

MALTA FA

Return to Play Protocol

A guidance document to ensure football can return safely
in the context of COVID-19

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Contents

1. Background	2
2. Introduction	4
3. Scope of Application	5
4. Guidelines for Member Clubs and Member Associations	6
i) Guidelines on the prevention of COVID-19 virus infection to be observed by Clubs	6
ii) Reporting by Member Clubs and Member Associations	7
5. Assessment of cases that require self-isolation	8
i. Management of Quarantine	8
ii. Additional Competition Rules related to COVID-19.....	9
iii. Disciplinary matters	10
iv. Standard Protocols for Stadium Operations	11
Annex 1: Attendance Register (including screening).....	15
Annex 2: Standard Operating Protocols for Stadium Organisation – Hygiene.....	16
Annex 3: Standard Operating Protocols for Stadium Organisation – Media	18
Annex 4: Guidelines for procedure in case of positive test.....	22
Annex 5: Return to Play Protocol following Positive COVID-19 Test.....	23
Annex 6: COVID-19 Liaison Officer	28

1. Background

Covid-19 - A continuous struggle for football since March 2020

Football in Malta ground to a halt on March 13, 2020 when the Malta Football Association pro-actively suspended all domestic competitions in the interest of public health amid an increase in the number of coronavirus cases. Soon after, the possibility of football activity was impeded through legal means via legislation prohibiting organised activities. The situation across Europe was no different with several countries suspending their leagues and competitions while UEFA postponed all international matches and tournaments, including EURO 2020 which took place in 2021.

This sensible and cautious approach by all football stakeholders was essential as the world struggles to come to terms with a global health crisis.

The Malta FA, as the governing body of local football, has been engaged in efforts to adapt to the challenges posed by COVID-19, striving to find a balance between public health considerations, which represent the foremost priority, and the interests of local football.

The first health and operational protocol for the potential resumption of the domestic football competitions behind closed doors was submitted to the local health authorities in April. Further requests to the Government to provide a clear direction on the potential restart of domestic competitions were made on three separate occasions in May but this was not forthcoming. Consequently, the Malta FA had no option but to terminate the 2019/20 competitions prematurely.

It was in early June 2020 when the Government announced that the restriction on contact-sport activities were to be lifted. The Malta FA duly informed the clubs about the SportMalta guidelines and its own position on 'Return to Training'. This was followed by the successful staging of 'Return to Activity' programme for the national teams in July 2020, backed by the implementation of a detailed health and safety protocol.

Unfortunately, despite all the efforts, Season 2020/21 proved to be a repeat experience of the one before it. In March 2021, competitions had to be terminated once more prematurely in adherence to measures taken at national level.

As at the start of Season 2021/22, competitive sport has the green light to resume activity subject to the implementation of health and operational protocols. Furthermore, spectators can be allowed in limited quantities.

Best practices from other countries have shown that the requirements of elite sport in this context can be addressed through an ad-hoc approach based on scientific evidence, granting targeted exemptions from certain restrictions.

Following the start of the 2021-22 domestic season, the Malta FA confirms its health and operational guidelines for clubs and nurseries, setting out obligations for regular reporting on the COVID-19 situation together with other health and safety measures.

This document further attests to the Malta FA's commitment to implement medical and safety procedures based on current medical advice and best practices, charting a safe way for football to continue for the benefit of all those involved in football and the wider community. During these difficult and unprecedented times, the society needs sport more than ever for its own physical and mental wellbeing.

This protocol sets out the framework of medical, sanitary and hygiene procedures together with the operational protocols that are to be applied when staging Malta FA competition matches. The evolution of the COVID-19 situation is dynamic and unpredictable, and while it is impossible to establish a completely risk-free environment, the aim is to lower the risk as far as possible by applying current medical advice and best practices.

2. Introduction

Minimising the risk to Malta FA competitions from COVID-19 relies on thorough and robust preparations and on-site organisation, but also to a large extent on the cooperation, behaviour and understanding of the teams, their players, officials and technical staff, as well as the Malta FA referees, the Malta FA venue staff and all target groups involved in the matches. Malta FA expects all parties to adhere to hygiene best practices both in the controlled match environments, as well as in their private day to day lives. It is therefore imperative that all precautions set out in this document, as well as the standard hygiene best practices, will be strictly adhered to by all members of these various groups. Non-respect of such social norms could have serious consequences for the organization of football matches in Malta and Gozo.

Players, staff, and everyone else involved should remember that their actions, and adherence to the social distancing requirements in particular, not only to guarantee a safe environment to matches but also serve as a strong symbol for the thousands of viewers locally. Football stakeholders have a collective duty to show leadership and set an example in the rigorous application of these measures.

Member Clubs organising and/or hosting football activities have a legal duty to take reasonable care to avoid acts or omissions which are a reasonably foreseeable risk. A risk assessment is a systematic review of the tasks, jobs or processes involved when your club organises, facilitates and/or hosts football activities. The purpose is to identify the significant hazards, the risk of someone being harmed and deciding what further control measures you must take to reduce the risk to an acceptable level.

