



ENGLAND
GOLF

PLAY SAFE
STAY SAFE

**A FRAMEWORK FOR
PLAYING GOLF**

Updated 4 May - Relevant as of Monday 17 May 2021 – Changes to previous version are in blue

This framework forms a part of our '**Play Safe, Stay Safe**' support and guidance for golfers, clubs and counties. All frameworks can be accessed through our website – [click here](#)

Any guidance may be re-issued as government measures to combat COVID-19 are updated in the future. Please refer to the government website for the most up-to-date guidance and laws on COVID-19 related social restrictions:

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>.

A FRAMEWORK FOR PLAYING GOLF

England Golf has been working closely with partners from across the sport, including The R&A, fellow home nations, PGA and other industry associations, to draw together a framework under which golf may be safely enjoyed.

There are many different types of golf clubs and golf facilities each requiring safe procedures to be finalised and implemented locally. However, the fundamentals are the same throughout the sport, which has a good record of compliance with rules and procedures.

These procedures include all aspects of the golfing experience. The over-riding consideration throughout must be to '**Play Safe, Stay Safe**'.

While each club/facility will need to adapt its procedures to ensure compliance with government restrictions, the following aspects of the golfer experience, divided into the five following categories, will need to be considered:

1. **Course set-up**, including information on course furniture (such as flags and rakes) and practice areas
2. **Before the round**, relating to tee-time booking processes, arrival and waiting to play
3. **During the round**, in particular golfer behaviour and social distancing in different areas of the course
4. **After the round**, detailing what golfers can and/or must do following the conclusion of their round
5. **Competitions and Rules of Golf**, including the registration process, scoring and formats of play

Clubs/facilities should adhere to the guidelines provided. These have been published to assist clubs/facilities in providing as safe an environment as they can. Failure to follow this guidance may leave

clubs/facilities open to enforcement action from local authorities and/or police, or subject to disciplinary procedures from England Golf.

1. Course Set-up

On-Course Items

- All rakes and ball retrievers to be removed. Players may bring their own personal rakes and retrievers, which should only be handled by that player and taken away at the end of their round
- Ball washers and drinking fountains to be covered up
- Open-top bins may be used on course, provided measures are taken to sanitise the bin and to ensure players do not touch the bin or its contents
- Benches may be in use with social distancing signage in place
- All other removable items to be removed. Stakes defining areas of the course can be treated as immovable obstructions

Hole and Flagstick

- Flagsticks can be retained, but it is strongly recommended that a sign is put on the flagstick stating that it is not to be touched
- A method of inserting the hole liner to be used that means all of the ball does not fall below the surface of the putting green and can be easily retrieved by handling the ball only. Ball-lifting mechanisms may also be used

Practice Areas and Lessons

- Practice areas, including driving ranges and practice nets, may be opened if safe sanitising practices can be guaranteed
- Indoor practice facilities may reopen for **groups of up to six**
- Lessons, including group lessons, may take place providing government guidelines are followed and appropriate sanitisation is guaranteed. There is no limit to the number of participants that can take part in outdoor coaching sessions as this falls into the government's "organised sport participation event" category. Full guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-grassroots-sports-guidance-for-safe-provision-including-team-sport-contact-combat-sport-and-organised-sport-events>

2. Before the Round

Bookings

- Four-ball groups are permitted on-course with no restriction on the mixing of households.

- Spectators are permitted and must follow social distancing guidelines. Clubs must include the safety of spectators in their Covid-19 risk assessments. For more information on the rules that spectators must follow, please contact your local authority.
- Both professional and non-professional caddies are permitted (see [guidance in section 3](#))
- Clubs/facilities to organise a system of booking and allocation of tee times that ensures the safety of staff and golfers and lessen the chance of people congregating. Clubs are required to track every golfer and the time at which they were at the facility so that they can trace potential contacts should the situation arise.
- A 10-minute interval is advised between tee times, but clubs may use shorter intervals provided that they can demonstrate that this is safe and ensures appropriate social distancing

