



Scottish Golf

**Golf and the Government's
relaxing of lockdown restrictions
Phase 3 – 23 September update**

Introduction

These safe golf procedures focus on how golf clubs can make additional changes as part of the Government's Phase 3 relaxed restrictions and have been prepared in consultation with Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland. Any updates to the guidelines for Phase 3 are highlighted with *.

We urge everyone to remain respectful of the guidelines and to apply good individual judgement, to ensure that in time we can move to a fully phased reintroduction of the game as we all know and love it.

It should be noted that the Scottish Government continues to monitor the situation closely and has not ruled out the reintroduction of restrictions, which could see golf suspended once again if public health measures dictate, or if the guidelines are not followed.

It is therefore imperative that golf clubs take the necessary steps outlined in this document prior to play under Phase 3 and adhere to the guidelines, which could be subject to update or change at any time.

To support all golf clubs and golfers during this period, we have set up a designated area on the Scottish Golf website to ensure updates are clear and accessible to all. Click [here](#) to access our COVID-19 updates and through time additional phases of the re-introduction to golf in Scotland.

There may be a variance in guidelines and procedures throughout the UK, it is therefore important that golf clubs and golfers in Scotland follow procedures outlined by Scottish Golf and the Scottish Government.

Procedures for “Golf Clubs”

The following safe golf procedures set out the basis on how golf clubs can make additional changes and continue to provide a safe environment for golfers as outlined by the Scottish Government’s Phase 3 relaxation of restrictions. Procedures are subject to change, and we would ask all golf clubs to regularly check [here](#) for updates.

For Golf Clubs to continue operating their course they should ensure that:

- All activity is consistent with current guidance on health, physical distancing and hygiene – facilities should also make sure they can adapt to changes in guidance at short notice.

General Guidelines:

- Physical distancing rules outlined by the Scottish Government should always be adhered to - [Click Here](#)
- Members who are in the highest risk (shielding) group outlined by the Government can return to play, however the restrictions for individuals in this category are slightly different and could impact the size of group in which a shielding member can play. Categories are outlined - [Click Here](#)
- Members with colds or any symptoms of Covid-19 should not be allowed on the premises of the golf club.
- It is recommended that each golf club appoints a responsible person(s), referred to as the Covid officer, to act as the point of contact on all things related to Covid-19. The Covid officer must ensure that full risk assessments, processes and mitigating actions are in place. An e-learning module for Covid officers is available to support those undertaking the role – [Click Here](#)*
- Any golf club/course which is accessed on a regular basis by over 200 members or visitors, in a single day, must have in place a designated Covid officer and appropriate risk assessments. More detail is available in sportscotland’s Phase 3: Return to Sport and Physical Activity guidelines – [Click Here](#)*

Tee Times and Access to Course:

- Tee-times should be managed and booked in advance – there should be no turn up and play allowed.
- Daily timesheets and intervals are at the discretion of the golf club – the following groupings will be permitted during Phase 3:
 - Groups of up to four golfers with no restrictions on the number of households represented provided they adhere to the Government’s physical distancing rules.
- Competition play (including club open competitions) may resume in accordance with the updated guidelines and schedule 1 as attached to this document. Use of digital

- scorecards must be in accordance with Handicapping Regulations and full compliance is required to permit scores for qualifying purpose.
- For Open Competitions the following additional requirements apply:
 - All golf clubs/tournament organisers must have a named 'Covid Officer' who will complete documented risk assessments and ensure all appropriate mitigations are put in place by the venue before any open competition takes place.
 - Physical distancing:
 - Scottish Government guidelines must be in place before and after a competition takes place.
 - During competition it is recognised that physical distancing may not always be possible however physical contact between adult participants should always be avoided and competition risk assessments should consider mitigating actions to limit the risk of participants encroaching within 2 meters of each other.
 - Officials involved in running the competition should always physically distance.
 - Where an employee is involved in running the competition, relevant work placed risk assessments and consultation should take place in advance of any activity being undertaken.
 - Travel to and from competition must not mix households ie no car sharing
 - Participant numbers
 - Focus should be on delivering the competition with as few participants as possible in attendance at any given time, whilst still allowing the activity to run effectively.
 - No formal presentation ceremonies should take place during or after an event and the focus should be on reducing numbers in attendance at any one time.
 - No spectating should take place other than where a parent/guardian is supervising a child or vulnerable adult.
 - Competitions which do not follow approved guidance should not take place at this time.
 - For team event formats the following additional requirement applies (e.g. Winter League Matches, Interclub Matches)
 - For adults, a maximum of 30 people including coaches and officials can combine to essentially create a 'competition bubble' as long as physical distancing measures are maintained. Competition organisers should ensure that no two 'bubbles' come into contact with each other at any time throughout the day.*
 - Foursomes and Greensomes format
 - Each partner should use their own golf ball, which is only handled by that player. For example, the player teeing off from hole 1 is the only player that touches the ball from teeing off through to completion of the hole. The partner teeing off from hole 2 does likewise with their ball.
 - When marking and replacing the ball on the putting green this should be conducted by the partner the ball belongs to. Under this situation (or any other where the ball must be replaced) the original ball must be used and must not be substituted by another ball.

