



**RETURN TO PLAY**

**PROTOCOLS**

Prepared for AFL Victoria Affiliated Community  
Football Leagues & Clubs  
Updated July 1, 2020



## RETURN TO PLAY PROTOCOLS

### **BACKGROUND:**

Returning to play in a safe, hygienic and controlled manner is paramount to the AFL. The safety and wellbeing of our participants is our number one priority.

Following the Victorian State Government advice around the return of community sport, AFL Victoria endorses a return to club sanctioned training and matches provided participants follow the relevant Victorian State Government guidelines and AFL Victoria's COVID-19 guidelines are implemented. In advance of returning to training and competitions, we encourage Leagues, Clubs and volunteers to digest the protocols, formulate an education and implementation plan for their Club following which they would go through an education period and prepare their Club to return to play safely.

We will continue to work with the State Government to ensure alignment with their advice, with hygiene and safety protocols firmly in place.

Our primary focus is preparing to return to play in a safe environment in a well-prepared and educated manner. In order for the return to play to be successful, and in line with Government advice, it is essential that Clubs and individuals work within the timelines and protocols and do not move ahead of the level and restrictions in place.

AFL Victoria will continue to follow any direction from State Government and align with the AIS Framework for Rebooting Sport, so that any resumption of community football activity in Victoria does not compromise the health of individuals or the community. A rollback to tighter activity restrictions is a possible scenario. If this occurs, AFL Victoria will communicate any changes to affiliates as soon as practicably possible through all AFL Victoria's channels.

This document relates specifically to senior and junior community football in Victoria, including umpires.

**If these protocols cannot be achieved, training and competitions should not proceed.**

**AFL Victoria strongly recommends those attending training and games download the COVIDsafe app**

## **AFL VICTORIA AFFILIATED COMMUNITY CLUBS CAN RETURN TO PLAY IF THE FOLLOWING GUIDELINES AND PROTOCOLS ARE MET**

1. Clubs/teams and umpiring groups/associations must strictly adhere to the current Victorian Government restrictions.
2. Only spectators necessary to support participation should attend training and competitions, and must abide by current group gathering restrictions
3. Each Club must nominate at least one COVID Safety Officer who must undertake the free Australian Government online [COVID-19 Infection Control Training](#) prior to recommencement of Club activity. Certificate of completion needs to be emailed to your League Administrator prior to the commencement of activity. Clubs are encouraged to have multiple people take ownership of this role and share the responsibility. In addition, we strongly recommend the COVID Safety Officer completes the [AFL's COVID Protocols Course](#) to assist with interpreting the protocols involved in Returning to Community Football in a COVID-19 environment.
4. A log, or register, using the approved AFL Victoria template, League template, or an online app or similar, which clearly identifies all participants and officials in attendance at each training session must be maintained and available upon request by the League, AFL Victoria or health authorities.
5. Sporting clubs that operate a restaurant, café or canteen within its facility were able to reopen with limited dine-in arrangements from June 1, provided the club strictly adhered to the restrictions on hospitality venues. Detailed guidelines of the requirements for cafes, restaurants and food and drink facilities to reopen are now available on the [Business Victoria website](#).
6. Clubs operating a bar facility should also take guidance from the [Business Victoria website](#).

### **FROM JUNE 22 FOR PEOPLE AGED 18 YEARS AND UNDER**

1. Full-contact training and full-contact competitions may resume for people 18 years and under without any limit on the number of participants, although gathering rules apply to spectators.
2. For people 18 years and under, groups of 20 are no longer relevant and full squads can train together.
3. Communal facilities, such as showers and changing rooms, can open provided participants abide by the Victorian State Government guidelines to limit close contact between individuals and no more than 20 people per indoor space. Signage must be displayed at the entry to each indoor space outlining the maximum number of people allowed at a single time.
4. Clubrooms at community football venues can have up to 20 people per indoor space, as long as the four square metre rule is met. Signage must be displayed at the entry to each indoor space outlining the maximum number of people allowed at a single time.
5. Spectators for training and competitions must abide by public gathering restrictions – spectators should be in groups of no more than 10 people in open, outdoor venues and spread out around the ground or venue. Spectators must keep 1.5 meters apart.
6. Gathering limits will not apply to participants and those reasonably necessary to conduct the training or competition (e.g. umpires, coaches).

