

Joint Response Group – Return to Football COVID-19 strategy

A three-step approach for
a safe return to the
national game



Background

- Scottish football at all levels was suspended on March 13 until June 10, in line with NHS Scotland's emergency footing.
- The Scottish FA and SPFL have convened a daily Joint Response Group to deal with the implications of COVID-19 and the Scottish Government-enforced lockdown.
- Sub groups were created to look in detail at key areas: Medical; Supporters; Club Operations; Broadcast; Regulations; Grassroots.
- The SPFL league season 2019-20 has been curtailed, with titles, promotion and relegation confirmed.
- UEFA have postponed European Club Competitions and international matches until further notice



Executive summary

- This document maps-out our three-step approach to resuming Scottish football in line with the Scottish Government's roadmap out of lockdown and with public health as the primary consideration.
- The information is based on the guidance and direction from the Scottish FA's Chief Medical Consultant in line with WHO advice, CMO guidelines and through dialogue with the National Clinical Director for Scotland.
- Through the work of the JRG sub groups, a three-step model for the safe return to professional football has been conceived: 1. **Return to Training** 2. **Return to Playing** 3. **Return to Supporting**
- The strategy is designed to lead clubs through a phased approach to resuming training on an individual basis, increasing through limited group sizes to full group training, in time for the resumption of the SPFL season.



Key timelines

- The SPFL has outlined the following working objectives to restore professional football:
 - Premiership – August 1
 - Championship - October
 - League One and League Two – After October 2020
- In order to achieve this, the Scottish FA would seek permission to end its suspension of the national game on June 11.
- This would enable SPFL Premiership to begin preparations in order to make the August 1 start date for season 2020/21.
- The following information is designed to achieve the objectives within the timeline.



Weekend	Training grounds open	Stadium Assessment & Preparation	Socially Distanced Training Allowed	Full training resumes	First match
13 June					
20 June					
27 June					
4 July					
11 July					
18 July					
25 July					
1 Aug					

* Note, this timeline can be adjusted in line with government advice



Phase One: Return to Training



Overview

- This section sets out a series of uniform operating procedures, to ensure that players and staff return to a training environment that is as safe as possible, with the support of the Scottish Government. It includes
 - Policies and Procedures
 - Daily Pre-Training Screening
 - Return to Training Schedule
- Note, this is a summary of the JRG Return to Training docu



Policies and Procedures

- Club Covid-19 Operational Policy
 - Approved by Club Board and CEO & communicated to all players and staff
 - Must include interdisciplinary risk assessment of the training facility
 - Appropriate educational and familiarisation programme to be completed by all staff and players prior to attending training ground.
- Club Appointed Covid-19 Officer
 - Responsible for risk assessment and risk mitigation
- Club Appointed Covid-19 Medical Officer
 - Familiar with the emerging evidence related to Covid-19
 - Case management and medical oversight to return any player or staff member to training following any confirmed or suspected cases of Covid-19



Return to Training Phased Schedule Testing

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Training condition	Full lockdown, training at home	Small group sessions. Social distancing in place at all times. No contact during training		Normal training session – contact allowed
Symptoms Based Assessment	Daily individual symptoms assessment completed online or via app			
Coronavirus Antigen Testing (CAT testing)	Testing of all groups will be in advance of the resumption of training and twice weekly thereafter.			
Objective Assessment	Contactless temperature testing carried out each day on entry to training facility			



Return to Training Phased Schedule Pre Session Preparation

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Training condition	Full lockdown, training at home	Small group sessions. Social distancing in place at all times. No contact during training		Normal training session – contact allowed
Staff	Remote contact only	Essential staff only adhering to Govt guidelines All session preparation takes place remotely		Essential staff only adhering to Govt guidelines
Training Equipment	N/A	Designated staff member responsible for set up, moving and removal of all training equipment. Equipment cleaned after each session		
Training Kit	Kept and laundered by player	Staff/Players responsible for boots & training kit including GPS & heart monitor vests		Prepared by kit staff
PPE	N/A	Yes. As required in line with Government advice. Further details in main document		