Risk assessments should cover all risks, including those associated with the Covid-19 pandemic and how the club intends to ensure that its members and activities will operate within the parameters of guidance by health or other relevant authorities.

The public health crisis is constantly developing and so should clubs' response to it. Clubs are responsible for ensuring that risk assessments are completed, continually reviewed considering changing guidance, feedback, and observations from staff. Club officials and coaches should always keep the below steps in mind to ensure the safety of participants. Clubs should review the measures implemented in response to these regularly:

- Keep up to date with Government and the Malta FA guidelines. Please ensure that they are followed at all times and communicate the guidelines to all individuals connected to your club.
- Undertake regular risk assessments of the club's activities. Risk assessments are 'living documents' and should be updated and reviewed regularly and kept in active use to mitigate any new or changing risks.
- Ensure that everyone – board/committee members, coaches, first aiders, volunteers, parents, and players – is aware of the club's Covid-19 protocols.
- Do not undertake an activity if the club has any concerns about the safety of club officials and/or participants.

3. Scope of Application

This document includes medical and operational obligations for all parties taking part in and/or organising football matches. These obligations will be applied by the Malta FA Venue Team when preparing venues, subject to any additional measures imposed by the local authorities.

The Malta FA administration is entrusted with the operational management of the protocol and is, therefore, entitled to take decisions and adopt detailed operational provisions and guidelines for the implementation of the protocol in particular in view of the different competitions to be organised as well as to amend it accordingly in view of the COVID-19 development and the constantly changing national conditions.

Non-compliance with the obligations set out in the Malta FA Protocol may lead to disciplinary measures in accordance with the Malta FA Disciplinary Regulations.

4. Guidelines for Member Clubs and Member Associations

i) Guidelines on the prevention of COVID-19 virus infection to be observed by Clubs

The following guidelines are intended to help club and nurseries and are to be read in conjunction with the latest guidelines published by Public Health and SportMalta¹. They are in no way intended to supersede or replace the guidelines published by the health authorities, but rather to serve as a reference guide to the main points detailed in the existing protocols. Please note that these guidelines may be updated from time to time.

1. All individuals are encouraged to arrive separately (max. 2 people per car) wearing facemasks.
2. Temperature is to be checked before entry to the sporting facility, entry should be denied if over 37.2°C or if there are any signs/symptoms.
3. Hand sanitiser is to be used upon entry to the facility.
4. Social distancing applies until training or match starts on pitch.
5. Any persons who are feeling unwell or show signs/symptoms should stay at home They are under no circumstances to attend the session or match.
6. Anyone who feels unwell during training is to stop, remove themselves from the pitch and if well enough to go home and isolate. In the case that they are not well enough to remove themselves from play, a room to be used for isolation purposes needs to be identified. Only the club doctor should be allowed to enter this room when in use and PPE should be worn. Ideally this room is close to the pitch and proper disinfection must take place after use.
7. Masks should be worn when not doing physically demanding activity, this means that coaches, technical staff, and other staff (e.g. medics) must wear a mask or visor. These are to be maintained in dressing rooms and other common areas.
8. Water and any food/snacks must be brought by the players / staff and no sharing is allowed. No water dispensers are allowed.
9. Shower facilities are not to be used.
10. Only persons occupying a role in the holding of a training session, or a match shall be allowed. (Players, technical staff, ground staff, club committees, media, as necessary).

¹ <https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/covid-19/Pages/mitigation-conditions-and-guidances.aspx>

11. Balls must be disinfected every 15min during training. One way around this is to ensure a new ball is used every 15 min.
12. Equipment e.g. cones should be disinfected before and after use. No equipment is to be shared e.g. resistance bands etc.
13. Clubs shall ensure rigorous compliance with obligations related to annual medical examination of players.
14. Every Club shall designate a COVID-19 Liaison Officer (Annex 6) who shall report regularly on the state of health and activity within his/her club based on a reporting template provided by the Association. It is also important to keep an attendance register.
15. Maximum cooperation is to be ensured with Public Health Authorities. Disciplinary sanctions will be applicable upon reports of non-compliance.
16. Clubs shall endeavour to ensure that all their players and technical staff are fully vaccinated including a booster dose where applicable. The vaccination certificate is to be one that is recognised by Maltese health authorities.

ii) Reporting by Member Clubs and Member Associations

Each Member Club is required to indicate a contact person (COVID-19 Liaison Officer) who will be asked to report regularly on the state of health within the respective club and the ongoing activity (such as training, friendly matches, etc.). The person designated as 'COVID-19 Liaison' does not have to be a doctor or come from the medical profession.

