

OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE FOR THE FUTURE PHASED RE-OPENING OF GOLF FACILITIES

This paper contains operational guidance for professional staff engaged in the management of golf courses, clubs and driving ranges that may be adopted when government COVID-19 restrictions permit the re-opening of golf facilities. These guidelines may be updated depending on further government guidance or amended social distancing measures.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the closure of golf facilities. At some point these restrictions will be lifted, most likely on a phased basis, and golf will open for business once again.

It will be essential that golf re-opens in a responsible and safe way and that government advice and policy are adhered to at all times. See the links below for the current guidance:

UK link - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Ireland link – <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/c36c85-covid-19-coronavirus/>

The purpose of this document is to offer practical advice and guidance across a number of areas to help golf clubs and courses, driving ranges and their professional staff to prepare for re-opening when the government advises that it is safe to do so.

This guidance has been prepared and is supported by key stakeholders in the golf industry with a view to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of golfers and members of staff alike.

The guidance in this document is split into a number of areas:

Preparing the golf course

Starting a phased return to play

Starting PGA Professional services

Starting clubhouse management and administration

Resuming full services

PREPARING THE GOLF COURSE

Golf courses have been permitted to carry out essential maintenance during the period of course closure. If government regulations allow increased maintenance levels, then the primary consideration should continue to be ensuring staff safety.

Measures relating to staff should include but not be limited to:

- Ensure suitable disinfectant and hand sanitiser is provided in all communal areas
- Stagger working hours and break times
- Limit or prohibit use of communal areas
- Ensure there is a robust lone working policy
- Encourage staff to bring their own food and drink for their breaks and for this to be stored safely and separately
- Appoint a senior member of staff to be responsible for disinfecting / sanitising all surfaces that are touched, for example door handles, fuel pumps. The same member of staff should be responsible for opening and closing doors to the maintenance facility
- Ensure team meetings, if they are necessary, are held outdoors or in large indoor spaces with physical distancing implemented
- Utilise modern communication methods, for example online systems, mobile phones etc. for team communications rather than indoor briefings and job sheets
- Ensure there is a high focus on hygiene and physical distancing
- Ensure staff members work separately, not in pairs / groups where possible
- Allocate individual machinery to one staff member only
- Fully sanitise all machinery after use, focusing on all areas that the staff member has come into contact with

N.B. Where this document refers to 'sanitisers' and 'sanitising wipes', please follow government recommendations; this would usually advise that these should be a minimum of 70% alcohol based.

COURSE CONDITION:

It is likely that due to reduced maintenance it will take some time for the course to return to 'normal' condition. It is important to manage golfer expectations and explain that the conditions they will experience are the result of limitations imposed by the pandemic essential maintenance safety measures and not through neglect.

OBVIOUS ISSUES WILL BE:

- Reduced pace of greens through higher cutting heights
- Higher cutting heights in all / most maintained areas
- Lengthier rough areas, particularly in 'out of play' areas
- Untidy bunkers
- Lack of golf course furniture such as bunker rakes, bins, ball washers, benches

Whilst some golfers may be disappointed with conditions, it does present an opportunity to remind golfers of the fine balance between turf health, maintenance cost and presentation. It may be that golfers enjoy a more natural, less manicured feel to the golf course and some of the changes may become permanent.

In returning the course to a more 'normal' condition, greenkeepers will ensure that heights of cut that have been raised during the course closure period are reduced slowly so as not to put undue stress on the plant. If heights are reduced too quickly it will encourage disease and weed / pest encroachment.

Additionally, it is likely that annual maintenance plans for the course will have been severely affected by the course closure period, this means that some projects planned for 2020 may be delayed or cancelled. Consideration should be given to the amount of invasive maintenance, such as aeration and topdressing that needs to take place in light of the shortened golf season. This may have an effect on the quality of surfaces in the longer term.

It is possible that staff levels or hours of work will remain at a reduced level during the initial stages of play being permitted so progress may be slower than usual.

