



Golf and Living with COVID-19
in Northern Ireland



NORTHERN IRELAND

Following engagement with the relevant Government departments and agencies, Golf Ireland can confirm the following measures apply to the initial phase of the reopening of Clubs in Northern Ireland from **1st April 2021 (until 12th April)**:

- Golf Clubs can reopen from **Thursday 1st April** for members only; however, in accordance with the continuing Level 5 measures in the Republic of Ireland, members must not travel from a place of residence in the Republic of Ireland to play golf. Further guidance for golfers and golf clubs is contained in the General Guidance document below.
- Golf activities at club level may be resumed, including those which are acceptable for handicapping purposes where such conditions can be met under the World Handicapping System. See updated guidance for playing handicap-counting rounds during the COVID-19 pandemic below.
- No organised social gatherings, of any size, are permitted at golf facilities. All golf activities should be organised based on arrival-play-depart without delay.
- In the initial phase (until 12th April), the Northern Ireland Executive have decided that participants in sport and exercise activity must be from no more than two households. Therefore, groups playing on golf courses during this initial phase must be confined to a maximum of two households. This means that all tee times must be either two-balls, or alternatively three-balls and four-balls where players in the group are from no more than two households.
- Daily timesheets are restricted as follows:
 - Two-balls at eight-minute intervals or longer
 - Three-balls from no more than two households at nine-minute intervals or longer
 - Four-balls from no more than two households at 10-minute intervals or longer
- To give clubs as much scope to accommodate golfers within these requirements, golf clubs will not be required to confine themselves to one standardised starting interval each day (for example, should a club decide to organise most of its tee times in eight-minute intervals for two-balls, they may choose to include a block of 10-minute interval times for three-balls and four-balls where the golfers are from no more than two households).
- Tee times must be booked in advance online or over the telephone. Clubs must ensure that players' names are recorded on timesheets and timesheets must be kept for a period of at least six weeks to assist with contact tracing should the need arise.

This Protocol will be reviewed dependent on the public health situation and in line with the NI Executive's reopening pathway with the next potential date for further relaxation from 12th April 2021.

Golf Ireland will continue to work with the relevant departments and agencies in the coming days and weeks on the resumption of further activities when the public health situation allows and will provide updates to clubs on these in as timely a manner as possible.



Golf and Living with COVID-19 in Northern Ireland

The following guidance applies to all golf club activities in accordance with the Northern Ireland Executive's Reopening Pathway.

At a time when the trajectory of the disease is not where we want it to be, it is essential that all golf clubs operate within this guidance – and in doing so continue to show the high levels of safety consciousness that has been a feature since reopening.

It is essential that all club officials and members familiarise themselves with this guidance, and play their part in ensuring our sport remains open and accessible at this uncertain time.

General Guidance For Golf Clubs

Clubs must ensure that the following protocols are observed:

Player Behaviour

- **Members, their guests, visitors and staff** with colds or any symptoms of COVID-19 stay away from the golf course/clubhouse.
- **Physical distancing rules** are observed by all members and their guests at all times in the car park, clubhouse and on the course. Signage should be erected to reinforce this message.
- **Players are instructed** not to touch the flag or flagstick.
- **Members of the same household** should play together, rather than split into mixed groups.
- **Clubs will have to consider** ways in which social distancing can be facilitated in practice facilities. If such facilities are open, golfers must warm up on their own.

Management Practices

- **Personnel are on hand** to monitor adherence with physical distancing rules and the rules for golfers set out in this document.
- **Tee times are booked in advance** online or over the telephone. Clubs must ensure that players names (including visitors and members' guests) are recorded on timesheets and timesheets must be kept for a period of at least 6 weeks to assist with contact tracing should the need arise.
- **If toilet facilities are open**, clubs should adopt a one-in, one-out approach. When taking a decision to close toilet facilities, consideration should be given to those with medical conditions that may require access to facilities, both on and off-course. Toilets in the clubhouse and course, if open, must be regularly cleaned.

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ACCESS TO GOLF

During the pandemic, certain levels of public health restrictions affect not only the ability to play golf but how it is played. While these restrictions apply, it is essential that golfers adhere to them. It is also important that golf clubs play their part in helping to ensure golfers follow these rules.

It is also important that golfers in counties on either side of the Northern Ireland border adhere to the restrictions that apply in both jurisdictions. For instance, if you live in the Republic of Ireland and are subject to a domestic travel restriction, travelling to Northern Ireland to play golf is not permitted. The same is the case if you live in Northern Ireland and are currently subject to any lockdown restrictions or limitations on travel.

- Hand sanitisers should be made widely available throughout the facilities, and located near any communal touchpoints.
- **Tee Time Intervals:** It remains imperative for all clubs to observe the minimum tee times intervals (10 minutes for four-balls, 9 minutes for three-balls and 8 minutes for two-balls). As golf courses generally remain incredibly busy at weekends, any erosion of these intervals creates the conditions for larger groups of people congregating before rounds – in contravention of current public health advice.

