On the 28th May 2020, the Prime Minister announced that groups of up to six people will be able to meet outdoors in England from 1st June 2020.

This was followed by an announcement on the 1st June 2020, by the Department for Digital Culture Media & Sport (DCMS) in conjunction with Sport England. They issued a press release confirming people will be able to exercise outside with up to five others from different households from 1st June 2020, provided that strict social distancing guidelines are followed. A link to that release can be found [here](#).

The updated public guidance on a phased return for outdoor sport and recreation was also released on 1st June 2020 and a link to that guidance can be found [here](#).

The public guidance included a reference to team sports which for ease is set out below:

**Team sports**

People who play team sports can now meet to train together and do things like conditioning or fitness sessions, but they must be in wholly separate groups of no more than 6 and must remain 2 metres apart at all times. While groups could practice ball skills like passing and kicking, equipment sharing should be kept to a minimum and strong hand hygiene practices should be in place before and after. Physical contact with anyone outside of your household is not permitted, therefore playing of any games (small sided or full) is also not permitted at this time. Avoid meeting in groups of 6 in busy or overcrowded areas, if it is so busy that it is not possible to maintain social distancing at all times.

Given the Prime Minister’s announcement, the press release from DCMS and updated government guidance on a phased return for outdoor sport and recreation, the RFL, having sought further guidance from Sport England, released an infographic on 2nd June 2020 summarising the Government’s public guidance and how it could apply to Rugby League. A copy of that infographic is set out below (amended 12th June):
In addition to the infographic, the RFL released a statement outlining the key points of the phased return for outdoor sport published by the Government, together with a commitment that more guidance would follow ahead of the potential for small group activity recommencing on the 8th June 2020.

Since the issuing of the new Government guidelines and the RFL’s announcement that small group activity can take place from the 8th June there has understandably been a desire for Clubs and individuals to recommence sessions as soon as possible. Whilst the RFL understands that there is excitement within the game, as this is seen as the first step towards a return, before considering any return to small group activity the RFL must stress to all Club committees that they should balance the natural desire to recommence activity against the following:-

- That the decision to re-commence with these small group activity sessions is a decision for Club committees, rather than individual coaches to take.

- If Clubs, having considered the position of their Club and the logistics involved with return to small group activity, feel that they are at risk of failing to adhere to Government guidelines, or it is too soon to commence with these sessions safely, that is fine and understandable and they are under no pressure to return.

- Whilst the possibility of small group activity is a positive step, such activity should not be viewed as the start of pre-season. No dates are planned for a return to full contact Rugby League. Whilst it is not possible to put a date on a return to full contact, it is not considered imminent and will be dependent on social distancing rules being relaxed further.

- The individual needs of coaches, players and parents should be considered. Nobody should feel pressurised into returning.

- Compliance with the guidance, especially that of social distancing, will be more challenging for some age groups than others, particularly those playing Primary Rugby League.

- Numerous Clubs are successfully delivering on-line virtual sessions linked to #skilltoplay #fittoplay and virtual-clubs. Not all players will be able to take part in small group activity sessions. Therefore, Clubs should consider whether on-line virtual activity potentially combined with some limited small group activity is more appropriate at this time, giving coaches the opportunity to have some contact time with players, alongside the virtual sessions.

- There are considerable regional differences in the R-value, with many Rugby League clubs in areas where the R-value is close to one. If the R-value is higher than one, then the number of cases of infection increases exponentially, increasing the risk of restrictions being re-introduced.

The RFL are currently working on further guidance for Clubs, leagues and parents and will continue to communicate and share this as this is released. Clubs should ensure that a senior Club official is a member of the Our Learning Zone ‘Club Leaders’ section, accessed through the Our League app which provides an opportunity for Clubs to share best practice and be kept up to date with current guidelines. For details of how to join please contact Leaguenetsupport@rfl.co.uk
If Clubs do wish to recommence activity then the guidance below should be followed to ensure that the phased return to Rugby League is not halted by any infections brought about by a failure to adhere to, or fully understand, the guidance that has been issued by the Government, Sport England and the RFL.