Return to Training Phased Schedule On arrival

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Training condition	Full lockdown, training at home	Small group sessions. Social distancing in place at all times. No contact during training		Normal training session – contact allowed
Travel & Parking	N/A	Travel individually. Social distancing parking system in operation at all times		
Pre-Training Activity	N/A	Wait in car until designated training time		Minimal contact time pre training
Changing areas	N/A	Not required.		Access allowed. Squad spread over multiple changing rooms
Attendance Recording	N/A	Strict recording of all those in attendance at training ground each day taken and kept to enable tracing if required		



Return to Training Phased Schedule During Session

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Training condition	Full lockdown, training at home	Small group sessions. Social distancing in place at all times. No contact during training		Normal training session – contact allowed
Pitch Activity	N/A	Pitch divided ensuring social distancing at all times.		Normal training activity
Gym Activity	N/A	Injured players only. Hygiene protocols in place and staff wearing PPE	Small groups ensuring social distancing, hygiene protocols and PPE in place at all times	Small groups. Equipment cleaned between users
Treatment	N/A	Essential treatment only – at discretion of Medical Department Lead		



Return to Training Phased Schedule Post Session

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Training condition	Full lockdown, training at home	Small group sessions. Social distancing in place at all times. No contact during training		Normal training session – contact allowed
Completion of session	N/A	Leave pitch immediately and return to car.		Changing room access. Kit laundered by kit manager. Minimal contact post session
Food/Canteen	N/A	Player responsible for own food provision off site		Food can be provided if part of club provision



Return to Training Phased Schedule

Phasing Factors

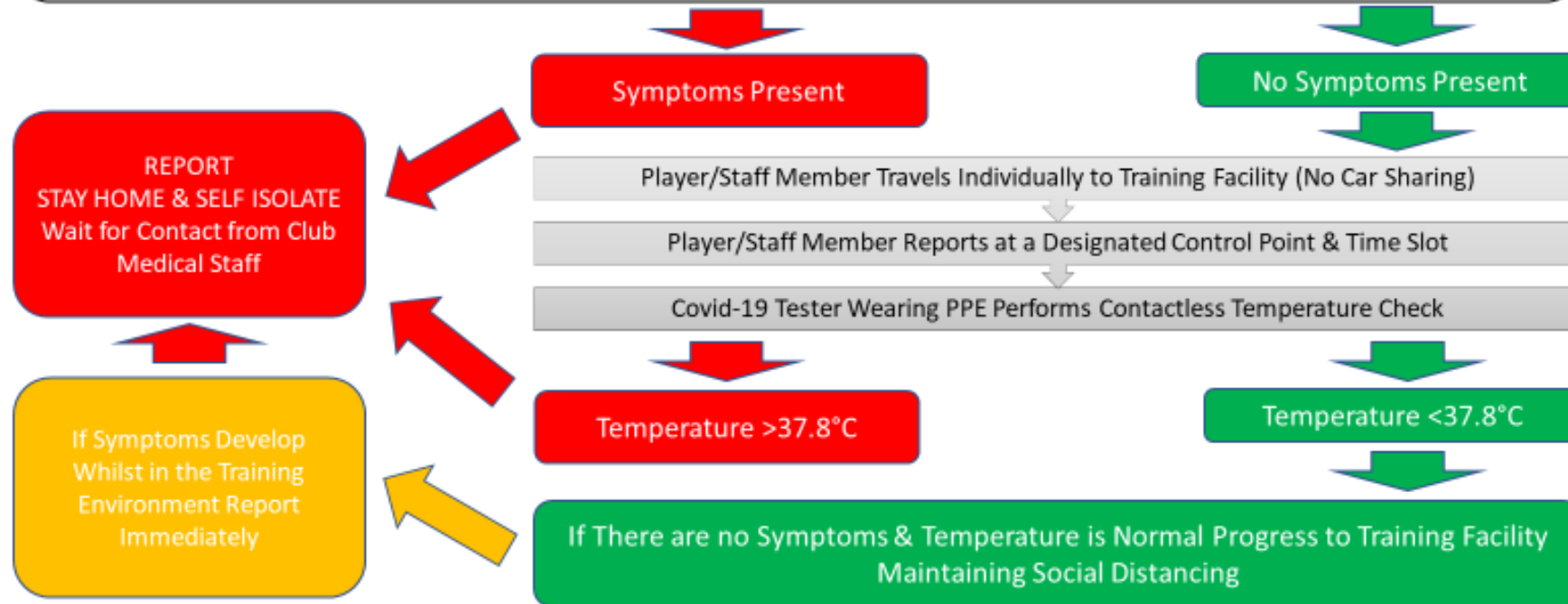
		Phase 1 – 2 11th June onwards	Phase 2 – 3 9th July onwards	Phase 3 – 4 16th July
Training condition	Full lockdown, training at home	Small group sessions. Social distancing in place at all times. No contact during training		Normal training session – contact allowed
Scottish Government Policy	No relaxation required	Relaxation of non-essential travel allowing players/staff to drive to training ground Training activity still in line with Govt guidance as individual activity	Relaxation of Scottish Government Policy allowing use of indoor gym facilities in elite sport settings for small group based conditioning	Relaxation from Scottish Government to allow full contact training in elite sport environment subject to appropriate testing regime in place



