in this document were diligently followed was a key reason for the success of the season. The roll out of the vaccine programme and continued adherence to all relevant guidance and public health advice will be crucial in ensuring a safe and enjoyable year for everyone involved in our games.

The guidelines may change over the course of the coming weeks and months as new health advice emerges or as changes in Government regulations are issued. This is a working document and should serve merely as a template for a more detailed site-specific Risk Assessment and Event Management Plan for each venue and event. Although variations in government advice may differ between the two jurisdictions on the island, it is intended that most of these recommendations can be applied to grounds in all counties.

These guidelines should also be read in conjunction with Competition guidelines and any Ticketing Communications as they become relevant.

For specific guidance on the management of teams and backroom staff, please refer to the Covid-19 ***Return to Training and Play Guidelines for Inter-County Teams*** and the ***Guidelines on Safe Return to Gaelic Games*** as issued by the Gaelic Games Covid-19 Advisory Group in April, 2021. A list of other useful links is included at the end.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the members of the NHSC in reviewing this guidance document.

Shay Bannon
Chairman,
National Health & Safety Committee/Gaelic Games Covid-19 Advisory Group
Meitheamh, 2021

Section 1 Staff, Volunteers, Players, Officials and Contractors

Key Control Measures

Always refer to Government Public Health Advice and Guidance in relation to the application of measures in controlling the risk of Covid-19. Consider the key measures below in relation to all elements of event planning and implementation:

1. Social Distancing
2. Hand Sanitising
3. Face Coverings
4. Coughing Etiquette
5. Cleaning and Disinfection
6. Communications, including Signage
7. Contact Tracing

For further information on protecting yourself from Covid-19 please visit the HSE website ([here](#)) or in the 6 counties visit the NI Direct website ([here](#))

Covid-19 Officer

Ground Management/Event Organisers should designate a Covid-19 Officer for their ground/event. The Covid-19 officer will be responsible for implementing all Covid-19 measures and regulations and will liaise directly with all key stakeholders involved.

Event Management Plan

Most elements of the existing Event Management Plan will remain the same and the focus should be on adding Covid-19 specific measures. It is important that the updated plan is shared with all key internal and external stakeholders and that Ground Management/Event Organisers engage where necessary with these key stakeholders, e.g. the Local Authority, Health Service, and An Garda Síochána/PSNI ahead of planned fixtures.

Accreditation

Only pre-accredited individuals involved in the participation, running, delivery, and broadcasting (if relevant) of the event can be permitted into the ground and measures must be in place to ensure that non-essential personnel do not gain access to the controlled areas of the ground. Contact details of all accredited individuals, including a contact telephone number, must be retained by Ground Management/Event Organisers to enable contact tracing.

Key Personnel Include:

- Players, Backroom Staff and Match Officials
- Ground Management, Event Organisers and Administration Staff
- Medical Staff and Anti-Doping (if relevant)
- Press, Media and Broadcasters
- Stewards, Security and AGS
- Other Contractors such as Cleaners, Facilities and Catering

Staff Health Status Questionnaire and Induction

All persons will be expected to self-declare that they have not, within the past 14 days, been in contact with anyone with suspected or confirmed Covid-19, and that they are not displaying any symptoms of Covid-19. All staff, volunteers and contractors must complete an online pre-match registration training and health self-declaration form. Resources available ([here](#))

Face Coverings and Sanitation

It is imperative that all staff, volunteers and contractors wear face coverings in all areas of the ground with exceptions only for players and officials as per Gaelic Games Covid-19 Advisory Group Guidance. Ground management must make available enough hand wash basins or hand sanitiser units for staff and contractors in all relevant areas.

Signage

It is important that clear and adequate signage be in place to direct staff, match officials and teams to where they need to go. In areas where queues are expected such as entrances to the ground and accreditation points, floors should be marked with tape to show safe waiting distances in line with the government guidelines. Any one-way systems should be clearly marked.

Designated Areas

Designated seating or areas should be allocated for substitutes, backroom staff and relevant accredited staff and attendees. Designated areas should be clearly marked and adhere to current 2m social distance guidelines.

