



Procedures for ensuring safe return to refereeing in Scottish football (from 12 September 2020)

Preface

This document sets out the revised protocols for all matches played for the start of season 2020/21. It considers the principles and detailed operating procedures for the on-field refereeing team. **The contents of this document are not optional. They are rules** set down by the Scottish FA JRG and in line with Scottish Government guidelines. It is vital everyone follows these.

This document should be read in conjunction with the Scottish Football Return to Football presentations and in line with content on the Scottish FA website / Return to Football hub;

<https://www.scottishfa.co.uk/football-development/return-to-football-hub/>

The overriding principle is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all Scottish FA match officials in the match day environment. **If at any time a match official feels they do not want to resume football activities under this guidance they are under no obligation to do so. Match officials should not feel under any pressure to accept matches.**

Match officials should consider and apply all relevant principles. This includes minimising face to face contact where possible, avoiding lengthy periods of time in enclosed spaces, ensuring appropriate hygiene protocols are always in place and encouraging observance of appropriate social distancing measures.

If match officials encounter match days situations which may not specifically be covered in this document, referral should be made to the Referee Operations team for assistance.

The following procedures would apply for all matches (including any bounce games/friendly matches which may be approved) unless specifically mentioned (i.e. Premiership matches are subject to additional testing).

Testing Procedures

1. From the restart of football below the SPFL Premiership level (from 12th September 2020) **only Premiership matches, or those matches involving Premiership teams will need players and officials COVID tested** within 7 days / 168 hours of the kick-off of that particular match. (This is to help protect the fixture list for the Premiership; where a player tests positive only that player needs to self-isolate as everyone else is negative. However in the lower leagues if a player feels unwell and is tested at the NHS and tests positive, then everyone they have been in close contact with (for example at training) needs to self-isolate and matches will be in danger of being put off.)
2. Matches not involving Premiership clubs do not need players or officials to be tested, however **ALL other current Scottish Government Guidelines MUST BE FOLLOWED**. The Scottish Government and health advisors have deemed the risk involved to be acceptable, and for football to restart under these guidelines, as long as all rules and regulations are followed. However as mentioned in the preface



above – if a match official feel they do not want to referee under these guidelines they are under no pressure to do so – it is an individual choice.

3. All Scottish FA match officials operating in any match under the auspices of the Scottish FA, SPFL, and other associated leagues once they start, are expected to follow the relevant testing regime and associated Scottish Government guidelines for as long as these are in place.
4. To re-iterate, only those match officials' appointed to a Premiership match or match involving a Premiership team, in that particular week need to be tested and they only require to be tested once that week. This includes the small number of stand by officials that will be appointed to ensure sufficient numbers of officials are available should any other official appointed to the game become unwell in the intervening period.
5. All match officials appointed to Premiership games or games involving Premiership clubs will be tested at their nearest SPFL Premiership club or at Hampden in the 7 day period leading up to a match. Specific days for testing at each club will be allocated in the week leading up to a match and timings advised. (Exact timings are not known at the time this document is prepared and will advised nearer the time.) Officials can choose a club with timings to suit their working pattern, however even with these efforts and choices, there may be occasions where timings may not suit perfectly and we will need to examine what options are available should this arise.
6. A negative test result in the 7 days prior to kick-off will be required to validate entry to the stadium on match day. Match officials will receive a direct communication from the testing lab or relevant club confirming the result.
7. Should the match official receive a positive result, this should immediately be notified to the Referee Operations Department and the Scottish FA's Chief Medical Consultant on 07963-692373. The match official must then follow official guidelines with regard self-isolation.

Match Day Medical Procedures (outwith Premiership which are subject to additional rules previously circulated)

8. **Zoning:** All stadiums / grounds will be delineated into the following 'zones':
 - 'Red Zone' - the pitch, tunnel area, technical areas, changing rooms and any other area that will be accessed by Relevant Persons on a matchday
 - 'Amber Zone' - the stadium interior including concourse areas, but not including the Red Zone
 - 'Green Zone' - the stadium exterior and its immediate vicinity
9. **Hygiene Protocols**
 - a. **Match officials should bring any necessary sanitising wipes or hand sanitiser** – including wipes to clean radio communications kit / flags and any other material shared by match officials.
 - b. All match day personnel are prohibited from spitting or the ejecting of any fluids, chewing gum or tobacco from the nose and mouth whilst at the stadium.
 - c. All spaces in each stadium must be modified to allow appropriate social distancing or alternative larger spaces provided.
 - d. Clubs have been asked to ensure social distancing is maintained where possible, including specifically:
 - In the technical area and during warm ups
 - In the tunnel area
 - During communications with match officials for all players and coaches