COVID-19 Daily Training Screening Protocol

Questionnaire completed by player & staff prior to leaving home reporting any of the symptoms listed below (for any member of household):

- Fever
 - Cough
 - Shortness/Difficulty Breathing
 - Chills
 - Muscle Pain
 - Headache
 - Sore Throat
 - Chest Pain or Palpitations
 - Fatigue
 - New Loss of Smell or Taste
- Is there any reason to believe that they or a member of their household may have been exposed to the virus in last 14 days?



Testing procedures

- Testing for COVID-19 will be an essential pre-requisite for the resumption of training and ultimately matches. It is accepted that testing in Scottish football will be outwith the NHS testing for COVID-19 in Scotland, although Testing for symptomatic players, team and club staff, and match officials will remain available as part of the NHS testing programme in Scotland.
- Testing relates to specific testing for COVID-19. Screening relates to the process of ensuring those players, staff and match officials are well before entering training grounds and stadia and includes such as health questionnaires and temperature checking.



What and how we will test

- Specific Coronavirus Antigen Testing (CAT testing) to identify the presence of COVID-19, whether symptomatic or not. PCR testing by throat and nasal swab will be carried out by appropriately trained individuals wearing appropriate personal Protection Equipment (PPE) in an appropriate setting e.g. drive through with player remaining in his car. Testing via saliva may be possible if these tests become more accurate.
- Testing of all groups as above will be in advance of the resumption of training and twice weekly thereafter. No players, team and club staff and match officials will be allowed into the training ground/stadium unless he/she has undergone CAT testing in advance and has a negative result.
- All test results should be reviewed by the COVID-19 medical officer who will communicate the results to the individual directly. Limitations exist with the current CAT testing including the need for the swabs to be accurately taken and the potential for negative tests in those who do have COVID-19 (false negatives).
- While a reliable Antibody blood test to determine whether an individual has had COVID-19 (and may have a yet uncertain degree of immunity) appears to be coming closer this test will not initially form part of the proposed regular testing programme but will be relevant in appropriate clinical situations and may play a greater role as the pandemic moves forward.



Analysis of CAT testing

- Swabs will be collected on-site at the training ground, stadium or other appropriate venue and analysed in one of the following ways:
 - Transported to a commercial laboratory for testing and later communication of the results.
 - Swabs will be taken on-site and immediately analysed in one of the available point of care laboratory machines commercially available
 - Via a mobile lab
- The equipment should provide a low 'false negative' rate and low 'false positive' rate to provide efficient and accurate results.
- Demand is high worldwide: we should expect a 2-6 week lead time in availability
- We expect a hybrid model of larger clubs procuring their own testing, and a centralised testing facility. They must all follow the same protocol.