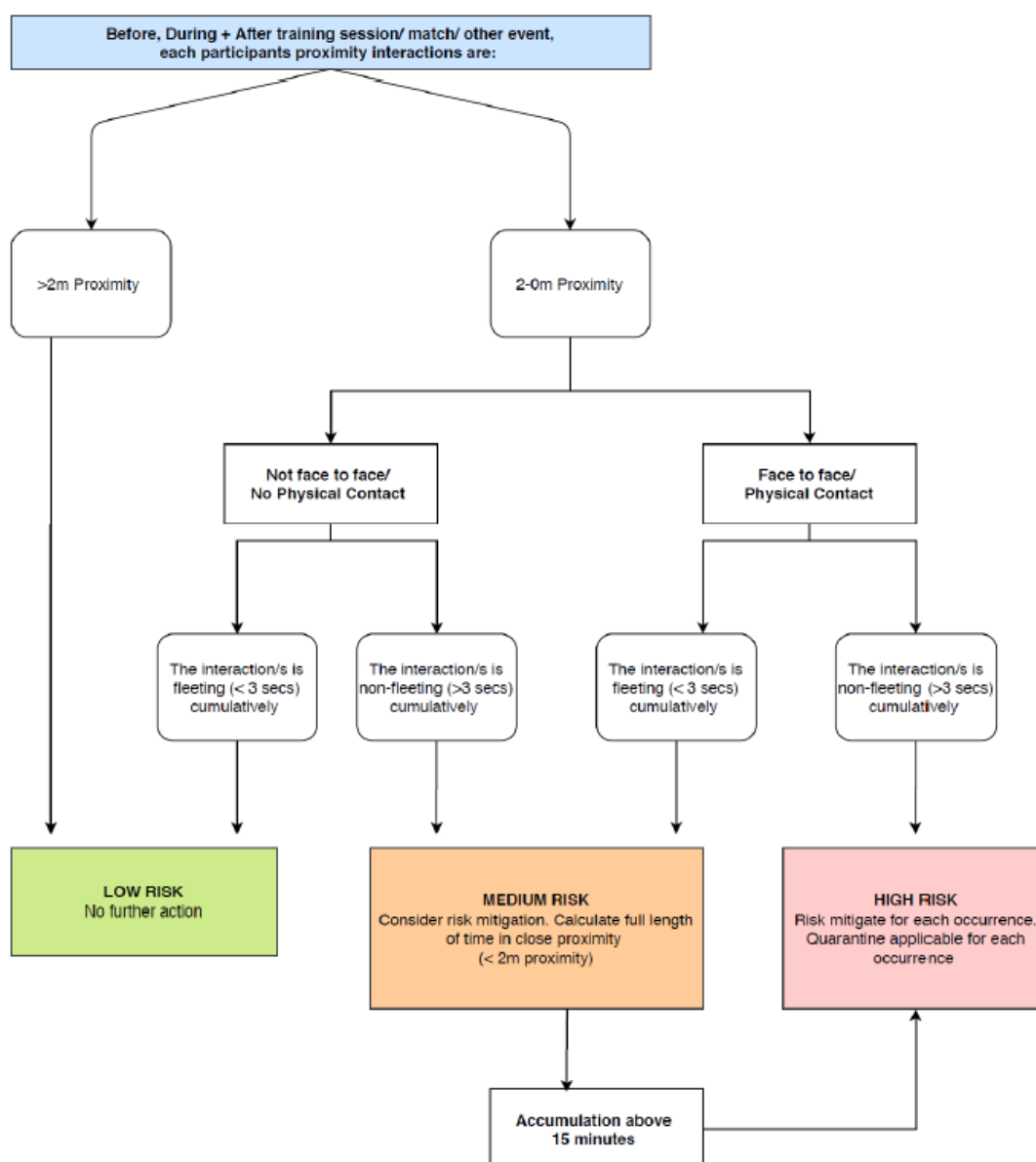
Each club should keep an attendance register for all the training sessions being organised. A template of the attendance register (including screening) can be found in Annex 1.

The Malta FA calls on everyone for maximum cooperation with the health authorities and for the FA to always be informed of health-related developments. The Malta FA reminds everyone that in a difficult context for everyone, football at each level depends on such cooperation.

5. Assessment of cases that require self-isolation

i. Management of Quarantine

The Malta FA has agreed with the Public Health Regulation Department that the impact assessment upon a positive case being identified is made by the Malta FA COVID Officer following the sanctioned mitigating risk factors (found below) who would then forward the report to a the Public Health Regulation Department to ensure a consistent and coherent approach. This would ensure a consistent and coherent approach and would also provide clubs with a single contact point.



In the case of a Player or Staff Member with a positive COVID-19 test:

Player/Staff Member shall quarantine as per public health guidelines. Once passed fit to exit quarantine they must undergo a repeat medical examination in conjunction with the Malta FA medical department and follow a graduated return to play protocol.

The established close contacts of the positive player or staff member shall quarantine according to currently applicable regulations and test as required. The individual, through the Club Covid-19 Liaison Officer shall send a copy of the test results immediately after receiving it to covid@mfa.com.mt.

The same approach will be taken with match officials.

Negative effects of an enforced quarantine on the physical fitness of footballers as well as their mental health is considerable, and as such it would be unfeasible for players to return to a high level of activity immediately after their return to sports.