Arrival and Waiting to Play

- In all indoor settings, social distancing, ventilation and other safety measures must be considered. All customers and staff who are likely to come into contact with the public must wear a face covering. There are some exemptions to wearing face coverings including children under the age of 11 and those with certain disabilities. [Clubs should refer to government guidance to ensure compliance](#)
- It is illegal for gatherings of more than six people to take place [indoor](#), except for limited exceptions, [with gatherings of up to 30 permitted outdoors](#)
- Clubhouses and [indoor and outdoor hospitality areas may open](#). Please refer to [section 4](#) for guidance
- Pro shops [may open](#)
- Locker/changing rooms are permitted to reopen, including shower areas. Social distancing measures should be in place throughout these facilities, but you should encourage participants to avoid or minimise use where possible (for example, by arriving ready to play and showering at home) and to minimise the time they spend in the changing area
- Toilets and wash-hand basins in locker rooms may remain in use
- Clubs/facilities to communicate in advance with golfers to advise on social distancing requirements that are being applied on arrival at the club/facility
- Clubs/facilities to have procedures in place to ensure social distancing requirements in the area of the reception area (if applicable) or starter's building in advance of golfers teeing off
- Hiring of equipment is a decision for club/facility managers. Where they are hired, individuals can use trollies. These should not be shared. Two members of the same household or social bubble may share buggies (including club or privately owned buggies), but

otherwise they should be used by individuals only. Facilities should follow sensible precautions and clean equipment after every use

- Clubs/facilities to have procedures in place for the practice putting green, for example giving priority of use to the players in the next group due to tee off

3. During the Round

Guidance and reminders should be provided by clubs/facilities to golfers to ensure that they maintain appropriate social distancing during the round.

Teeing Areas

- Remind golfers to maintain appropriate social distancing at teeing areas due to the normal close proximity of golfers to one another when tee shots are being played

General

- Remind golfers to maintain appropriate social distancing when walking to the ball, searching for a ball and playing shots
- Remind golfers not to touch stray balls

Bunkers

- With no communal rakes allowed on the course, remind golfers to make their very best efforts to smooth the sand using their club and/or their feet

Putting Green

- Remind golfers to maintain appropriate social distancing on the putting greens and not to touch the flagstick

Caddies

- [Caddies, both professional and informal, may be used](#)
- Where used, caddies should only provide guidance to players and should not handle clubs
- Appropriate social distancing and sanitising should be maintained by players and caddies at all times
- Competition organising committees should consider whether to permit caddies during competition play

4. After the Round

Please speak to your local authority to clarify guidance relating to the serving of food and drink, including alcohol.

- Clubhouses and indoor hospitality areas may reopen. Groups are limited to six indoors. Clubs must display the official NHS QR code poster ([which can be created here](#)) and every customer aged over 16, whether sat inside or outside, must be asked to check in to the venue using the NHS Covid-19 app. Clubs should also have a system in place for the collection of information from customers who do not have a smartphone or don't want to use the app. Information collected should be stored for 21 days, adhering to GDPR. For more information on opening indoor hospitality areas safely: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/restaurants-offering-takeaway-or-delivery>
- Outdoor social and hospitality areas may open with gatherings limited to 30. Food and drink, including alcohol, may be served. For more information on the opening of outdoor hospitality, visit: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/restaurants-offering-takeaway-or-delivery>

5. Competitions and Rules of Golf

Clubs may choose to run competitions provided all social distancing and safety rules are strictly observed. Gatherings of people must be avoided at all times, including for registration or for presentations.

It is the responsibility of the host club to ensure that all relevant guidelines are followed and that a safe environment is provided for all players. Failure to do so may leave the club liable for enforcement action.

Registration Process

- Where open competitions take place, organising committees must put in place a registration process to capture full contact details of all players in case of the need to track and trace following a confirmed case of COVID-19

Shotgun starts

- We do not recommend the use of shotgun starts at this time because of the increased likelihood of creating congregations of people before and after the round

Foursomes and Greensomes formats

- 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. 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

- 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

Handicapping Provisions

To enable some of the changes to the way the game is played, CONGU (GB&I Handicap Authority) has issued some temporary adjustments to the playing of scores for handicap purposes, which may differ from the temporary changes to the Rules of Golf. Some of these are outlined below.

Note: Consult the relevant handicapping authority on whether scores using any of the provisions below are acceptable for handicapping purposes - [click here to access CONGU guidance](#)

Forms of Play and Scoring

- If competitive stroke play is played, a method of scoring needs to be used that does not require any exchanging of scorecards
- 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 hole 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
 - Player Score Input (PSI) screens may be used where players can sanitise or wash hands before and after use
- As provided in the Rules of Golf, scorecards can be electronic, which could include emailing or texting scores to the committee.
- Further guidance on this has now been provided by CONGU – [click here to access the guidance](#)

Bunkers

- The distance for preferred lies in the bunker is limited to 6 inches and the area cannot be smoothed before placing

Flagstick

- Golfers are required to leave the flagstick in the hole at all times and not to touch it. 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
- 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
- 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 Holed

- The hole liner (sometimes referred to as the hole 'cup') may be set in a way that means that all of the ball cannot be below the surface of the putting green, so the ball is considered holed if any part of it is below the surface of the putting green