Dressing Rooms

For club games, dressing rooms must remain closed. This is to ensure the risk of players or backroom personnel being classified as close contacts is minimised. Players should arrive ready to warm-up and play and leave the ground once the relevant game is over.

Warm Up Area

Warm-ups and cool downs must take place outdoors with adequate space for social distancing. Indoor areas must not be used for warm-ups or cool downs. Social-distancing measures must always be adhered to when entering and exiting the pitch, during half-time and after the match.

Media

All relevant media personnel must have an up-to-date site-specific Covid-19 Risk Assessment before each event to include both indoor and outdoor activity. All media personnel including broadcasters, photographers, social media and journalists should complete the Gaelic Games online induction resource and health questionnaire. Media should work only within their own designated zones and avoid interaction with other staff, players, contractors, and spectators. Post-match interviews must take place pitch-side and social distancing must always be adhered to.

Travel and Parking

Adequate bus and car parking should be provided for all key stakeholders. Parking should be as close to the ground as possible. Passes should be distributed in advance where possible to ensure that only designated personnel are accommodated. Priority should be given to teams, backroom staff, match officials, emergency vehicles and those with special needs.

Section 2 Spectators

Communication

It is essential that clear and concise information be made available to spectators before they consider attending any games. This should involve the use of all available means of communication, from national to local level including official GAA, Camogie and LGFA websites, social media platforms, information on tickets and signage outside grounds. Important areas to address include:

- Spectators should be aware that in attending GAA, Camogie and LGFA games not all the risks posed from Covid-19 can be eliminated but that essential control measures have been put in place to reduce risks for spectators.
- Spectators must not attend games if they display any symptoms of Covid-19 and instead should phone their GP and follow public health advice.
- Individuals that are considered high risk or are in close contact with others who are considered high risk should not attend games ([click here](#))
- Individuals must be informed that much of the responsibility for managing Covid-19 risk remains with themselves, particularly in relation to social distancing, the wearing of face coverings and sanitation
- All spectators should be encouraged to bring their own hand sanitiser.
- The use of face coverings is required for all patrons over the age of 13 (including those who have been vaccinated)
- Spectators must not enter the field of play at any time, whether pre-match, at half-time and other intervals or after the final whistle or at end-of-match presentations
- Spectators should be advised to keep their own record of contacts at a match for potential tracing purposes.
- All spectators should be encouraged to download the HSE tracing app ([click here](#)). The link for the 6 counties is ([here](#))

Capacity

In accordance with the latest Government of Ireland guidelines 100 spectators will be permitted to attend Gaelic Games in the 26 Counties from Monday, June 7th. This number is in addition to players, team personnel, stewards or media attendees. Where a ground has a minimum accredited capacity of 5,000, a maximum of 200 spectators can attend. These figures do not apply to grounds in the 6 counties. These numbers are subject to change on an ongoing basis and should be reviewed accordingly. It should be noted that the current guidance also allows for the number of spectators to increase to 500 (safe capacity more than 5,000) and 200 (safe capacity less than 5,000) from 5th July subject to the public health situation at that time. Further increases are expected in August and beyond.

To ensure that government guidance is fully complied with, the number in attendance at grounds should be recorded by the Ground Management/Event Organisers hosting the match. A designated person should be appointed to carry out this task. Every ground should be risk assessed to ensure that it is capable of hosting the permitted number of spectators, with social distancing measures fully respected. Where control measures do not adequately mitigate the risks involved in running two or more games consecutively consideration should be given to operating single-header fixtures only in some grounds.

Social Distancing

It is imperative that all spectators (including those who have been vaccinated) adhere to social distancing guidelines when travelling to games, arriving at the ground, in the seated areas, on the concourses, using toilets and facilities, when leaving the ground and travelling home.