Phase Two: Return to Playing



Overview

- This section sets out a series of uniform operating procedures, to ensure that players and staff can return to competitive football within Scottish Government guidelines. These procedures will cover:
 - Pre-match guidelines
 - In-match guidelines
 - Post-match guidelines
- Note, this section will be based on the assumption of matches being played behind closed doors



Guideline Objectives

The basic aims of these guidelines is to guarantee where possible –

- The safety of all players & match officials.
- The safety of coaching staff of all clubs.
- The safety of the venue staff facilitating/hosting the game.
- The safety of all external staff required at matches i.e. broadcasters

The following guidelines can only be applied to environments which can be controlled i.e. an area which has been thoroughly cleaned prior to being solely used by one team with a clean bill of health.



MATCH – BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

Issues to Be considered:

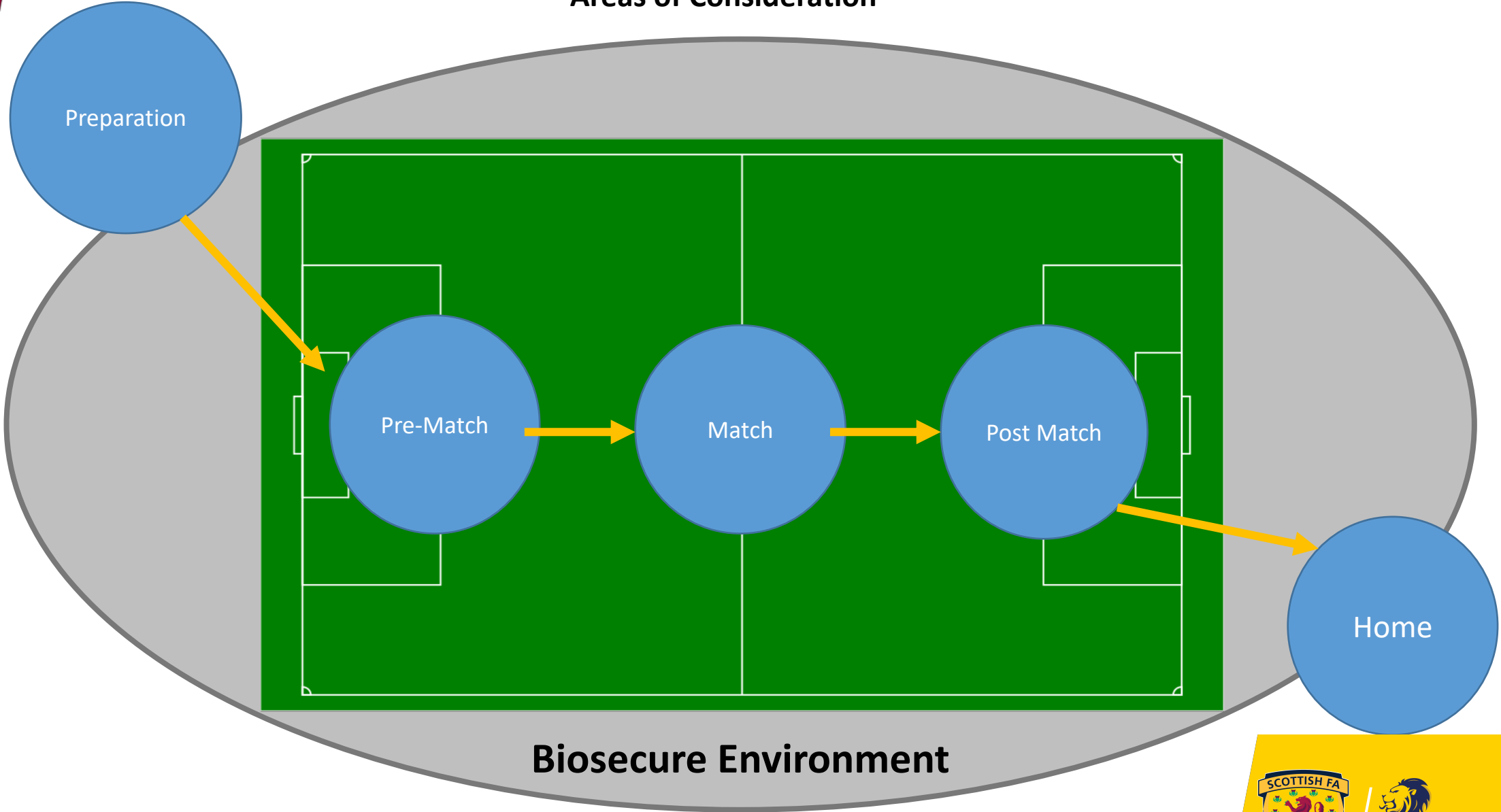
Requirement for players, staff and others to be in close proximity increasing the risk of Covid-19 transmission.