### **FROM JUNE 22 FOR PEOPLE AGED OVER 18 YEARS**

1. Small outdoor non-contact group training can continue to occur in groups of up to 20.
2. Clubs/teams are to strictly adhere to a maximum of two (2) groups of 20 participants per group. The groups of 20 do not include a coach or the minimum number of support staff who are reasonably required to manage the activity as per the current Victorian Government restrictions.
3. Communal facilities, such as showers and changing rooms, can open provided participants abide by the Victorian State Government guidelines to limit close contact between individuals and no more than 20 people per indoor space. Signage must be displayed at the entry to each indoor space outlining the maximum number of people allowed at a single time.
4. Two groups of 20 can utilise the same oval provided they do not operate closely together, and the oval is split into two zones.
5. The two training groups of 20 per oval are not permitted to interact.
6. Strictly no physical contact between players can occur (i.e. no tackling, no bumping, no marking contests).
7. Social distancing of 1.5m must be maintained at all times.





## RETURN TO PLAY PROTOCOLS

### FROM MID JULY FOR PEOPLE AGED OVER 18 YEARS

From mid-July – subject to the advice of Victoria’s Chief Health Officer and the continued management of the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), adults can resume full-contact training from 13 July and full-contact competition from 20 July.

#### FROM JULY 13

1. Adults (i.e. 19 years and older) can resume full-contact training.
2. Intra-club practice matches are considered as full-contact training and can occur from July 13.
3. Inter-club practice matches are considered competition and cannot occur until July 20.
4. As full-contact training is allowed, groups of 20 are no longer relevant and full squads can train together.

#### FROM JULY 20

5. Adults (i.e. 19 years and older) can resume full-contact competition.

### HYGIENE PROTOCOLS FOR RETURN TO PLAY

The following general hygiene practices for participants and official always apply, in line with Government advice.

#### ILLNESS

- If you, or people you have been in contact with are sick, do not attend training or games and advise your football coach who is responsible for informing the COVID Safety Officer.
- Generally, you should be tested for COVID-19 if you develop fever or respiratory symptoms.
- Stay home and seek medical treatment when you are sick. Do not attend if unwell.
- People who present to training with symptoms to be sent home immediately.
- Any person wishing to attend training or games that has underlying health conditions or is considered a vulnerable person should consult with a healthcare professional prior to attending.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

#### POSTIVE COVID-19 CASES

- Localised outbreaks may require clubs to restrict activity and clubs must be ready to respond accordingly. The detection of a positive COVID-19 case in a club will result in a standard public health response, which could include quarantine of a whole team or large group, and close contacts, for the required period.
- Facilities may be closed on the instruction of the local Public Health Authority or the Chief Health Officer. Re-opening of the training facility should only occur after close consultation with the local Public Health Authority.
- It is not possible to provide certainty around the impact on competitions of a positive COVID-19 case as the Public Health Authority will review each case.
- Where there is a positive COVID-19 case, the player or official must notify their Club immediately. The Club must notify their League who will notify AFL Victoria and the Public Health Authority. The Club and League must then follow the advice of the Public Health Authority or Chief Health Officer who will determine requirement for quarantining individuals, groups or teams (and their close contacts) and whether the training facility can be used.

#### HYGEINE

- Alcohol-based hand sanitisers must be available for all team training sessions and on the interchange bench, with players encouraged to use prior, during and following training/games.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser.
- Wash or sanitise your hands before eating.
- No high fives or handshakes, and other physical contact.

