

GUIDANCE ON RETURN TO RUGBY FOR AGE GRADE GROUPS JULY 2020

Dear Rugby Colleagues,

A number of you have been in touch with regards to what activities you can offer to Age Grade players, particularly as some clubs appear to be offering a full “Pre-Season Training Programme”....(please see my notes below on when the season might start). We are happy to support clubs in their efforts to engage young players providing every effort is made to stay within legal and RFU guidelines.

As mentioned previously, the RFU considers that AS FAR AS RUGBY IS CONCERNED we are in Stage B (hopefully on our way to Stage F which is a return to competitive rugby).

<https://www.englandrugby.com/dxdam/bb/bb42cab-c-9918-4663-a22f-16a5decdca744/RUGBY%20RESTART%20ROAD%20MAP%20FINAL%202020-01.jpg>

With effect from 4th July you can start to re-engage your age grade players but with very specific guidelines about how you do so.

The infographic is titled "ENGLAND RUGBY COMMUNITY GAME GUIDANCE UPDATE 02/06/20". It features the England Rugby logo (a red rose) in the top left corner. The main content is organized into a grid of green boxes with white text and icons. The top left box contains the text "ALL PLAYERS MUST FOLLOW GOVERNMENT SOCIAL DISTANCING GUIDELINES" and the URL "WWW.GOV.UK/CORONAVIRUS". Below this, it states "GUIDANCE CAN CHANGE AT SHORT NOTICE, AND RESTRICTIONS CAN BE REINTRODUCED." and "STAY UP TO DATE ON THE LATEST ENGLAND RUGBY COMMUNITY GAME GUIDELINES:" with the URL "WWW.ENGLANDRUGBY.COM /CORONAVIRUS". The remaining boxes contain specific guidelines: 1. "COACHING CAN NOW TAKE PLACE WITH SMALL GROUPS OF UP TO SIX (INCLUDING THE COACH). RFU SAFEGUARDING POLICIES MUST BE FOLLOWED." with an icon of a clipboard. 2. "OUTDOOR FIELD BASED INDIVIDUAL TRAINING IN SMALL GROUPS PERMITTED" with an icon of a hand with a slash through it. 3. "PLAYERS CAN TRAIN WITH OWN HOUSEHOLD. ONCE PER 24 HOUR PERIOD PLAYERS CAN TRAIN AS PART OF A GROUP OF MAX 6 FROM OTHER HOUSEHOLDS." with an icon of six people. 4. "EQUIPMENT SHARING (INCLUDING BALLS) SHOULD BE KEPT TO A MINIMUM" with an icon of a rugby ball. 5. "WASH/SANITIZE HANDS & EQUIPMENT REGULARLY" with an icon of hands being washed. 6. "CLUBHOUSES CURRENTLY CAN OPEN FOR ACCESS TO TOILETS AND TO SERVE TAKEAWAY FOOD/DRINK ONLY" with an icon of a clubhouse building. 7. "NO PHYSICAL CONTACT. USE ENGLAND RUGBY TRAINING RESOURCES FOR GUIDANCE" with an icon of a hand with a slash through it. 8. "IT IS NOW PERMISSIBLE FOR TWO OR MORE GROUPS OF 6 TO TRAIN PROVIDED THEY ARE KEPT SEPARATE (NO MORE THAN 4 GROUPS PER FULL PITCH), AND SOCIAL DISTANCING AND STRICT HYGIENE MEASURES ARE OBSERVED." with an icon of a clipboard. 9. "STRONG HAND HYGIENE PRACTICE SHOULD BE IN PLACE BEFORE AND AFTER." with an icon of hands being washed. 10. "DO NOT TRAIN OR MEET ANYONE IF YOU HAVE CORONAVIRUS SYMPTOMS" with an icon of a hand with a slash through it.

The RFU have produced an infographic on facility re-opening [here](#) and if you are planning to use natural turf pitches you should work your way through this [guidance](#)

Every club needs to undertake a thorough risk assessment of the general and specific risks associated with gathering together groups of children for fitness and conditioning activities. The government has introduced laws to specify that, with effect from 4th July:

- when you are outside you can continue to meet in groups of up to six people from different households, following social distancing guidelines;
- it will be against the law to gather in groups larger than 30 people

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do-after-4-july>

This means you could offer “training” to a single age grade at a time, providing you work with players in pods of six (typically one coach to 5 players) in an area no smaller than a quarter of the

size of an adult pitch. As a guideline, the recommended maximum duration of a training session in a day is:

U7 - U8	60 minutes
U9 - U11	90 minutes
U12 – U18	120 minutes

At this time it would not be possible to organise rugby “camps” in the traditional way but it may be possible to organise a week of daily activities run on current guidelines. If you are thinking along those lines, I encourage you to call us to talk through your ideas before progressing too far with your plans.