ACTIONS:

- Implementation of Covid-19 relevant stadium operational plans
- Implementation of behind closed door risk management policies covering all stakeholders
- Evidence based reassurance to government about the anticipated low need for NHS medical resources as a result of football injuries.



Areas of Consideration

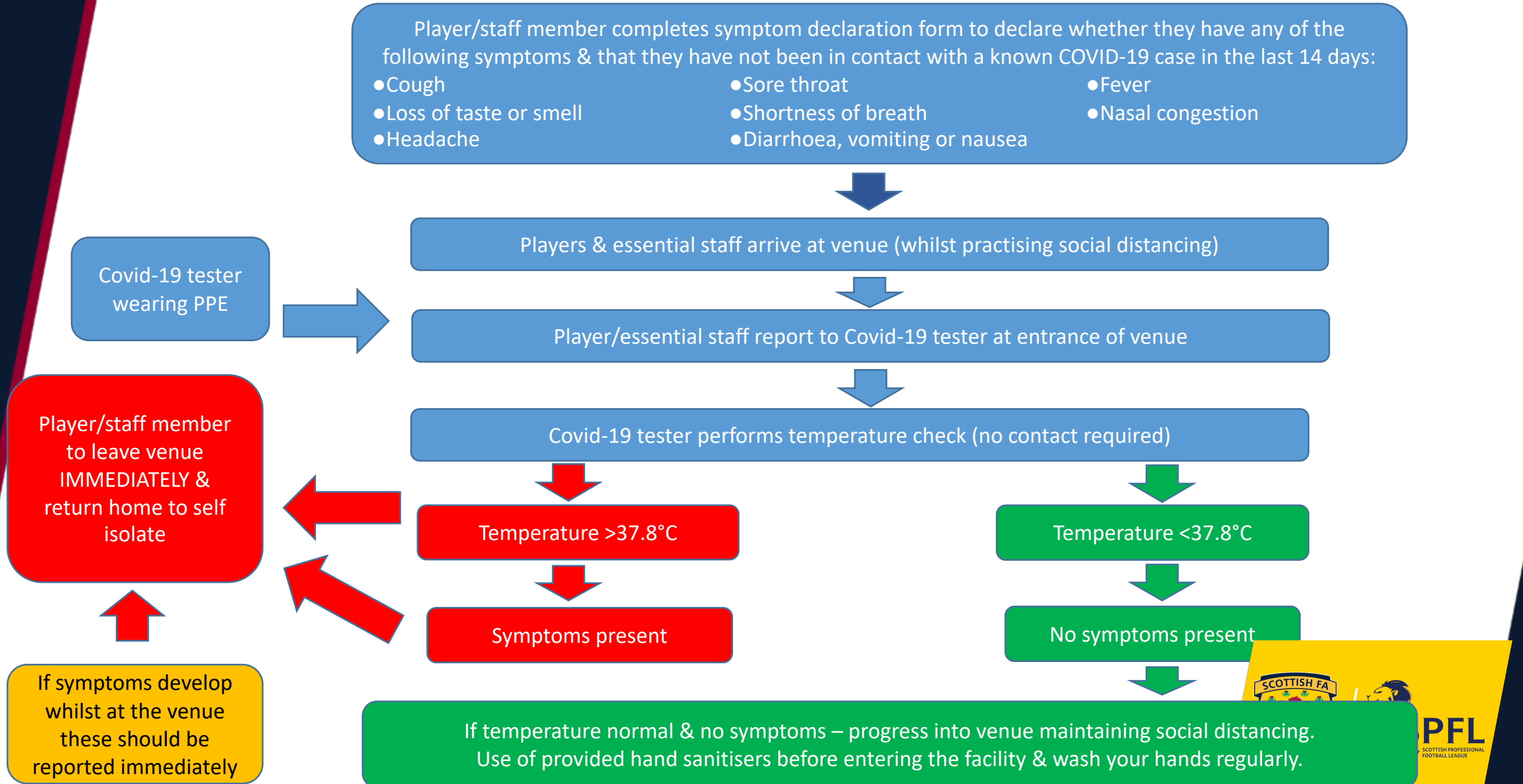


Biosecure Environment



COVID-19 – Match Venue Screening Process

Do not come to the match venue if you currently have any illness symptoms or have been in contact with a known Covid-19 case in the last 14 days



Hygiene Considerations for Restarting Matches – Players, Match Officials and Team Staff

- Ensure all people in the Stadium about the compliance with the basic hygiene measures (hand disinfection, cough and sneeze hygiene, distance) following the specifications from Health/Hygiene officers
- To inform all players, match officials, team officials, and employees with access to the Stadium with a defined “Infection Symptoms” guideline.
- Ensure access/egress and stadium layout complies with all Covid-19 requirements – consider use of common areas (changing rooms, showers only in small groups) guaranteeing a distance of 2m between people.
- Health status and measurement of body temperature checks on all matchday staff entering stadium
- Hand sanitisation at entrance to every room. Regular disinfection of surfaces before team arrivals
- **IMPORTANT:** In the Stadium, under the current situation, the public perception and following of professional football, teams and players will resonate much more than before. We would encourage exemplary behaviour with regards to Hygiene and Isolation measures outside the field. Players are to be instructed to avoid spitting



Access area to dressing rooms & tunnel area

Referees	4*
Players	22**
Substitutes	7
Backroom/support staff	5
Hygiene staff	TBC
Steward	TBC

*Maybe more depending on the competition

**Clubs often have 2-3 unstripped players

The number of people must be limited in this normally congested area.



Considerations for Restarting Matches – Broadcasters and Media

- Ensure all people in the Stadium are aware of appropriate hygiene measures (hand disinfection, cough and sneeze hygiene, distance) following the specifications from Health/Hygiene officers
