



RFU

RETURN TO RUGBY ACTIVITY

ROAD MAP - VERSION 1

04/06/20

INTRODUCTION

The Rugby Football Union's decision to suspend Rugby Union activity on March 16th and subsequently the decision to end the 2019/20 season activity on March 20th followed government and medical advice and was taken swiftly with the prime objective being to protect players, volunteers and clubs. Our sport has reacted brilliantly, not only closing down clubs quickly and efficiently but in the amazing community work that many have undertaken to support those in greatest need.

While a great deal of uncertainty still exists, the RFU is now in a position to set out a national roadmap of how we begin to think about returning to rugby activity. What still remains impossible is to set out specific timescales as to when this might happen. We will continue to be led on this by both government and medical advice. In doing this we will stay focused on what is right for rugby in England. We recognise that other sports may return quicker in England and that rugby may return earlier in other countries. We will continue to be informed by a) expert medical advice on the specific risk levels in our sport, primarily around the risks of Covid-19 transmission as a result of 1) close and face-to-face contact between individuals and 2) direct contact with other individuals, the ball and other equipment and b) government advice as to the risk levels in our country and particularly measures around social distancing, group activity and social gatherings.

The roadmap deals with return to rugby activity and not the reopening of clubhouses. As these are indoor spaces, they will be subject to separate government advice and guidance. In parallel, we will continue to develop advice and guidance on when and how clubhouses may reopen. The current position is that clubs are able to open indoor facilities only to allow access through the building to pitches, access to toilets and a facility (should appropriate licenses be held) for the serving of takeaway food and drinks.

Progress along the roadmap is totally dependent on how the Covid-19 pandemic develops and government advice. We will only move from one stage to another when guidance and advice says that it is safe to do so. As we move from stage to stage, detailed guidance will be issued. In recognising the major concern of clubs – retaining their players and preserving their revenue streams – we will also produce supporting advice and guidance as to how to focus on both of these, should we have to remain in a certain stage longer than maybe most would like to. It is also possible, should social distancing measures be strengthened at any time, that we reassess the situation and regress (for example, from Stage C to B).

ROAD MAP

The roadmap consists of six stages. It may be necessary to remain in any one stage for a sustained period of time, with or without minor amendments. It may also be possible to jump a stage:

- A. Individual training with one other person
- B. Individual training in small groups
- C. Larger group training with limited face-to-face or close contact
- D. Whole team training with increased face-to-face or close contact
- E. Whole team training in preparation to play matches
- F. Return to matches against other teams

We moved to stage A on May 13th when it became permissible for rugby club pitches to be opened and for two individuals to meet together, while remaining at least two metres apart, and engage in individual fitness-based training. The opening of pitches is at the discretion of rugby clubs (or other pitch operators) and indoor space in clubhouses may only be opened to provide through access to pitches, for access to toilets and to provide takeaway food/drinks.

The most recent government announcement on May 28th made it possible, from June 1st, to move to stage B. Here 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. Parents/carers observing a session at a distance from a safeguarding perspective is permitted, without them being part of the participating group. 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 RFU's guidance would be that no more than one group should be active on each quarter of any pitch.

It is possible that we may remain at stage B for a while with potential amendments coming within the stage to reflect any revised government position. This could include, for example, an enlargement of the number of people permitted.

A move to stage C would begin to see larger groups being able to train together, such as forwards or backs or age grade groupings and would likely involve more interactive activity other than simply fitness and conditioning work. We anticipate that this stage will still be subject to some social distancing measures and the training activities permitted would likely reflect a need to limit the total amount of close or face-to-face contact between individuals.

A move to stage D is likely to be triggered by a more significant relaxation of social distancing measures and when the risk element of typical rugby training activities that involve close and face-to-face contact and the typical physical contact of rugby training is deemed acceptable.

Stage E allows for preparation for return to play and to matches (NB – there may still be some adaptations/restrictions in place). A minimum of four weeks will be spent in stage E before any progression to stage F, to allow players to get match fit.

Stage F allows for a return to matches between players from different clubs (NB – there may still be some adaptations/restrictions in place).

IMPLICATIONS

There are many implications of a staged return to play. In relation to the 20/21 season these fall into four main areas:

1. **The competitive programme.** Depending on when it is possible for the season to commence there may need to be changes to the competitive programmes, including leagues, cup competitions and representative rugby. This may lead to a truncated league programme if the season does not start at its usual start point in early September. Two review groups are considering this in adult and age grade respectively and we anticipate being able to publish their recommendations later in June.
2. **Rugby activity in clubs.** We recognise the importance of clubs being able to offer rugby activity – both to retain their players (particularly at a time when other sports may be able to commence earlier) and to protect their revenue streams. Should it be necessary to delay the return to normal rugby activity it will be important to have alternatives in place. We are working on options to support this and aim to publish these by the end of June. This will include a range of things from alternative activity for mini and junior players on Sunday mornings through to potential temporary law amendments to the game to enable some activity to happen.
3. **Rugby activity in schools, colleges and universities.** Recognising the significant amount of rugby played in education settings we recognise the importance of maintaining a rugby offer when these institutions begin to return to some degree of normality. We are working on options and suggestions for this and would seek to have these available for the start of the 20/21 term/season.
4. **Clubhouses and indoor facilities.** As government regulations and guidance change in relation to indoor facilities we will amend our advice and guidance for clubs. Clubs are reminded of the need to undertake comprehensive risk assessments before reopening any facilities.