If the present rules and conditions are not addressed, it will require league games to be postponed for lengthy periods and would make completing the top-level competition in football in Malta next to impossible.

ii. Additional Competition Rules related to COVID-19

To complement the above, and to ensure the regular staging of competition, the Malta FA has as of season 2021-22 introduced regulations to address the specificities that COVID-19 presents. These can be found in Annex I of Section V – Competition Rules.

The Malta FA may request nasopharyngeal swab testing by RT-PCR/antigen of a representative sample from each squad, including coaches and other staff.

A competitive match cannot be postponed if the team has the minimum number of players as established in the regulations available from the squad list who are RT-PCR/antigen negative, notwithstanding the obligation to self-isolate imposed on the rest of the squad. Where less than such minimum from the above-mentioned list are available, the match will be postponed.

The return of the player with a RT-PCR/antigen positive nasopharyngeal swab test to the sporting activity is permitted with the certificate from the Malta FA doctor and ONLY if ALL the following four (4) conditions are met:

- Afebrile without the use of antipyretics for three (3) days.
- Asymptomatic.
- Followed the graduated return to play protocol outlined in Annex 5
- He has resubmitted the medical clearance form (via COMET).

Without prejudice to the applicable regulations governing the right of a club to request postponement (Section V, Annex I Article 5), in the case where a club has at least 10 players in mandatory quarantine at the same time, the Association shall endeavour to reschedule fixtures at least (4) days following the day when at least sixteen (16) players from the squad list are able to return to activity.

iii. Disciplinary matters

For the purposes of these regulations, the following shall signify:

MFA COVID officer shall signify such person nominated by the General Secretary of the Malta Football Association to occupy such position.

COVID Testing shall signify any public health recognised and approved for the detection or otherwise of COVID-19.

1. A registered football player or club staff member is to inform the MFA COVID officer of any COVID testing undertaken by him and this by not later than 24 hours from such testing.

The registered football player or club staff member is thereafter to inform the COVID officer of the official result immediately, and by not later than three (3) hours following the issuance of such result.

2. The registered football player or club staff member shall adhere to all instructions issued by the Health Department and the Malta FA COVID officer, without reservations and to the fullest extent possible.

3. Every club shall ensure that all its registered players or club staff members that have undertaken COVID testing, informs the Malta FA COVID officer within 24 hours from such testing.

4. Every registered player or club staff member that tests positive to COVID-19, shall self-isolate and consequently is not to participate in any football activity, up until such person has been given clearance by the Public Health Authorities to end the self-isolation period.

5. Every club shall ensure that any of its registered players or club staff members that tests positive to COVID-19, shall self-isolate and consequently is not to participate in any football activity, up until the registered player or club staff member has been given clearance by the Public Health Authorities to end the self-isolation period.

6. Any player or club staff member who is found guilty of an offence against these regulations by the Disciplinary commissioner, shall be suspended from any football activity for a period of two (2) months.

7. Any club found guilty of an offence against these regulations by the Control and Disciplinary committee, shall have a deduction of three (3) points in the national league with immediate effect.

iv. Standard Protocols for Stadium Operations

Standard operating protocols for the stadia used will be followed with regards to hygiene². Stadia used³ for competition have been divided into three zones (Only pre-authorised individuals will be allowed into their requisite zones, thus limiting the number of individuals in any given area at any given time to within the limits set by Public Health):

- Zone 1 - Restricted area and benches
- Zone 2 - Pitch-side (photographers and ball kids)
- Zone 3 - Tribune and Media Area

The number of persons allowed in the stadium grounds shall be strictly tied to the applicable regulations issued from time to time by the health authorities.

Preparatory and set-up work on the match day must be completed well in advance of the teams' arrival in the stadium.

Access to Stadia

For players and technical staff, the criteria to access stadia will not change. Any individual accessing the stadium needs to:

- Either be fully vaccinated;
- or provide a negative test taken up to 48 hours prior to matchday if a PCR test result is produced; or taken up to 24 hours prior to matchday if a Rapid Antigen Test result is produced.

² Standard Operating Protocols for Stadium Organisation – HYGIENE (Annex 3)

³ This document presumes the usage of the following stadia: National Stadium, Centenary Stadium, Hibernians Stadium, and Victor Tedesco Stadium.

Fully vaccinated for adults aged 18 years and over means⁴:

- (i) primary schedule⁵ with last dose administered not more than 3 months previously OR
- (ii) primary schedule and booster with last dose of booster administered not more than 9 months previously.

Fully vaccinated for individuals aged between 12 and 17 years means

- (i) Primary schedule with last dose administered not more than 12 months previously

Players and technical staff members will be requested to show their vaccination certificate at the door. For those who would have taken the booster up to 2 weeks prior to matchday, they would be requested to show the card given by the Public Health Department, until being able to generate the actual certificate.

Players and technical staff members who were positive to Covid-19 up to 6 weeks prior to matchday, will not be asked to provide a certificate that includes the booster. It will be sufficient to show a vaccination certificate showing the primary schedule or, if unvaccinated, a negative test taken as explained above (PCR or Rapid Antigen Test), together with the positive test result from which they would have recovered.