- Do not share drink bottles, helmets or equipment that touches your face or head.
- Cover your mouth to cough or sneeze (using your elbow).
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Spitting and clearing of nasal/respiratory secretions is not permitted.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect facilities before use (prior to player arrival).
- Clubs must ensure that frequently touched surfaces and objects are cleaned regularly when in use (e.g. tables, countertops, light switches, doorknobs, and cabinet handles) using a regular household detergent and water. In some instances, change rooms may need to be cleaned more regularly and clubs should be monitoring or adjusting cleaning arrangements as required.
- Avoid removing mouthguards other than when necessary and take care when removed that no contact is made with another person.
- Disinfect mouth guards after each session and ensure they are appropriately stored.
- Minimise use of communal facilities (toilet or medical use only with strict social distancing).
- Showers at home where possible.
- Hygiene posters displayed (templates available on [Toyota AFL Club Help website](#))

### **FIRST AID PERSONNEL/TRAINERS**

- All club/team First Aid Personnel/Trainer should complete the Australian Government COVID-19 infection control training available online via <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/covid-19-infection-control-training>
- Medical officials must follow protocols as outlined in infection control training (i.e. disposal of gloves in between treatments, wearing of face masks).
- If you are using shared equipment it should be cleaned and sterilised after you use it.

### **EQUIPMENT**

- Strictly no sharing of personal items such as water bottles, food or towels.
- Personal items need to be easily distinguishable, labelled and kept separate.
- Use your own equipment where possible and minimise sharing of equipment.
- Shared equipment, including Club provided footballs, must be wiped with antibacterial wipes or alcohol-based sanitiser prior to and after training and games (do not immerse footballs in water).
- All playing kit and equipment to be cleaned and disinfected between training sessions and games.
- Sports medicine staff who share medical equipment must sterilise them between uses, which includes disposable cover/sheet to be used for player massage tables.
- Treatment equipment to be wiped down and sanitised before and after each use.
- No sharing of food (e.g. lollies, fruit bowls).
- Where modified rules are played, swapping of wristbands is prohibited (players must have their own wristband).
- No sharing of officials' bibs or training bibs
- No sharing of headsets or computer screens/ipads.
- Match football will be wiped with antibacterial wipes or alcohol-based sanitiser at each break in the match.
- Entry and exit points to the playing surface (e.g. gates) should be cleaned between training sessions and matches.

### **CLEANING**

- Take all reasonable steps to ensure that frequently touched surfaces accessible to members of the public, including tables, bars, toilets and handrails, are cleaned regularly including when visibly soiled and post events or between groups by wiping the surface with a disinfectant that has anti-viral properties.
- Cleaning principles can be found via the Australian Government Department of Health [website](#) which should help as a reference point to what cleaning guidelines are recommended.

## **STRATEGIES TO MANAGE TRAINING AND GAMES**

- Staggered training and game schedules must be adopted where multiple teams are using the same ground/facilities (e.g. start times, different days, potential of different locations, time between games).
- Only players and officials are allowed on the ground during matches, including breaks, and at training.
- No spectators on grounds during breaks or after the match.
- Use adequately spaced markers on the floor in toilets to promote physical distancing.
- Ensure toilets are in working condition with soap provided and increase cleaning as appropriate.
- Specific to Junior Football, parents and/or care givers should limit their person-to-person contact on site when taking their child/children to training or games.
- Parents and/or care givers should prepare their child/children for training in accordance with the above principles.
- Parents/guardians are encouraged to limit drop-off/pick-up to only one parent/guardian and other dependents as required and necessary. For those staying at venues, social distancing and gathering regulations must be adhered to.
- Only key roles access rooms and bench (e.g. coach, runner, medical support).
- Minimise use of change rooms, bathrooms and communal areas (i.e. toilet, medical only)
- Limit access to change rooms only for players and essential staff only as required (i.e. coach, team manager, trainers – no parents or spectators) with up to 20 people only are allowed in an indoor space.
- Where possible, shower at home instead of at training venues.
- Between training efforts, maintain at least 1.5m apart.
- Any tasks that can be done at home should be done at home (e.g. recovery sessions, online meetings).
- Limit the coming together in tight huddles during training and quarter breaks.
- Any necessary meetings to occur remotely using video technology, or in venues where social distancing can be practiced. No more than 20 people are allowed in an indoor space. Meetings are preferably conducted outdoors subject to weather.
- Match fixtures and schedules will need to reflect any time between matches to meet any necessary cleaning requirements, as well as limiting the crossover of large groups.
- Avoid social gatherings and mingling after training and games