STARTING A PHASED RETURN TO PLAY

PLAYING ON THE GOLF COURSE

When governments and authorities give express consent, play may be able to begin in a regulated way. Looking ahead to this time, facilities are advised to begin planning for a range of procedures that may be insisted upon to allow safe play to take place, including but not limited to:

- Play should be managed by the professional staff / starter and they should remind golfers of the guidance on social distancing and safe play (see below)
- This guidance and advice for golfers should be posted on websites and on tee times booking pages
- Tee time booking should be done online if at all possible
- Consider increasing the time between tee times to allow for easier social distancing
- Consider restricting number of players in a group
- Consider playing a reduced number of holes (e.g. 9 holes)
- Any payment should be taken online or by contactless methods
- Clubhouses may initially remain shut so ask people to arrive shortly before their tee time (e.g. 10-15 minutes) and change their shoes etc. in the car park
- Consider the layout of the car park for easier social distancing
- Consider access to toilets
- It may be necessary to employ marshals on the golf course to ensure that the social distancing directive is maintained between players
- Remove the flagsticks or ask golfers to leave the flag in at all times. If the flagstick is left in, use a hole liner system that means that the ball doesn't drop and can be retrieved without touching the cup
- Remove the bunker rakes and cover or close ball washers and any other course furniture that would otherwise be touched
- Cover or remove all benches / seating from the course if possible
- Golfers should be asked to leave the venue as soon as their game is completed

Once the details of the Government's COVID-19 restrictions are known, staff will need to finalise the "safe play" procedures and communicate these to the golfers.

Plans should be put in place to ensure that any practices required of golfers before, during and after the round, including communications of temporary provisions relating to the playing of the game, can be easily and effectively communicated in advance, and reinforced when golfers arrive to play.

It may be appropriate to send these guidelines, once finalised, to members, place these on the online booking areas of a website and also place signage on the first tee as a reminder.

DRIVING RANGE USE

The safe use of a driving range or practice area must also be considered. It should be noted that driving ranges might not necessarily be allowed to open at the same time as golf courses.

Safe use procedures include but are not limited to:

- If bays are not separated by partitions or walls, close every other bay to allow for social distancing
- Make sure the ball washer has soap in the machine
- Provide sanitising wipes for people to use as required
- Clean the ball dispenser surfaces frequently
- Coach on the side of the range that fewest people have to walk past
- Ask people to use their own equipment

Driving range users should be advised of the “safe use” procedures once finalised.

STARTING PGA PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

When the PGA Professional’s shop opens guidelines will need to be kept under constant review as government advice changes.

The safe use of the Professional’s shop will require the adoption of a range of procedures including but not limited to:

- There should be clear external signage to inform golfers a maximum of 2 golfers will be allowed in the shop at any one time (this may need to be 1 golfer at a time for small shops)
- For larger shops, agreed numbers of customers may be permitted to enter but this must be in line with social distancing recommendations. Larger shops may also wish to suggest a route to be taken around the shop by use of arrows on the floor
- Staff shift patterns should be amended to take account of government advice, ideally one person working at a time – this may result in a lower staffing level in the shop than normal and a more basic service may be offered on initial opening
- Staff in the shop must conform to government advice on social distancing – ideally one person at a time working in the shop, if this is not possible, then a 2 metre distance should be kept
- Shop staff should wash hands regularly, as required
- Ideally one member of staff would use the till during a particular shift – if multiple people are operating the same till then hands should be washed / sanitised after each transaction
- There should be a clearly defined queuing area outside the shop where golfers must adhere to social distancing of a minimum of 2 metres
- Hand sanitiser should be positioned at the entrance to the shop and all customers should be asked to sanitise before entering
- The shop door could remain open to avoid contact with handles by golfers and to easily view number of customers in the shop
- In store signage should direct customers to the till area and then back out of the shop
- Transactions should be by customer account or card only
- Sanitiser wipes should be provided for use before and after each transaction
- Rental trolleys will not be available unless handles are able to be removed and sanitised between each use
- Buggy use should be reviewed in latter stages of ‘return to golf’. When this service is offered, it should be on the basis of one person only hire, with strict sanitisation between hires
- Where possible, a clear screen should be employed to protect shop staff
- Ideally, the shop should be merchandised with essential items positioned close to the till area, especially given possible lower levels of staffing
- Other transactions requiring advice will be located in an area where shop staff can offer advice whilst also observing safe social distancing of 2 metres