For spectators in the stands, including the VIP sector, access will only be possible on presentation of a valid fully vaccinated certificate. In the case of spectators that were positive to Covid-19 up to 6 weeks prior to matchday, these will not be asked to provide a certificate that includes the booster. It will be sufficient to show a vaccination certificate showing the primary schedule together with the positive test result from which they would have recovered.

Arrival of the teams at the stadium:

- The individual arrival of athletes in their own car should be strongly recommended, if possible, with not more than two athletes per car. The arrival of the teams at the stadium must be staggered over time.
- Teams and their respective staff (particularly kit manager/s) are allowed to enter the stadium 90 minutes before kick-off.
- Depending on the stadium infrastructure: different routes to the dressing rooms (e.g. Centenary) or separation over a large area (e.g. National Stadium; Hibernians Stadium).

⁴ <https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/covid-19/Pages/travel.aspx>

⁵ Primary schedule refers to the initial course of vaccination as recommended by the manufacturer, e.g. two doses of Moderna, Pfizer or Astrazeneca; and one dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine

Dressing rooms (teams & referees):

- Imperative use of adjoining, free spaces as additional changing facilities (e.g. splitting of starting eleven - goalkeeper - substitutes).
- All persons must always wear a mask in the dressing room and in communal areas.
- Teams & referees can stay in the dressing room for a maximum of 20 minutes after the match ends.

Warm-up:

- Time adjustment to circumstances.
- Avoidance of simultaneous use of the accesses to dressing rooms / player's tunnel.

Equipment control/gathering for the arrival of the teams:

- Equipment control at dressing room by Assistant Ref (not in the collection area).
- Separate entry through the players' tunnel/no gathering or joint entry at all.

Walk-on of the teams:

- No escort kids.
- No mascots.
- No team photos (photographers position only behind goal).
- No opening production with additional people.
- No handshake.
- No joint formation of the teams.

Technical zone/pitch side:

- Teams only on benches (exceptions: 4th official, camera positions, medical service).
- Minimise TV positions in interior area.
- Positioning of teams on the bench: Persons should be distanced as possible. Replacement extension possibilities: grandstand area (if there is direct access) or additional chairs/benches in extension of the spare benches (ideally also covered).
- Adaptation of technical area.

Half time:

- Divide access to the dressing rooms, reverse order to that taken before the match.

After the game (media⁴ areas with Super Flash/Flash/PK/X zone):

- Media working area and Mixed zone remain closed.
- Press-conference to take place as virtual press conference (if any).
- Minimise the interview (flash) position and number of interviews taking into account necessary hygienic measures. These should always be held pitch-side and should not last more than 5 minutes taking into account the social distancing measures. The reporter and camera crew must always stay at least 2m from the player. Common sense must prevail in terms of location and access.

After the game (Operations):

- Establishment of a second doping control room to separate players of both teams

Departure of teams:

- Spatial and temporal separation of departure see arrival.

⁴ Standard Operating Protocols for Stadium Organisation – MEDIA (Annex 3)

Annex 2: Standard Operating Protocols for Stadium Organisation – Hygiene

1. Inform all persons required for match operations in the stadium about compliance with the basic hygiene measures (hand disinfection, coughing and sneezing hygiene, distance) in accordance with the instructions of the hygiene officer.
 2. Minimize the time spent in the dressing room before and after the match.
 3. Inform players and staff with access to the stadium about the definition of "infection symptoms".
 4. Entry attendant regulates access to the stadium for players and compulsory staff.
 5. Entrance attendant asks other access persons about Health status and measures body temperature.
 6. Keep hand disinfectant (stands) available in front of or in each room if possible.
 7. Regular surface disinfection before the arrival of the teams.
 8. Leave doors as open as possible and avoid touching the door handles.
 9. Food should be prepared by the team cook and brought to the stadium already packed. Do not hire external catering.
 10. Exclusive use of personalised drinks bottles.
 11. Use of the common rooms (changing rooms, showers) (only in small groups) with guaranteed 2m distance.
 12. Showering at home / in the hotel (to avoid steam as a possible conductor of viruses / aerosol generator).
 13. Use of the fitness equipment only with disposable gloves, face mask and use of disinfectants before and after – consider closing gym area.
 14. Medical department works with mouth protection, hand disinfection and disposable gloves and is responsible for hygiene in the medical premises.
 15. Spatial separation and sufficient distance between treatment couches for therapeutic measures, if possible, use separate rooms.
 16. Economical use of medical equipment such as ultrasound/shockwave/etc. only after prior and subsequent disinfection.
 17. Persons who have contact with several players should pay attention to hygiene and protective measures.
 18. IMPORTANT: In the stadium, the public's view of professional football, the teams and players in the current situation will be even greater than before. Exemplary behaviour with regard to hygiene and insulation measures outside the pitch is a must.
 19. IMPORTANT: All hygiene and isolation measures serve to ensure that no further measures are necessary on the pitch and that 22 players and 4 referees are active without current infection.
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20. Overall, care should be taken to ensure that only those persons from the coaching staff are on the team who are essential for the game. Persons who are not essential for the direct course of the game can be contacted via telephone and video calls.
21. Personnel requirements:
 - Hygiene Officer
 - Increase in cleaning personnel
 - Entry attendant /accreditation system/regulation service
22. Stadium infrastructure requirements
 - 2 separate doping control rooms
 - Isolation room
23. Material requirements
 - Hand disinfectant/stand
 - Surface disinfectants
 - Mouthguard
 - Personal bottles for drinks
24. The individual arrival of the players in their own car should be considered.

