



Officiating adjustments due to COVID-19: guidance and recommendations

This document presents guidelines for officials and officiating associations to use in aiding a return to play while restrictions are in place due to COVID-19. These guidelines do NOT overrule local laws or guidance, and are intended to complement and inform guidance produced by national governing bodies and/or competition authorities.

1 Personal health and well-being

1. Do not participate if you feel unsafe in any way or if you have any doubts about exposing yourself or others to an unnecessary infection risk. Your risk may be higher if you are in a designated vulnerable group.
2. You must withdraw from a game if you have any symptoms of COVID-19 or have been in close contact with someone who has. If symptoms come on during a game, leave the game as safely as possible and follow local health advice regarding testing and isolation.
3. National federations, competition authorities and officiating organisations must respect officials who withdraw for these reasons and not discriminate against them when things return to normal.
4. You should not participate in a game or any other football activity that is not permitted by local law or guideline.
5. If you become unwell in the days after a game with symptoms of COVID-19 and/or a positive test, you must inform your assigner who will notify the other officials you came in contact with and the teams.
6. When attending a game, you should consent to your contact details being shared with any health tracing system in place in your locality if anyone at the game develops symptoms and/or has a positive test.

2 Officiating uniform and equipment

1. If you wish, before, during and after the game, you may:
 - a. wear a face covering (which may need replacing periodically to maintain its effectiveness) to reduce the chance of spreading the infection
 - i. If you are going to remove and replace your face covering frequently (e.g. to blow a whistle or to make announcements more clearly), ensure it is securely attached to your head or neck and unlikely to fall to the ground.
 - b. wear gloves (which will need to be removed carefully after use) to reduce your contact with the ball and players
 - c. carry a container of hand sanitiser for personal use
 - d. carry your mobile phone or similar device if it is being used to track your proximity to people who have or develop COVID-19

2. You may use an electronic whistle as an alternative to or in addition to a conventional whistle. You may also attach a shield or pouch to a conventional whistle to reduce the spread of droplets.
 - a. If an electronic whistle is not very loud, other officials may need to echo the whistle to end continuing action in their area.
3. When using a conventional whistle, avoid blowing it more loudly than necessary and also avoid blowing it when close to other people. This will reduce the chance of virus being spread by spray.
4. Use your own water containers and do not share them with anyone else.
5. Avoid, where possible, picking up another official's equipment (e.g. flag or bean bag) or field equipment (e.g. yardage markers).
6. Use hand sanitiser during appropriate breaks in the game (e.g. team or injury timeouts, end of first and third periods and between extra periods) or at the first opportunity after contacting a player, especially if sweat or other bodily fluids may have been transferred, or equipment.
7. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Where a signal is normally made with hands near the face (e.g. signal [S26]), bring the hand close but don't touch.
8. Do not share equipment with anyone.
9. Clean your uniform and equipment after every game.
10. No specific type or style of face covering is recommended, but bear in mind:
 - a. breathability is the most important consideration, followed by comfort
 - b. two or three layers of fabric are more effective than one at stopping transmission
 - c. choose a colour (e.g. black) that fits with your uniform and does not draw undue attention
 - a.d. the ease with which you will be able to remove and replace it, if you need or want to do that repeatedly

3 Dealing with players, coaches and other officials

1. You do not normally touch players and this should be even more the case. Maintain social distancing whenever possible. When close proximity to players is essential, do so for as short a time as possible to minimise the risk of infection. Avoid getting face to face with a player or anyone else. In particular, take care around personnel who are breathing heavily or shouting.
2. Where it is necessary to speak to a fellow official, player or coach, stand at a social distance from them and away from other personnel. Avoid shouting, particularly when anyone is within 10 yards/metres in the direction of your voice.
3. Never form a huddle of officials. If radios are available, use them for group communication.
4. If you are a sideline official, ensure that coaches and players behind you maintain social distancing. Remind them frequently if necessary. Ensure your initial position is wide enough to maintain social distance from players split wide in a formation.
5. If you are an official in the middle of the field, maintain as much social distance from players as possible. As Umpire you might find this hardest to do, but adopting a deeper position than normal is acceptable, where needed. Alternatively, the Umpire may work from the Centre Judge position, as long as this is made clear in advance to fellow officials, the head coaches and (if a switch is made during the game) the on-field captains.