- e. As of the time of writing this document (2/9/20) changing areas may be provided by the home club, subject to social distancing rules and Return to Football protocol / Scottish Government guidelines. **However for the majority of lower level clubs with smaller facilities, no changing areas will be provided. Referees should come ready to referee.**
- f. Pre-match briefings should be performed outside and ensure social distancing is maintained.
- g. Face masks / coverings - Match officials are **not** required to wear face coverings on match day except in the following 3 situations:
 - Mask must be worn when arriving and leaving stadium.
 - Masks should be worn by 4th official: Official medical advice / requirement states that the 4th official does not need to wear a mask during the match, however given the proximity to the technical areas the wearing of a mask is optional but suggested as good practice.
 - Players equipment should be checked outside in lower levels of football, however where changing areas are provided, the referee / assistant referees must wear a face mask / covering while performing the cursory visual equipment check of players when leaving the changing areas. A referee / assistant referee should return the face mask to the match officials changing area and sanitise their hands prior to taking the field of play for the match.
- h. Worn warm up kit, and any changed match kit should be kept in separate plastic bags by each match official and not left out in the changing area at any time.

Pre-Match Procedures

10. At Home

- a. Match officials, and close family members, are expected to adhere to Government guidelines, including social distancing, and not undertake activities which unnecessarily increase their risk of infection between appointments.
- b. Match officials should advise Referee Operations immediately if any member of their household is either symptomatic or receives a positive test result.

11. Appointments at SPFL level

- a. Due to testing for Premiership matches (and some clubs may test on a Monday) match official appointments for the SPFL may be released by 12 noon on a Friday for the following Saturday (i.e. 8 days later) and the following mid-week matches (i.e. up to 13 days in advance of the match). Appointments for all other levels of football will be done in line with usual timeframes.
- b. There will be no provision for match official guest attendance / tickets at any Behind Closed Door (BCD) matches.

12. Pre-match operations meeting for SPFL matches (2 days prior to matches)

- a. Additional information relating to the key changes in operation of the stadiums and changes to usual match day protocols will be included. This will include information regarding the procedures for that venue, directions to designated entrances/exits, confirmation of designated car



parking allocations and confirmed match day schedule and indicating timings for separate warm up and field of play entry /exit timings and contact details of the Clubs' COVID-19 Officer, Medical Officer.

- b. Where these meetings are formally held (usually SPFL matches), it is recommended that a member of the match officials team are invited to, and where possible attend, these pre-match meetings (which are currently planned as being held via video conference) in order that all relevant information regarding these changes to protocol can be passed to the rest of the match official team appointed to the game. If it is not practical or possible for one of the officials to attend due to family or work commitments, all relevant details should still be emailed to the match officials by the home club at least 48 hours before the match.
- c. The referee should ensure the rest of the on-field team have all the necessary briefing documents prior to the match.
- d. The referee should co-ordinate the team briefings and preparation remotely, as there will be no hotel meetings, and everyone will be travelling directly to the venues separately.
- e. The referee is responsible for ensuring that any items of shared equipment are disinfected appropriately between matches, including the requirement for assistant referee flags to be washed at a temperature of at least 60 degrees prior to each match.
- f. All appointed match officials should ensure they bring and use their own dedicated ear-pieces. The match officials are responsible for cleaning and disinfecting this equipment themselves using appropriate sanitising wipes. Where officials do not have a dedicated earpiece a standard ear piece can be worn, however the referee (kit owner) must ensure these are wiped down and sterilised using wipes – and where possible the rubber insert washed - between matches.

13. Travel

- a. All on-field match officials are required to travel separately in their own vehicle, unaccompanied, directly to the stadium on the day of the match. As lock down rules ease it may be appropriate for officials to share a car – but reference should be made to existing rules at the time.
- b. As per Scottish Government guidance public transport should be avoided where possible (and would require the mandatory wearing of a face covering).
- c. It is expected that all officials will be able to travel to and from their home to the stadium on the day of the match.
- d. As rules and guidance are relaxed and hotel accommodation becomes more widely available, this should be requested in the usual manner for SPFL matches.

Match Day Procedures

14. Before departing home

- a. Match officials should travel in appropriate clothing. Note that it is expected that match officials in the SPFL should enter the stadium wearing the current season travel wear or where this has not been received, training kit (tracksuit, warm up t-shirt and trainers).
- b. Catering provision at stadiums will not be available. Match officials should



make appropriate provision to bring any food/ refreshments as necessary for personal use only. Match officials are encouraged to bring their own labelled water bottles.