Annex 3: Standard Operating Protocols for Stadium Organisation – Media

General Outline

The aim is to protect each individual employee and to ensure that the TV production is as completely separated as possible from the players and staff.

Maximum protection can only be achieved by consistent hygiene, a sense of responsibility and a minimisation of time overlap or spatial proximity. Individual hygiene measures are the most important activities to protect against infection.

All persons working on site must declare their agreement to comply with the hygiene regulations and the necessary health checks.

Awareness of the rules of conduct on hygiene according to the recommendations of public health. Informing all persons required for match operations in the stadium about compliance with basic hygiene measures (hand disinfection, coughing and sneezing hygiene, distance) in accordance with the instructions of the club's hygiene officer in coordination with the production manager (PV).

The employees stay in their respective areas (zone 3) exterior of stadium, in the stands area (zone 2) and the interior (zone 1).

From a hygiene point of view, special regulations for the arrival and departure of personnel and technical service providers must be observed:

Entrance attendant regulates access to the stadium for mandatory staff.

Involvement of the hygiene officer

Duties of the Hygiene Officer and Delegation from tasks to medical professionals.

Control access of all persons working on site and education about hygiene measures.

Checking the state of health (questioning, temperature measurement, checking of vaccination certificate) of all those involved in production.

Monitoring of basic hygiene measures (hand hygiene, coughing and sneezing hygiene, distance rules) and checking of hygiene regulations on site during the entire production period.

Right of intervention in the event of infringements against employees working on site. The hygiene officer can assign individual tasks to a delegated person with medical expertise.

Collaboration of the Production Manager (PM) with hygiene officers or delegates of the club. The PM is responsible for the planning and implementation of the entire production and interface to all those involved in production - and thus the hygiene officer or other delegated person is to be introduced to the PM. The hygiene officer and the PM should be in constant exchange of information.

Access, control and instruction of individual employees

Every production participant is to undergo a "health check" when entering the stadium and agrees to submit a "health declaration" including compliance with the hygiene regulations (see 1.). Access is only granted after a health check.

Each operator completes a questionnaire (yes/no) describing possible symptoms of COVID-19 and confirms the information by signing:

1. Fever in the last 7 days?
2. Coughing in the last 7 days?
3. Throat or aching limbs in the last 7 days?
4. Breathing problems in the last 7 days?
5. Restriction in sense of taste and smell in the last 7 days?
6. Contact with a Covid-19 patient in the last 7 days?
7. Past 14 days in a corona risk area?
8. Already tested (including when and how)?

If one or more questions are answered with "Yes", further decision regarding access and permission of the activity by hygiene officers.

Provision of protective equipment (by media personnel):

1. Mouth and nose protector
2. Disinfectants (unless otherwise provided)

Provision of hygiene material (at toilet and broadcast van):

1. Installation of mobile washbasins in several easily accessible places
2. Soap
3. Disposable folding towels
4. Alcohol based hand disinfectant

Additional explanations of the safety measures and hygiene rules

In addition to the most important safety requirements, the following points must also be observed:

1. Avoidance of private conversations, as these tempt to reduce the distance requirements.
2. Mandatory consultations should be held in a small circle, short and at the greatest speaking distance.
3. Leave doors as open as possible and avoid touching the door handles.
4. Press lift buttons with your elbow or use stairs.
5. Mouth and nose protectors: must be worn after entering the stadium grounds and in all areas. Observe correct putting on and taking off as well as carrying (complete covering of mouth and nose).
6. Hand disinfection: Basically, before and after every use of jointly used equipment (focus on broadcast technology). Hand disinfectants must be rubbed into dry hands and must not be subsequently rinsed with water.

Work in the stadium in compliance with hygiene regulations

General

The time spent on site is reduced to the bare minimum (see Planning and Dispatching).

- In order to avoid crowds of people of any kind no catering provided on site. The press room should remain closed.
- The production van is closed and only for PM and accessible to the hygiene officers of the club.

Precautions at workstations and work equipment

- General measures (e.g. cameras, Plexiglas, microphones, headsets)
 1. Observe the minimum distance for camera positions and on the media stand.
 2. Use of plexiglass partitions by the service providers, where other spatial equalisation is not possible.
 3. If possible, establishment of an open access (open doors and avoidance of barriers and thus unnecessary contact with hands).
 4. Protection of microphones and headsets.
- Cleaning and disinfection (before/after installation) of equipment
 1. Cleaning of equipment and surfaces with a surface disinfectant before the start of production, after assembly and disassembly on the production day by the service provider.
 2. Recurring cleaning if necessary.
- Posting of the hygiene plan at media-relevant locations in the stadium.