You should issue all players and parents with clear guidelines on what is expected. Here are some issues to consider:

- Players with underlying health conditions (e.g. asthma / diabetes etc.) need to consider the additional risks to them
- Anyone feeling unwell or experiencing any known Covid-19 symptoms must stay away from the club.
- Have one-way systems into the club and minimise non-playing individuals
- Wash/sanitize hands on arrival and regularly throughout training sessions (especially after ball drills), after toilet breaks and at the end
- Minimise the equipment you use (e.g. one ball per pod of six). There should be no tag belts, kicking tees, bibs, scrummaging machines....you are NOT yet preparing for competition.
- Maintain 2-metre social distance at all times, including during activities.
- No food or drink should be shared, and players should ONLY use their own water bottles

I repeat my previous message that if you are planning to re-start training activities consider carefully whether the players are likely to gain anything from the activities you can offer under the present circumstances. For younger children you should be encouraging play and fun. There must be ABSOLUTELY NO contact (no high fives, elbow bumps etc) and age grade players MUST NOT be engaged in activities alongside adult teams.

Regulation 15.6 still needs to be followed and you need to request authorisation for any 17-year-old to train with your seniors.

We all want to get back to “normality” as soon as we can but jumping the gun may simply have the reverse effect. It may be great fun for kids to get out and be with their mates. But it will be less fun if they take home a virus that hospitalises a vulnerable member of their family. Be alert and use common sense at all times.

Lastly, the Age Grade committee will take a particularly dim view of any coach or club who seeks to encourage or entice players from another club into their training activities. Stick with your current squads and look after the players that have paid their subs.

I previously said I would let you have further plans regarding the start of the season and competition. Here is the latest from Twickenham:

AGE GRADE RUGBY INCLUDING NATIONAL COMPETITIONS

The start of the Age Grade rugby season will be dictated by reaching stage F in the Return to Rugby Roadmap . The aim is to maximise participation and retain as many current age grade players of all

ages and levels as possible. In the event of a delayed start to the season, the season is able to be extended to the end of May as a one off to support delivery of meaningful activity.

In all the [scenarios](#), player welfare and safety is a priority and activity must continue to be in line with Regulation 15. Players should complete a staged progression aligned with Return to Rugby Roadmap Stage E to be fully contact-ready before playing contact matches.

The Age Grade Playing Calendar 2020-21 and associated regulation remains as scheduled for the season including Player Pathway (DPP, CB and Academy) activity.

Steve Grainger, RFU Rugby Development Director, commenting on the return to competitive play said: “The competition models we’re outlining today demonstrate our commitment to having competitive rugby played in clubs and education settings as soon as it is safely possible. In addition to the competition framework, we are working on plans with Sport England and the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport about how we accelerate some form of a return to community rugby. We’ll share our work on this with you as soon as it is available.”

Here is an idea of how the season might look:

If Phase F is put in place by 13th September 2020	➡	All national competitions can take place as per original schedule in the AG playing calendar	➡	The season will end on Monday 3rd May 2021
If Phase F is put in place between 14th September and 18th October 2020	➡	National competitions can continue as scheduled in the AG playing calendar from this point	➡	The season will end on Monday 31st May 2021
If Roadmap Phase F is put in place after 18th October 2020	➡	National competitions will be cancelled for the 2020-21 season	➡	The season will end on Monday 31st May 2021

An infographic detailing the RFU’s recommendations for Age Grade Rugby can be found [here](#)

And the **RETURN TO PLAYING COMPETITIVE RUGBY FAQs** can be found [here](#)

As far as Kent Age Grade Competitions are concerned, we are confident that, even with a January 2021 start date, we can offer some form of competitive activity across all age grades. As we progress into Stages D and E we will have a clearer picture of the time line available to us and we will share our thoughts with you then.

With regards to club festivals we know some of you are keen to book your dates into the diary. The RFU are intending to release guidance on competition format and, possibly, regulation changes for Age Grade Rugby. Once we are apprised of these we will be able to let you know if and how you will be allowed to organise large events.

We’re here to help with any queries you may have.

Keep yourselves and your playing community safe.

Deborah Park

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