- Under the Rules of Golf, a partner is permitted to drop the side's ball in taking relief. It is also permissible to drop another ball when taking relief.
- Tee timesheets & records of all visitors should be kept for a period of at least 6 weeks to assist with contact tracing should the need arise.

Clubhouse, Equipment and Course Set-up:

- Starter facilities can operate, providing that all physical distancing measures are adhered to and appropriate hygiene measures are put in place. Retail operations of a professional shop can recommence.
- Risk assessment – should be carried out and documented.
- Physical distancing – the 2m rule applies to all these settings. Facilities need to adapt to encourage physical distancing.
- Workforce – ensure the relevant workplace guidance is followed for staff, and any existing health and safety advice is maintained and aligned.
- Face Coverings – Golf Clubs should ensure that golfers wear face coverings when indoors, the only exception being when using hospitality services.*
- Golf clubs may offer indoor hospitality with physical distancing, increased hygiene routines, controls on the number of people and adherence to curfews. More detail is available in the governments tourism and hospitality guidance [Click Here](#).*
- Cleaning – hand and respiratory hygiene are core measures and provision should be made for these. Clear guidance and plans are needed for cleaning facilities and equipment, and waste disposal. More detail is available in the governments non-healthcare guidance [Click Here](#) and we would encourage more detail to be provided/signposted to on this.
- Buggies, electric or pull trolleys, clubs should not be available for hire unless safe sanitising practices can be guaranteed.
- Caddy services may resume, providing all physical distancing and hygiene measures are adhered to. There are no restrictions on the number of households a caddy can have contact with per day but services should be limited to carrying of bag, providing advice only and not passing golf clubs to the player.*
- Where practice putting greens are open, the holes should be filled in, covered, or the cup raised and procedures for use should be considered, for example giving priority of use to the players in the next group due to tee off.
- Signage should be erected to reinforce physical distancing rules.
- Hand sanitisers should be made available.
- Bins may be reintroduced as long as strict sanitisation and staff safety can be maintained.
- Water fountains may be reintroduced as long as they do not allow face-to-tap drinking. Water fountains should only be used to refill personal bottles or disposable containers.

- Ball washers, rakes, benches, divot boxes and non-essential furniture should be removed from the course. Where such fixtures are permanent, they should be taken out of use.
- Holes/cups should be altered to facilitate easy retrieval of golf balls.

Locker Rooms

- Access to indoor locker rooms and storage areas is permitted for the dropping off and collection of sports equipment or clothing. The golf club should ensure mitigating actions are put in place to minimise the risk of virus transmission including physical distancing, hygiene and cleaning measures.

Changing Facilities

- Use of changing rooms and showering facilities should be avoided where possible, although they may be made available for participants with disabilities or special needs.
- Sports facility operators may open toilets for public use if they follow the guidelines outlined on the Scottish Government website, [Click Here](#).
- For detailed facility guidance including a checklist that covers use of changing rooms, showers and toilets [Click Here](#).

Advance Planning and Communication with Golfers:

- Agree to put in place proper management procedures to ensure golfers comply to this protocol.
- Communication to all members that they should follow the “Procedures for Golfers.” Provide golfers with regular updates on any changes made.
- Members are instructed not to touch the flag/flagstick, or the flagstick should be removed.

Procedures for “Golfers”

The following procedures have been established to ensure a safe environment for all golfers and all on-site staff, as outlined by the Scottish Government’s Phase 3 relaxation of restrictions. Not only are Golfers expected to comply with the rules they must also observe the government and public health restrictions [Click Here](#). Both sets of regulations / procedures are subject to change, we would ask all golfers to regularly check with Scottish Golf and their Golf Clubs for regular updates.

To ensure the safe return to golf in Scotland, golfers should adhere to the guidelines:

In advance of play:

- If you are in the highest risk (shielding) group outlined by the Government, then you can now play with up to one other household.
- If you are ill or have any symptoms of COVID-19 then stay at home.
- Schedule your tee-time in the manner prescribed by your golf club. Under no circumstances should you arrive at the club without booking in advance.
- Tee group sizes will be determined by the Golf Club.
- Ensure you have enough golf balls, tees etc. as the facilities at the Golf Club may be closed and you should not exchange equipment with other members.
- Golfers from different households should travel separately.*
- Aim to arrive at the Club no more than 15 minutes prior to play.
- Park your car in such a way as to facilitate physical distancing.
- Change your shoes in the car park

On the course:

- Do not arrive at the first tee more than 5 minutes before your allotted tee time.
- Always observe physical distancing rules on the course.
- With no rakes allowed on the course, golfers to make their very best efforts to smooth the sand using their club and/or their feet.
- Following play of a hole, do not enter the next teeing area until the all members of the group in front have played their tee-shots and exited the teeing area.
- Do not share equipment, food or drink with other players during your round.
- Do not use on-course water fountains, ball cleaners etc.
- Do not touch the flag or flagstick. Putt with the flagstick in and remove your own ball from the hole. Remember not every putt needs to be holed out in casual golf.