6. During a play, maintaining normal position and mechanics should be adequate since anyone who comes close to you should do so only for a fleeting period of time (<3 seconds). At the end of the play, be conscious of ways in which you can observe players, mark forward progress and communicate effectively while maintaining social distance. **Encourage players to establish a social distance from each other as soon as possible after the play ends.**
7. As Referee, when making penalty announcements, ensure nobody is nearby in the direction of your voice, especially if you have to project your voice because you do not have a referee microphone. You may remove your face covering to improve the audibility of your announcement.
8. If necessary to dig in a pile to determine the status of a contested ball (e.g. after a fumble), only one official should do this. Other officials should keep other players clear, verbally and using hand gestures.
9. Do not shake hands or make other intentional skin to skin contact with anyone. If there are local conventions on non-contact greetings/acknowledgements (e.g. the Namaste gesture), use them instead.
10. Cover your face if you cough or sneeze and where possible do it in a direction away from other people.

4 Dealing with the ball

1. Whenever possible, the ball should be cleaned regularly to minimise the chance that it could spread infection from one participant to another. Ball persons may be issued with sanitising wipes by game management for this purpose and encouraged to use them regularly.
2. Be conscious of the need to minimise the number of people who need to handle the ball in a relay.
 - a. This may necessitate more running to reduce the number of relays.
 - b. Where possible, have the ball person hand (or toss over a short distance) the ball directly to the official who needs it, rather than relay it via other officials.
 - c. The ball carrier or a player in the vicinity of the ball should return it directly to the Umpire (or Centre Judge) rather than to any other official.
3. It is acceptable for you to use your feet to make minor adjustments to the position of the ball at the succeeding spot, if this will avoid having to pick it up and put it down again. However, do not kick the ball more than a foot or so.
4. Avoid measurements whenever possible. **If a measurement does take place, preserve social distancing as much as possible, including asking players to stay away from the area.**

5 Before and after the game and half-time

1. You should observe social distancing when travelling to/from a game. Travelling alone in a car is encouraged. Where this is not possible, it is strongly recommended that all of those travelling together wear face coverings and sit as far apart as possible
2. Where possible, you should arrive at and depart from the venue in uniform. If changing rooms have to be used, maintain social distancing and minimise the number of surfaces that are touched. Clean those surfaces before and after use.
3. Social distancing should be maintained during the pre-game conference. Preferably, this should be held outdoors.

4. Social distancing should be maintained while meeting with coaches, players or game management. Preferably, these should all be held outdoors.
5. Social distancing should be maintained while briefing the chain crew and ball persons. Encourage them to maintain social distance from each other.
6. Social distancing should be maintained during all ceremonies, including the coin toss.
7. Social distancing should be maintained during the half-time interval. Preferably, this should be held outdoors. Do not share drinks or food.
8. Social distancing should be maintained during the post-game conference. This should be kept brief and preferably held outdoors. Game data that is not specifically urgent may be shared by phone or email once everyone has returned home, or captured quickly by taking photographs of each official's game card.
9. Where social distancing is limited or in any place without good ventilation, wearing a face covering is also recommended.

6 Possible rule adjustments (for federations or competitions to consider)

1. Allow the team area to extend beyond the 25-yard lines, but no further than the 10-yard lines.
2. Move the coaching box line back (e.g. to 12 feet from the sideline).
3. Move the team area line back (e.g. to 24 feet from the sideline).
4. Limit number of players in squad and/or limit number of coaches or sideline staff permitted in the team area.
5. Only 1 captain from each team at the coin toss ceremony.
6. Require the chain crew and ball persons to wear face coverings during the game.
7. Require the game balls to be sanitised periodically and after they have been contacted by anyone other than a player, official or ball person.
8. Require coaching staff and other sideline personnel to wear face coverings when speaking with officials.

7 Reminders for game management relating to officials

1. Ensure that you include the needs of the game officials in all preparation and planning for the game.
2. Ensure that areas of the playing enclosure and indoor facilities are set aside for the officials' exclusive use and that these areas are big enough for the officials to maintain social distancing from each other.
3. Provide sanitising materials for the officials, chain crew and ball persons. Ensure the chain equipment and balls are thoroughly sanitised before and after the game.
4. If a radio microphone is provided for Referee announcements, ensure it is sanitised before and after use.

8 Acknowledgements

- Queensland Gridiron Officials Association
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9 Change log

9th January 2021	Encourage social distancing at the end of every play and during measurements. Added recommendations for additional wearing of face coverings. Added advice on face coverings.
4th October 2020	Added guidance about removable face coverings and the possible need to echo electronic whistles. A shield to reduce droplet spread from a conventional whistle is also an option.