This approach is essential as Sport England themselves have stated that they encourage all organisations with a role in this to take time to look at how they can operate effectively and safely within the six-person limit, while strictly adhering to public health guidance around hygiene and social distancing. Further Sport England guidance is expected by 12th June 2020.

We have reviewed the government guidance and would ask Clubs to consider the following:

**Insurance**

The RFL has received confirmation from Bartlett’s, the RFL’s insurance brokers, that Personal Accident and Public Liability insurance remains in place at no cost to Clubs whilst training activity is undertaken. However, Clubs must ensure that they follow the latest government advice and keep records that they are doing so. For further information on what cover is in place please visit the RFL website [here](#).

**Risk Assessments**

The advice states that you must ‘conduct a thorough Risk Assessment’ before engaging in any sessions. This should include any ‘particular considerations for U18s and Vulnerable Adults’.

A template risk assessment can be found on the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) website accessed through the link below. Given the considerable differences between clubs in terms of size, facilities etc it is not practical to produce a 'one size fits all' Risk Assessment template. Some clubs should already have Risk Assessments in place which can be modified to reflect the current circumstances.

In addition to risks relating directly to small group activity which need to be assessed in accordance with government guidance, clubs need to assess and manage the risks of COVID-19 as an employer or as an operator of a sports or leisure facility. You have a legal responsibility to protect workers, customers, and users from risk to their health and safety. This means you need to think about the risks they face and do everything reasonably practicable to minimise them, recognising you cannot eliminate the risk of COVID-19.

You must make sure that the risk assessment for your business addresses the risks of COVID-19, using this guidance to inform your decisions and control measures. A risk assessment is not about creating huge amounts of paperwork, but rather about identifying sensible measures to control the risks in your venue. Your risk assessment will help you decide whether you have done everything you need to. There are interactive tools available to support you from the HSE at [https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/index.htm](https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/index.htm)

We have also created a template risk assessment for Clubs to use when accessing any risks. This can be found [here](#).
Practical Coaching Considerations

It is permissible for coaches to organise a skills and fitness based session that has two or more groups of six (including the coach) involved in the session, as long as the groups of six are kept separate, everyone is socially distancing and strict hygiene measures are in place with any equipment.

The following must be adhered to and/or considered:

- The guidance outlined by The RFL [here];
- Groups must be wholly separate groups of no more than 6 people and must remain 2m apart at all times;
- Equipment sharing should be kept to a minimum (players must bring their own water bottle etc. and have designated areas to put any of their own items);
- Balls can be used although should be kept to a minimum and strong hand hygiene practice must be in place at all times. No tackle shields or bags are permitted.
- If the coach is providing equipment which is being shared/re-used, then they must be thoroughly cleaned before, between and after sessions. This is in accordance with the government guidance.
- Further advice for coaches can be found [here]

The RFL Coaching department is currently preparing session plans to assist coaches. These will be issued week commencing 8th June.

General Health and Hygiene Considerations

In line with Government advice Clubs should also put steps or messages in place to ensure that those involved in any activity at Clubs:

- Do NOT attend any Rugby League facility at any stage if in the past 14 days they:
  - Have been unwell or experienced cold and flu like symptoms;
  - Have been in contact with a known or suspected case of COVID-19;
  - Have experienced respiratory symptoms (even mild);
  - Are considered high risk, including the elderly and those with pre-existing medical conditions; or
  - Have been asked to isolate by NHS ‘Test and Trace’ or they are considered as extremely vulnerable on health grounds (in which case they should follow the specific advice for these groups: further advice can be found [here])
- Wash their hands thoroughly before and after sessions (and also when returning home);
- Use hand sanitiser at intervals (N.B. Children, particularly younger ones, are not always as aware about good hygiene, so special attention should be paid to children’s hand hygiene.) More advice can be found [here]

There is further guidance on cleaning available [here]

Facility Considerations

The RFL will be issuing further advice on reopening facilities in due course. However, for now, and in line with Government guidance, Clubs should:

- Ensure permission is in place from the owner to use the facility, which could include local Councils.
- Prepare the facility and playing surface whilst maintaining social distancing, including any additional line marking, infrastructure changes and ground signage to support social distancing, cleaning and hygiene protocols;
• Establish meeting areas and venue entry and exit procedures;
• Section off any restricted areas;
• Establish a training timetable that complies with participant number restrictions;
• Prepare attendance sheets for all participants attending training;
• Ensure all participant and volunteer registration details are up to date and are registered on LeagueNet;
• Ensure all volunteers are familiar with the ‘Return to Play’ protocols;
• Ensure that, if a Club owns its own facility with changing rooms or facilities, this remains closed other than toilets and throughways;
• Ensure that additional cleaning processes are put in place which will be required; in particular in the toilets, throughways and areas for accessing and leaving the facility (e.g. wipe down areas on contact, additional hand washing/sanitising facilities, use of paper towels where possible etc.);
• Consider the need for additional signage.

Additional Government advice can be found here and specifically in relation to Legionella risks here

Communications

There is an obvious need to clearly communicate with all relevant parties and therefore the following guidance should be considered:

• Need to communicate clearly and regularly with parent, coaches and volunteers – setting out what is being done to manage risk;
• Ascertained the desire of coaches/parents/participants to attend sessions. Is there enough interest to make these sessions viable?
• Communicate how and when people can safely access the facility (if relevant through a booking system);
• Consider and communicate whether or not there will be a charge for these sessions. It is noted that some Clubs have stopped memberships/subscription fees. Will the Club require additional funding to support the implementation of these guidelines and/or to support the financial viability of the Club?

First Aid Provision

There is no requirement in the RFL Community Game Operational Rules for First Aiders to be present at training. This would apply to small group activity now permitted by Government.

Whilst the type of activity envisaged clearly carries less risk of injury than a full contact-based training session, the possibility of injury or illness remains. In the event, if any volunteer needs to breach the 2m social distancing guidelines to administer First Aid then the following guidance should be followed: -

• Government guidance here
• Red Cross guidance here

It is also recommended that Clubs have disposable gloves and face masks available for volunteers should they need to breach the 2m guidelines to administer First Aid. The club’s Risk Assessment should reflect this.
**Safeguarding**

The following areas should be taken into consideration for all U18’s and Vulnerable Adults:

- Continue to comply with RFL Safeguarding Policies and Procedures;
- Parents/Carers must be in sight of the session in which their child is participating, whilst observing social distancing guidelines (and parents/carers must be provided with clear messaging about this i.e. that they are responsible for the supervising of their children at all times and to reinforce the guidelines for social distancing etc. themselves);
- The psychological impact that COVID-19 may have had on children and the difficulty that some may have with returning to activity. Coaches/Clubs will need to consider how to approach these situations and whether any adjustments need to be made. Outlining what will happen at training and providing children/vulnerable adults with a sense of safety will be part of this;
- The RFL are working on additional guidance for Club Welfare Officers and this will be shared as soon as possible with all Club Welfare Officers.
- Children, particularly younger ones, are not always as aware about good hygiene, so special attention should be paid to children’s hand hygiene. More advice can be found here
- Ensure dialogue with children and young people to make sure they are comfortable and happy to return to Rugby League training.

The RFL continues to work closely with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) and Sport England in order to provide good practice guidance for those responsible for and wishing to commence with delivering different aspects of community Rugby League and will share further information as soon as possible. We are also in regular communication with the RFL’s Clinical Advisory Group. The situation and guidance remain fluid and subject to amendment and alteration at short notice depending on the current circumstances.

It is important that Clubs review all the guidance notes and decide whether they have relevant provisions in place to host small group activity. Ultimately it is a Club’s decision, having considered the Club’s specific requirements.

All clubs via either the Chairman, Open Age or Junior Secretary should notify the RFL via **competitions@rfl.uk.com** which teams have been authorised by the club to recommence small group activity. No coaches should deliver any small group activity unless they have permission to do so from the club.

To keep up to date on the latest information please visit **https://www.rugby-league.com/coronavirus**