Personnel are considered separately according to functions and access to zone/working area:

Zone 1 -

- Persons working in zone 1 should only work on their equipment or equipment for a certain period of time according to strict necessity and schedule.
- Walking distances should be reduced and planned as short as possible, no crossing of the players' tunnel.
- The rules of social distance are strictly necessary here and unnecessary conversations are to be avoided.

Zone 2 & 3 -

- In the stands and in the outside area, the rules of distance must be strictly observed, and no unnecessary discussions must be held.
- Broadcast van.
- Significant reduction in the number of workstations on the broadcast van to comply with the distance regulation.
- Closed rooms are to be ventilated three to four times a day for ten minutes each time, ideally the production takes place with open doors.
- Cleaning of the surfaces of the equipment and the door handles with a surface disinfectant before the start of production and after installation on the production day by the service provider.

Media activities after the match

- Here the current security measures apply with distance of 2m and possible plexiglass partitions.

Other rules

- Meetings of the production team is subject to the current hygiene rules, the distance rules. Arrangements should be made preferably by e-mail, telephone, or video calls.
- Behaviour during breaks: Avoid meetings and spend your break alone, if possible, this also applies to the intake of meals. If possible, do not stay in closed rooms.

Supplementary provisions

- The precautionary principle means that everyone must take care of his or her own personal protection.
- The principle of solidarity means that everyone is responsible for and can protect the OTHERS.
- These recommendations can be changed at short notice.

Annex 4: Guidelines for procedure in case of positive test

Doctor/ Covid Liaison Officer

- I. Informing the Malta FA on covid@mfa.com.mt
- II. If testing of a player with symptoms is still to be done, this should be preferably done as a "drive in" method in a car.
- III. Immediate isolation of the affected player.
- IV. Organisation of the testing of the documented contact persons.
- V. Observation and clinical testing of symptoms in the team.
- VI. Calming down and informing the team about the situation (no panic, strategic orientation of the team, control of hygiene measures, etc.)

Players

- I. In case of symptoms of illness, call the team doctor and/or club Covid Liaison Officer immediately and inform
- II. Immediately initiate a self-isolation in the sense of a quarantine in order not to infect family members and team members.
- III. In case of illness, all physically strenuous activities should be avoided.
- IV. In case of a positive test without illness, an individual training program can be carried out at home.

Clubs

- I. No automatic reporting of a positive case to the press since the focus is on disease verification and clear documentation of previous transmission routes.
- II. Telephone consultation to ensure that players isolate.
- III. Ensure a sufficiently large squad for the season finale.

Annex 5: Return to Play Protocol following Positive COVID-19 Test

Summary - COVID-19 Infection

COVID-19 is a predominantly respiratory virus, but there is substantial evidence to suggest it may also affect the cardiovascular system.

Most cases resolve without requiring hospitalisation.

Any player with a suspected case of COVID-19 should be isolated.

Players with a positive test for COVID-19, or a strong suspicion of infection should be re-introduced to physical activity gradually.

Symptoms must be resolved, and medical clearance given before return to play.

Any worsening of symptoms during the rehabilitation phase requires removal from activity and re-assessment.

If symptoms persist, then players may need to be referred for specialist intervention. Any players requiring hospitalisation should seek specialist help before attempting return to sport and are not to use these guidelines.

Introduction

These guidelines reflect the current best practice and are based largely on recommendations / expert opinion at the time of publication. We acknowledge there are gaps in current scientific knowledge however these guidelines are intended as a tool for health professionals involved at all levels of Maltese football as a means for to effectively manage return to sport following a positive test for COVID-19 safely.

“If you have tested COVID-19 positive you must undergo mandatory quarantine for a number of days as advised by the Public Health Authorities”

These guidelines aim to provide a framework return to football, for those who have suffered a mild or asymptomatic illness, while respecting the guidelines issued by Public Health Malta.

What to know if you have tested positive for COVID-19:

https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/covid-19/Documents/resources/What_You_Need_To_Know_If_You_Have_Testes_Positive_To_Covid-19.pdf

What does being infected with covid-19 mean?

COVID-19 infection may lead to symptoms such as fever, cough, shortness of breath, diarrhoea or vomiting, loss of taste and/or smell, tiredness, sore throat, runny nose/blocked nose, headache, and muscle pain. In some cases, the virus may lead to a subclinical myocarditis and arrhythmias, even in the absence of symptoms.

“7% of all patients with proven COVID-19 infection show evidence of myocardial injury”

How to deal with a player with a positive COVID-19 test?

When dealing with a player who has a proven COVID-19 infection, they must firstly and foremost follow the national guidelines issued by Public Health Malta.

As much as possible they should be encouraged to maintain a balanced diet and keep hydrated and to monitor any worsening of symptoms.

The length of the quarantine period is governed by the legal notice issued by the Government of Malta and may be subject to change. Once completed, and in the absence of symptoms a player may be considered to be recovered. Should symptoms persist they are to contact their doctor.