## **COVID SAFETY OFFICER RESPONSIBILITIES**

- Ensuring all players, coaches, officials, etc. are aware of the Return to Play Protocols.
- Ensuring a club's adherence to these protocols and taking immediate steps to correct any identified breaches of the protocols.
- Developing processes or initiatives that will aid a club's adherence to the Return to Play Protocols.
- Implementing and maintaining training logs/registers.
- Keeping up to date with any changes to the protocols implemented by AFL Victoria and communicating these to all within the club.
- Contact point for any questions from club members (e.g. players, coaches, officials, spectators, etc.) relating to the Return to Play Protocols.
- We encourage Clubs to have multiple people to take ownership of this role and share the responsibility.

## EDUCATION PROTOCOLS – REQUIREMENTS

- AFL Victoria strongly recommends community clubs implement a minimum one-week preparation and education phase to ensure clubs undertake the necessary preparations prior to returning to play.
- Each club must nominate at least one COVID Safety Officer and as a minimum this person must undertake the free Australian Government online **COVID-19 Infection Control Training** prior to commencement of Club activity. In addition, we strongly recommend the COVID Safety Officer completes the **AFL's COVID Protocols Course** to assist with interpreting the protocols involved for Returning to Community Football in a COVID-19 environment.
- It is recommended other club officials also undertake this training. Certificate of completion needs to be emailed to your League Administrator prior to the commencement of activity. Where possible, we encourage Clubs to have multiple people to take ownership of this role and share the responsibility.
- All players and club officials are strongly encouraged to download the Government's COVID-19 tracing app.
- Protocol briefings (as outlined below) must be held in advance of return to play for players, coaches and officials.
- The Australian Football community must lead and promote a strong culture of COVID-19 safety for the health and wellbeing of participants and the broader community.

## SPECTATORS

- Any attendance at community football matches by spectators will always be strictly compliant with government directions and restrictions.
- Only spectators necessary to support participation should attend training and competitions, and must abide by current group gathering restrictions.
- Spectators for training and competitions must abide by public gathering restrictions. Spectators should be in groups of no more than 10 people in open, outdoor venues and spread out around the ground or venue. Spectators must keep 1.5 meters apart.
- Gathering limits will not apply to participants and those reasonably necessary to conduct the training or competition (e.g. umpires, coaches).
- Where venues allow for vehicle access surrounding the oval, spectators are encouraged to remain in their vehicle (subject to Government advice regarding risk for spectators viewing from vehicles, e.g. cohabiting family/household members only).
- Reinforcement of social distancing requirements should be displayed prominently by posters or newsletters at all venues and policed by Club officials and Police as required.
- Reinforcement of 'good health' requirements would be conveyed by posters at all participating sports venues and through a social media campaign.
- It is the participating Clubs' responsibility to monitor crowd social distancing and if required they can liaise with Police to enforce social distancing protocols.
- Any non-compliance to the Victorian State Government's direction and restrictions should be reported to Victoria Police.