- To inform all players, match officials, team officials, and employees with access to the Stadium with a defined “Infection Symptoms” guideline.
- Ensure access/egress and stadium layout complies with all Covid-19 requirements – consider use of media areas (during match, interview rooms, photographer areas) guaranteeing a distance of 2m between people.
- Health status and measurement of body temperature checks on all media personnel entering stadium on match day
- Hand sanitisation at entrance to every room. Regular disinfection of surfaces before team arrivals
- **IMPORTANT:** In the Stadium, under the current situation, the public perception and following of professional football, teams and players will resonate much more than before. We would encourage exemplary behaviour with regards to Hygiene and Isolation measures outside the field.



Phase Three: Return to Supporting



Overview

- Return to Supporting will be the final phase and one that is not foreseeable for Scottish football in the short term.
- The JRG sub groups will continue to look at ways in which supporters can gradually be introduced – when deemed safe to do so – in line with government social distancing guidelines.
- We will look at efficient and pragmatic measures to provide a consistent approach to public health and any return to supporting will, naturally, take place with a phased approach.

Guideline Objectives

The basic aims of these guidelines, when appropriate, is to guarantee where possible:

- The safety of all spectators throughout their match day journey including
 - Access/Egress at the stadium
 - Queueing, ticket purchase, stadium security
- In stadium facilities
 - Food and drink, toilet provision, seating deck layout
- Stadium layouts to be reviewed in line with social distancing measures relevant at the time of opening



MATCH – NON CLOSED DOORS

Issues to be considered:

Attendance of spectators at matches in a safe manner which complies with government guidance and social distancing

ACTIONS NEEDED:

- Implementation of Covid-19 relevant stadium operational plans
- Implementation of risk management policies covering all stakeholders including spectators
- Evidence based reassurance to government about the anticipated low need for NHS medical resources due to measures in place.



Thank you