Golf Course Measures:

- **Rakes must be removed from the course.** Players are requested to smooth bunkers using their feet or a club. Clubs may introduce a local rule providing placing in bunkers within six inches not nearer the hole.
- **Holes/cups** should be altered to facilitate easy retrieval of golf balls.
- [CLICK HERE](#) for measures which can be taken for activities accepted for handicap purposes.
- **Where possible** ball washers, sand bags, benches, divot boxes and non-essential furniture should be taken in off the course. Where such fixtures are permanent, they should be taken out of use. This measure will help ensure the safety and wellbeing of course workers even as the virus is in suppression.
- **Bins:** Some Clubs that withdrew bins from circulation at the outset of the pandemic have asked for guidance on returning them to use. Clubs that wish to restore bins on the course should ensure they are contactless to operate, are emptied frequently and the area sanitized regularly.”
- **Divot Bags:** A number of Clubs that withdrew divot bags from circulation at the outset of the pandemic have asked for guidance on ongoing course maintenance. Clubs that wish to promote divoting among their members in this way may wish to consider allocating personal bags and trowels to members so that they can collect divot mix for the repair of any divots during their round. Where such a scheme is operated bags and trowels must not be shared.

Amenities:

- **Hire trolleys** (electric and pull trolleys) must be sanitised prior to each use.
- **Caddying on a casual/friendly** basis continues to be discouraged unless by a member of the player’s own household or if a member requires a caddy/guide due to having a disability or an additional need(s). Where golf clubs normally offer caddying services to members or visitors, the resumption or commencement of these services must be in accordance with the Workplace Safety



Guidelines available on <https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/coronavirus-workplace-safety-guidelines-and-social-distancing>. It is recommended that before performing their duties, a player's equipment and clubs should be cleaned with disinfectant spray or wipes. In performing their duties, caddies should regularly sanitise their hands, keep a two-metre physical distance from their player wherever possible (including in advising the player generally on the course and also on the line of putts). After the round, the player's equipment should again be cleaned with disinfecting spray/wipes. Payment for caddying services should be contactless wherever possible.

- **The use of golf buggies** is discouraged. Where a golf buggy must be used, it should be used by one person only and cannot be exchanged between people during the round, however members of the same household may share a buggy. Buggies must be sanitized thoroughly after each use.
- **In a circumstance where a player**, because of the nature of a disability, requires another individual to drive a golf buggy for them, the player and driver should wear face coverings when seated in the buggy. Every effort must be made to avoid handling of communal surfaces and regular hand-washing must be observed by both individuals.
- **If necessary, defibrillators** should be moved to an accessible area and members should be notified of their new location.
- **Use of Computer Terminals:** Clubs should take action to try to avoid any communal touch- points - this includes not using the terminal and trying to find alternative ways for players to submit scores, such as by mobile phone, etc.

Where a Club feels they have no choice but to use the terminal they should still take note of the general point which is to discourage people gathering in an enclosed indoor area for the purpose of signing in or entering scores. Ways of managing this might include having the area attended, instituting queuing systems with one person in the area at a time only, and surfaces regularly cleaned. Relying on players to sanitise their hands after use – while an important measure in its own right – is not sufficient on its own to ensure infection control in this setting.

- **Clubs should require the use of face coverings** in any settings where two-metre physical distancing is not always possible, including on entry to the clubhouse and at all times before being seated for dining.



General Guidance For Golfers

To ensure that the game is played safely, golfers must observe the rules below.

There is a danger of complacency setting in regarding social/physical distancing which every golfer has a responsibility to address. Golfers should keep in mind that it is entirely possible to play a round of golf with others in a friendly and sociable manner without coming into close physical contact. Unnecessary physical contact negates this and should be avoided, including:

- Avoid shaking hands, hugs, putting your arm around someone else, etc.
- Avoid huddles in groups before, during or after rounds.

In addition to this point, the following must be observed:

In advance of play:

- If you are ill or have symptoms, stay at home.
- Schedule your tee-time in the manner prescribed by the club you are playing at. Under no circumstances should you arrive at the club without booking in advance.
- Ensure that your group size is no greater than that allowed by your club.
- Ensure that you have sufficient numbers of golf balls, markers, tees to avoid having to exchange equipment with others.
- Wash your hands and your golf equipment before you leave home.
- Aim to arrive at the Practice Area, if open at your club, no more than 15 minutes prior to play.
- It is recommended that, wherever possible, you travel to and from the golf course on your own or with members of your own household only.

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- Park your car in such a way as to facilitate physical distancing.
- Observe physical distancing rules at all times following your arrival at the club.
- If necessary, retrieve your clubs, shoes and other equipment from your locker.
- Change your shoes in the car park.
- Warm-up alone. Observe physical distancing rules on practice range and on the practice putting green. If your club has taken the decision to close practice facilities, this must be strictly adhered to.

On the course:

- Do not arrive at the first tee more than 5 minutes before your allotted tee time.
- Observe physical distancing at all times on the course.
- Following play of a hole, do not enter the next teeing ground until all members of the group in front have played their tee-shots and exited the teeing ground.
- The use of golf buggies is discouraged. Where a golf buggy must be used, it should be used by one person only and cannot be exchanged between people during the round, however members of the same household may share a buggy. Buggies must be sanitized thoroughly after each use.
- Do not exchange or share equipment, food or drink with other players during your round.
- Do not pick up another player's equipment or golf ball.
- Do not use on-course water fountains, ball cleaners etc.
- Do not use rakes in bunkers.
- Do not touch the flag or flagstick. Putt with the flagstick in and remove your own ball from the hole.

In addition, the following guidelines should be observed:

- Use the toilet facilities before you leave home.
- Bring your own hand sanitiser to the course & use regularly during the round.

Golfers with Disabilities/Additional Needs

- Golfers with disabilities or additional needs should be able to continue to play once they adhere to all necessary risk minimisation measures.
- If there are concerns regarding an individual's susceptibility to COVID-19 due to an underlying illness, the individual/parent/carer should discuss this with their medical practitioner.