### PARTICIPANT BRIEFING (Players, coaches, volunteers, parents etc.)

Prior to the commencement of training and games, clubs to provide a briefing to all participants, coaches, volunteers/activity helpers, parents (e.g. online or in writing) that includes:

- Intended training dates, times and procedures established.
- Hygiene practices that have been implemented by the club, including hygiene procedures around the venue and equipment.
- Hygiene requirements that must be complied with by all participants.
- What to do if you are feeling unwell or have been into contact with people who are sick.
- Opt-out options for individuals who may not yet feel comfortable returning to training, and alternative training options available.
- Measures that the coaches are taking to limit physical contact of players (i.e. social distancing guidelines, limited physical contact drills at training, etc).
- Restrictions on support staff (i.e. assistant coaches, trainers, etc).
- Restrictions that are in place on club rooms, changerooms, club gyms, etc.
- Restrictions on people attending the training venue (e.g. parents, etc.)
- Highlight it is the choice of participants to train, noting that even with adherence to protocols there is some increased risk of exposure to COVID-19 (compared to staying at home), which for some people if contracted, has serious health consequences

### COACHES BRIEFING

Clubs should also brief all coaches (e.g. online or in writing) on the required expectations as leaders within the club environment, including:

- Importance of the required hygiene protocols and practices.
- Limiting crossover of teams.
- Limited use of changerooms, club rooms and club gym facilities.
- Limiting training drills to be non-contact where applicable.
- Acceptable skills and drills.
- Requirement for players to 'get in/get out'
- Responsibility as leaders to influence behaviour change

### COMMUNITY FOOTBALL CLUBS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN:

- Reducing the spread of COVID-19
- Promoting good hygiene practices amongst players and officials
- Adhering and promoting the State Government Requirements around social distancing, and gatherings; and
- Following the clear protocols and requirements around Return to Training.

It is important clubs are respectful in adhering to the protocols outlined as part of Return to Play as they form part of the current Government directions, and sanctions can be applied to individuals and to clubs if they are in breach.





## RETURN TO PLAY CHECKLIST

This guide has been established to support teams 'Returning to Play' phase under the current Victorian Government COVID-19 restrictions. Community clubs and teams have an obligation to strictly adhere to these protocols at every training session.

### **SPECTATORS**

Only spectators necessary to support participation should attend training and competitions, and must abide by current group gathering restrictions.

### **1.5M SOCIAL DISTANCING**

The club has advised its participants, coaches, volunteers and parents that all training must strictly observe social distancing requirements of 1.5m.

### **CLUBS & TEAMS UNDERSTAND THE RETURN TO PLAY PROTOCOLS**

The club and all teams have read, understood, and agree to adhere to the Return to Play Protocols provided by AFL Victoria.

### **HYGIENE PROTOCOLS ARE IN PLACE**

The club has implemented the hygiene protocols as outlined in the Return to Play Protocols document.

### **AT LEAST ONE COVID SAFE OFFICER**

Nominated Club official(s) has undertaken the Australian Government online COVID-19 Infection Control Training and submitted a certificate of completion to their League Administrator contact prior to recommencement of Club activity.

### **REGISTER OF PARTICIPANTS**

A log, or register, using the approved AFL Victoria template, League template, or an online app or similar, which clearly identifies all participants in attendance at each training session **MUST** be maintained and available upon request by the League, AFL Victoria or health authorities.

### **COVIDSAFE APP**

The club has encouraged all players, volunteers and families to download the COVIDSafe App to help in tracing the spread of COVID-19.

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT APPROVAL**

The club has received approval from the Local Government to access the oval returning to play.

### **FOLLOW DIRECTIONS**

The club and training groups understand that they must always follow the direction and advice of local and state authorities. People who present to training with symptoms to be sent home immediately.

### **DEFIBRILLATOR**

Clubs with a defibrillator have arranged access to their defibrillator for if and when required, the defibrillator has been tested and is in working order.

### **FOOTBALLS AND EQUIPMENT IS ALLOWED**

Footballs and all other equipment can be used for training sessions. Please make sure that equipment is cleaned appropriately after each session.

### **TRAINING GROUPS**

For 18 years of age and under - the club can undertake contact training in full teams or squads. For adults (over 18 years of age) – Until July 13, non-contact training in groups of no more than 20. Two groups of 20 can utilise the same oval provided they do not operate closely together, do not interact and the oval is split into two zones.