Before Return to play:

Any player who has recovered from COVID-19 infection may follow the protocol outlined above which reintroduces physical activity in a controlled manner. Some key considerations which are required before the player starts the RTP protocol are highlighted below:

- Before starting the RTP protocol, the player must be able to complete their regular daily activities and be able to walk 500m without excessive fatigue and breathlessness.
- The player must have been symptom-free for at least 7 days.

- The player should be off all medication before starting.
- Medical Assessment should be undertaken before starting the protocol. This should be done in conjunction with the Malta FA medical department.

“In the non-professional setting return to work or school takes priority”

Graduated return to play

Following the recovery of a player from COVID-19, the initial management should involve a medical assessment with input from the Malta FA medical department, this may require referral to a specialist for further investigation, depending on the results of any investigations done. As a minimum requirement the medical assessment should include, a full history and examination and an ECG. Assessment by Echocardiogram is recommended, and in the presence of symptoms, mandatory.

Once players have been cleared to begin their return to play, they should be encouraged to monitor the following and report to the club medical staff:

- Resting heart rate.
- Rated perceived exertion.
- Wellness questionnaire - covering sleep, stress, fatigue, and muscle soreness.
- Injury-Psychological Readiness to Return to Sport.

A healthy diet and good hydration are encouraged.

“Some players may take over 3 weeks to recover”

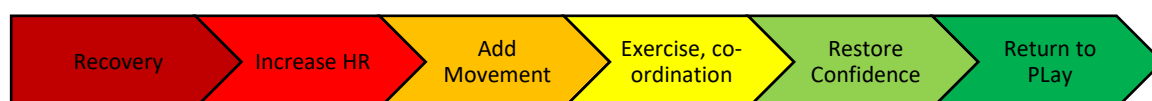
A graduated return to play protocol is outlined in the next page, with the occurrence of symptoms mandating a return to the previous stage after 24hrs of rest.

There should be at least 24hrs between each step.

Any player who has persistent symptoms should be referred to a specialist for further investigations.

Graduated return to play protocol

Stage	Exercise Allowed	% HR	Duration
Stage 1 Quarantine 10 / 14 days (Depending on Vaccination status)	Activities of daily living	No training	Minimum 10 / 14 days (Depending on Vaccination status)
STAGE 2 – LIGHT EXERCISE 2 days	Walking, light jogging, swimming, stationary cycling	<70 %	<15min
STAGE 3A – FOOTBALL SPECIFIC EXERCISE 1 day	Simple movement activities e.g. running drills NO Resistance training	<80%	<30min
STAGE 3B- FOOTBALL SPECIFIC EXERCISE 1 Day	Progression to more complex training Increased intensity Co-ordination and attention, e.g. passing, change of direction, shooting, tactics	<80%	<45min
STAGE 4- LIMITED DURATION TRAINING 2 days	Restore Confidence and assess functional skills. Normal training activities limited to 1 hour	<80%	<60min
STAGE 5 – FULL CONTACT TRAINING Earliest Day 17 or Day 21	Normal training activities		
STAGE 6 – RETURN TO PLAY	Player rehabilitated, may continue physical conditioning to reach match fitness		

Aims:

References:

- Public Health Malta Quarantine guidelines:
https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/covid-19/Documents/resources/What_You_Need_To_Know_If_You_Have_Testing_Positive_To_Covid-19.pdf
- Does H. & Cardim N. - Return to play after COVID-19: a sport cardiologist's view, British Journal of Sports Medicine Published Online First: 07 May 2020. doi: 10.1136/bjsports-2020-102482
- Elliott N, Martin R, Heron N, et al - Infographic. Graduated return to play guidance following COVID-19 infection, British Journal of Sports Medicine Published Online First: 22 June 2020. doi: 10.1136/bjsports-2020-102637

Annex 6: COVID-19 Liaison Officer

Each club will appoint a COVID-19 Liaison Officer. The role of this person is to remain familiar with the most up to date Malta FA, Sport Malta and Public Health Guidance and ensure that this is communicated throughout club officials, administrators, volunteers, coaches, players, and parents/ guardians.

Like Safeguarding, ensuring the adherence to the Malta FA protocols is the responsibility of **everyone** and the role of the COVID-19 Liaison Officer is to oversee this.

Key responsibilities:

- Ensure coaches, staff and volunteers are aware and adhere to Covid-19 guidelines and protocols while at training & during matches and have access to the appropriate equipment. (sanitiser/disinfectant/gloves etc.)
- Co-ordinate attendance record keeping for each training session and match, regardless of venue. This information should be retained by the club and destroyed after 30 days. (Unless required for another lawful purpose as per GDPR).
- Ensure that the club only uses facilities that allow Malta FA, SportMalta and Public Health guidance to be met. This includes social distancing and good hand hygiene practice.
- Keep updated with all new SportMalta and Public Health guidance and Malta FA guidelines on Covid-19; update and communicate club plans, as necessary.
- Carrying out a risk assessment will help support the decision to return to football activity.
- Clubs have a responsibility to ensure that the maximum number of attendees is not exceeded.