After your round:

Golfers may access indoor locker rooms and storage for the dropping off and collection of sports equipment or clothing.

Use golf clubs indoor hospitality facilities while adhering to the Government's physical distancing rules.

Face coverings must be worn when using all indoor spaces in the clubhouse, the only exception being when using hospitality services.

In addition, following guidelines should be observed:

- Use toilet facilities at home before you leave.
- Bring your own hydration / food to the course.
- Bring your own hand sanitiser to the course and use regularly during the round.

Closing Remarks

Scottish Golf will remain in regular dialogue with Scottish Government, with regards to the procedures outlined in this document that are for playing golf during Phase 3 of relaxed restrictions.

Golf Clubs are asked to note that the restrictions for permitted number of households to interact, physical distancing and hygiene are mandatory aspects that all facilities must adhere to. We have been made aware of a small number of clubs who are not following these rules and in doing so are potentially risking the position for whole golfing community. It is also important to remember that household interactions and group sizes differ indoor and outdoor and both clubs and players need to be aware of their responsibilities in adhering to these.

We must remember that it is our shared duty as custodians of golf to ensure that we all play our part in following the protocols set out in this document to ensure that the phased return to the game is managed in line with Scottish Government guidelines.

Given the fluidity of the current situation there may be a requirement to update and re-issue this guidance at regular intervals to reflect future government advice. In addition, if local lockdown restrictions are enforced then further amendments to the above protocols could be required.

Schedule 1

R&A - Rules of Golf Related Matter

For handicap qualifying competitions, please refer to Scottish Golf's support document [here](#). This will be a requirement for all handicap qualifying competitions in Scotland.

Until further notice, R&A have released the following provisions as acceptable on a temporary basis:

Scoring in Stroke Play (Rule 3.3b)

- In view of concerns around handling and exchanging scorecards (which may be in paper or electronic form as already provided in the Rules), on a temporary basis, Committees may choose to allow methods of scoring in stroke play that do not strictly comply with Rule 3.3b, or do not comply with the normal methods used under Rule 3.3b. For example:
 - Players may enter their own scores on the scorecard (it is not necessary for a marker to do it).
 - It is not necessary to have a marker physically certify the player's hole scores, but some form of verbal certification should take place.
 - It is not necessary to physically return a scorecard to the Committee provided the Committee can accept the scores in another way.
- As provided in the Rules of Golf, scorecards can be electronic, which could include emailing or texting scores to the Committee if acceptable to the committee.

Flagsticks

Committees may choose to adopt the following policies on a temporary basis:

- Require that players leave the flagstick in the hole at all times. It is a matter for the Committee to decide whether it establishes this policy by way of a Code of Conduct or Local Rule, and whether it provides a penalty under the Code of Conduct or for a breach of the Local Rule.
- Not have flagsticks at all.
- As a temporary provision, flagsticks can be used for the purpose of player safety which do not meet the specifications in Part 8 of the Equipment Rules. For example, a Committee may temporarily decide to use a flagstick that has an added movable platform or tray to help prevent touching the flagstick when removing the ball from the hole.
- Allow players to centre the flagstick in a safe manner which does not involve using the hand, even when wearing a glove or using a towel (for example, by using a club). The centring of the flagstick may be allowed while another player putts (this may be desirable in windy conditions when the flagstick is required to be left in the hole and is leaning towards the player making the stroke).

Hole and Definition of Holed

- A method of inserting the hole liner may be used that means that all of the ball does not fall below the surface of the putting green and can be easily retrieved by handling the ball only. But if any of the following provisions are used, play in such circumstances is not in accordance with the Rules of Golf:
 - Treating a ball as holed or holed with the next stroke if it is within a certain distance of the hole.
 - Having the hole liner sitting above the surface of the putting green and treating a ball as holed if it strikes the liner.

- Treating a ball as holed when it has bounced out of the hole for any reason (for example, when it has bounced off the flagstick, a tray attached to the flagstick or the hole liner).

Bunkers

- If rakes have been removed from the course, or if the Committee has requested rakes not be used, it is recognised that bunkers may not be smoothed as well as when there are rakes on the course. Players should be requested to smooth bunkers using their feet or a club, which was the method used to smooth bunkers until relatively modern practice of having rakes on the course was introduced. This may not provide an ideal lie in a bunker but coping with imperfect lies, whether in a bunker or elsewhere, is a normal part of the game.
- But if the Committee decides that, even with players making their best efforts to smooth the sand, the condition of the bunkers is likely to be so abnormal that it will be clearly unreasonable for players to play the ball as it lies, the Committee may use one of the following options:
 - Change the status of the bunkers to be part of the general area and declare them all ground under repair.
 - Introduce preferred lies in bunkers, for example allowing a place in the bunker within one club-length not nearer to the hole than where the ball came to rest.
- But if the following provision is used, play in such circumstances is not in accordance with the Rules of Golf:
 - Allowing a ball to be lifted, the bunker to be smoothed and the ball to be replaced.

Note: A Committee should consult its handicapping authority for guidance on whether scores are acceptable for handicapping purposes.