CLUB FITTING SESSIONS

Any club fitting sessions carried out both internally and externally should adhere to the following guidance to ensure safety of both customers and professional staff:

- This service should only be offered by prior booking
- Hand sanitiser should be positioned at the entrance to the club fitting area and all customers and fitters will be required to sanitise before entering
- Customer advice signage should be placed prominently when entering the fitting room or zone to notify the measures and procedures in place
- A strict 2 metre social distance must be adhered to between the fitter and the customer
- All golf fitting components must be sanitised after every use with a conforming alcohol sanitising wipes before being returned to its storage location

- Particular attention must be given to the sanitising of the club grip and the passing of component clubs between fitter and customer
- Golf balls used in the club fitting must also be kept clean to avoid cross-infection between customer and fitter

GOLF COACHING

Any golf coaching should adhere to the following guidance to ensure safety of both customers and professional staff:

- Promote coaching and playing lessons that takes place outdoors and ideally on the course although social distancing must still be observed
- If at all possible, don't coach in an indoor studio, but if doing this, social distancing guidance must be followed
- If using a practice ground or similar, create a 2 metre exclusion zone around the lesson tee/golfer that no one enters
- If you have to move a player into position, use an alignment stick, which is easy to wipe down with a sanitising wipes before and after the lesson
- Wash hands with soap and water before and after the session
- Provide sanitising wipes for you and your golfers
- Offer short game coaching sessions that allow the golfers to use their own golf balls, that way they are not sharing equipment that other people have touched
- Take flags out of the holes on practice areas

STARTING CLUBHOUSE MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

These guidelines will need to be kept under constant review as government advice changes. It may be necessary to agree a periodic / weekly review meeting with club staff.

- The management and administration of the club will in many ways remain focused on its core objectives. However, certain procedures and policies will need to be introduced or amended to ensure the welfare of the staff, golfers and those outside personnel who will visit the club in their normal working day i.e. delivery, maintenance and even emergency personnel
- Whilst the clubhouse may remain closed for the initial period, there will be a need for the management of the club to be maintained. At this time offices and administration areas should not be available for golfers or visitors to frequent or visit. All members and visitors will need to be made aware of the alternative communication channels that are available to them
- Those responsible for overseeing the running of the club, Owners, Directors and Committee members, need to agree and adhere to a cohesive policy and set of procedures that are delivered on a consistent basis
- The club administration areas and offices will need to be sufficiently arranged to ensure that either lone working (split shifts) or adequate social distancing is adhered to. Should there be need to provide a reception facility, then adequate protective screening will need to be deployed
- Hand sanitiser and only disposable hand towels should be used for staff toilet facilities - regular cleaning procedures will be required for these areas
- In the instance of maintenance personnel being involved in clubhouse activities, they should be suitably attired with protective clothing and report in and out of the facility
- Administer the arrangements for playing golf as outlined above
- In the event of Clubs offering a take-away coffee / tea service enforce social distancing rules and ensure staff wear protective gloves. All drinks or snacks are served in either plastic or paper containers
- Should the decision be made to open the locker rooms and toilets, then there is a need to ensure they are cleaned and sanitised at regular intervals
- Ensure all safety measures are shared with all employees and that their health and wellbeing is the number one priority, encourage them to share any concerns and empower them to request that golfers adhere to social distancing measures and report any issues to managers

RESUMING FULL SERVICES

Over time the full services provided by the club and professional staff will resume. However, it must be noted that there may be certain restrictions in place for some time, such as a degree of social distancing, that will necessitate a phased return to full operation.