- The current public health guidance advises that a social distance of 2m be maintained between people. Future government guidance may change, and the Gaelic Game's assessment methods may change as a result.
- Where small groups of people are attending games together members of these groups should be from the same household.
- Insofar as possible, individuals and small groups should remain in the same area for the duration of the game, remain 2m apart from others and avoid intermingling with other individuals or groups.
- Signage should be in place to remind spectators to practice and maintain social distancing, particularly at '*pinch points*' identified in the risk assessment.
- Consideration should be given to the ingress and egress of patrons particularly when there is more than one game taking place. Where possible, separate entrance and exit points should be used to reduce crossflow of spectators and to help maintain safe distancing.
- There should be adequate space at the entry point to facilitate socially distanced queueing and adequate signage, ground markings and stewarding should be in place.
- It is essential that spectators do not congregate in groups in the vicinity of the grounds before, between and after games as social distancing and contact tracing measures will be compromised by such congregation and the potential risk of transmission will be higher.
- Under no circumstances should spectators enter the playing area before and after games or during intervals unless part of and the activation of the emergency plan.
- Celebrations involving '*pitch invasions*' are strictly prohibited.

Contact Tracing

All practical measures, e.g. through public announcements, signage, and stewards, should be taken to inform spectators attending matches to restrict contact with individuals and groups outside their own household once inside the ground. All spectators should be advised to download the contact tracing application. Ground management will be responsible for the contact-tracing records of staff, volunteers, players and officials but are not responsible for the contact-tracing records of spectators. All third-party contractors and media must have their own contact-tracing measures in place as per their risk assessment and avoid any close contact with spectators, players, and other staff where possible.

Ticketing

For games with an expected attendance of 200 or more it is recommended that entry be by pre-paid ticket only. Where possible grounds should operate reserved seating in line with social distancing guidelines. If a ground cannot operate a reserved seating policy measures must be in place to ensure there is social distancing between patrons inside the grounds. Key information should be available to spectators before they purchase a ticket to ensure they understand the specific Covid-19 control measures in place. There should be no re-admittance to the ground once a patron has left.

Sanitation and Toilets

A deep clean of the ground (including seating, toilets, staff areas, media areas etc.) should take place before and after each match day. Special attention should be given to high-contact surfaces such as door handles and light switches. On-going cleaning of some areas, e.g., toilets, entrances will be required, and hand-hygiene facilities should be provided throughout the ground. Grounds must ensure that there are adequate male and female toilet facilities available for the expected attendance.

Toilets should be well ventilated with a robust and documented cleaning regime in place. Hand sanitiser units should be located at entry points and at other key touch-point areas.

Medical Protocols

Should any patron present to staff or stewards with any symptoms of Covid-19 either before entering or whilst in the ground they should be advised to go home immediately and contact their GP. In the event that a patron presenting with symptoms is not in a position to go home, grounds should ensure there is a room available for that person to isolate whilst waiting on the HSE/Department of Health and Social Services to respond.

Patrons with Special Needs

Individuals that are considered high risk or are in close contact with others who are considered high risk should not attend games ([click here](#)). Consideration should be given to suitable entry and exit points for wheelchair users.

Catering

Where catering is provided, control measures must be put in place to minimise risk e.g. a queuing system, cashless options, take-away options etc. A detailed site-specific risk assessment must be carried out by the catering operator/ contractor in conjunction with Ground Management/Event Organiser.

Match Programmes

Match programmes should be made available in online format if possible. If printed versions are being sold a Covid-19 risk assessment must be carried out and appropriate control measures put in place.

Smoking Policy

It is recommended that smoking and vaping be prohibited in all areas inside the ground for all staff and spectators to avoid congregation in semi covered areas and for public health reasons.

Outside the Ground

To ensure that access to the ground is reserved for essential personnel and ticketed spectators only, it is essential that An Garda Síochána/PSNI be informed of all match-day arrangements. Additional stewarding/security will be required to ensure that only designated stakeholders and ticket holders are permitted access to the ground. It is imperative that all available means of communication be utilised by the event organisers to ensure that non-essential personnel including fans without tickets do not congregate in the vicinity of the ground before, during or after the match.

Useful Links

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/e5175-resilience-and-recovery-2020-2021-plan-for-living-with-covid-19/>

<https://www2.hse.ie/coronavirus/>

<https://learning.gaa.ie/covid19>

<https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-19-coronavirus> (NI)

<https://sgsa.org.uk/covid/>

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-regulations-guidance-work-business-hospitality-tourism-and-sport>