15. Arrival at Ground

- a. For Premiership matches, the match officials are expected to **arrive at the stadium KO - 120 mins** (note – **not** -90 minutes as previous). A designated parking space will be available for each official from KO -180 mins. (This earlier arrival time is to allow for the risk that a match official may fail the temperature check on arrival at the stadium and a stand by official be required to travel to the stadium.)
- b. For all other leagues the usual arrival times should be adhered to – however in lower leagues access to the pitch may not be allowed until c40 minutes prior to the kick off.
- c. **On arrival, all match officials should make themselves known to the home team COVID officer as their presence and their contact details will need to be recorded for track and trace purposes.**
- d. **The home team COVID officer can also advise a suitable person to look after the match officials valuables (car key), drinks bottle (clearly marked with your name) and where applicable the polythene bag for the match officials warm up top / clothing.**
- e. All match officials should avoid non-essential face to face contact whilst entering or exiting the stadium where possible.

16. Pre-Match Procedures

- a. Only match officials are permitted to enter any dedicated match official space e.g. match official preparation room and/or match official changing area.
- b. **Referee Observers:** Where there is a Scottish FA Referee Observer appointed to matches, in Premiership matches and those where players / officials have been tested, Observers are not permitted in the red zone. **As there is no testing in matches outside of Premiership, Observers are permitted to meet with match officials outside or inside within social distancing rules being applied. Observers can, in these matches, obtain radio communication kit.**
- c. All appointed match officials must ensure they bring and use their own dedicated ear-piece (where this is supplied). The match officials are responsible for cleaning and disinfecting this equipment themselves using appropriate sanitising wipes. Where officials do not have a dedicated ear piece the standard ear piece can be worn as long as it has been cleaned and disinfected with wipes prior to use.
- d. The assistant referees should use sanitising wipes to disinfect flag sticks when distributed by the referee.
- e. Match officials should exit the changing areas for warm up according to the agreed schedule and take appropriate measures to minimise any interaction with anyone whilst entering or exiting the field of play before or after warm up.
- f. A dedicated match official warm up area on the pitch should be clearly marked (as per Return to Football presentation). This must be used. Match officials should continue to observe social distancing measures during the warm up.



- g. Ensure the pitch is suitably marked out with cones / markers 4m outside the perimeter of the pitch. Only match officials, players and coaches are allowed in the perimeter of this 4m. All coaches should remain at least 2m outside the field of play and this 2m should also be marked.

17. Team sheets

- a. A request is being issued to all relevant leagues and associations to communicate and advise clubs to email team sheets to the referee and the opposition in accordance with time lines for their appropriate league / association – thus removing the need for team sheets to be manually passed. There should be no need to meet with club officials prior to a match. The referee can then use these pictures and upload to the Scottish FA administration systems as normal post-match. Where substitutes cannot be written on to the team sheets, or the team sheets cannot be altered (as they may be a photograph) these can be keyed into the Scottish FA system as normal post-match.
- b. Where changes to team sheets are required due to player injury before kick-off, it is permissible for a club official to request this and on the odd occasion this does happen the club COVID officer should contact the match official with details – and the email an updated copy signed by the relevant club doctor and official to the referee and the opposition.

18. Half Time

- a. Where no changing areas are provided, everyone must remain on the field of play at half time (socially distant) with only the match officials, players and up to three coaches permitted on the field of play. Substitutes should not warm up or kick the ball about at half time.

19. Post-Match Procedures

- a. In the Premiership and matches involving Premiership teams, there will be no face to face debrief with the Match Delegate or Observer on match day. In other matches where no testing has taken place, Observers may meet with the match officials after the match, observing social distancing as appropriate.
- b. All shared equipment should be disinfected by the referee using the sanitising wipes before departure.
- c. As per previous section, current guidelines are for showers not to be used. This may change as rules are relaxed. Where showers are used, they should be used by one person at a time, and in communal areas all the remaining officials maintaining a distance of at least 2m from the shower area.
- d. Before leaving the changing room each official should pack all their match kit and towels in their own disposable plastic bags before departing the stadium.
- e. All match officials, should leave the stadium independently, continuing to adhere to social distancing measures, and travel directly home.
- f. Match kit, assistant referee flag fabric and match attendance attire should be washed on return home at a temperature of at least 60 degrees.
All match officials should ensure that any H&S issue is reported directly to the Club COVID-19 Officer on match day