



ENGLAND  
GOLF

**PLAY SAFE**  
STAY SAFE

**A FRAMEWORK FOR  
PLAYING GOLF**

**Updated Monday 21 December 2020** – updates highlighted in blue

This framework forms a part of our **'Play Safe, Stay Safe'** support and guidance for golfers, clubs and counties. All frameworks can be accessed through our website – [click here](#)

Any guidance may be re-issued as government measures to combat COVID-19 are updated in the future.

From Sunday 19 December four tiers of restrictions apply across England. An overview of all restrictions is provided on the Government website – [click here](#)

An infographic document provides additional guidance for clubs/ facilities in all four Tiers through. The additional guidance can be accessed on our website – [click here](#)

The Government's website provides two methods to check tiers and guidance

- [Area-by-area list](#)
- [Postcode checker](#)

## A FRAMEWORK FOR PLAYING GOLF

England Golf has been working closely with partners from across the sport, including The R&A, Home Nations, PGA and other industry associations to draw together a framework under which golf be safely enjoyed.

There are many different types of golf clubs and golf facilities, requiring safe procedures to be finalised and implemented locally. However, the fundamentals are the same throughout the sport, which has a good record of compliance with rules and procedures.

These procedures include all aspects of the golfing experience. The over-riding consideration throughout must be to **'Play Safe, Stay Safe'**.

While each club/facility will need to adapt its procedures to ensure compliance with government restrictions, the following aspects of the golfer experience, divided into the five following categories, will need to be considered

1. Course Set-up
2. Before the Round
3. During the Round
4. After the Round
5. Competitions and Rules of Golf

Clubs/facilities should adhere to the guidelines provided. These have been published to assist clubs/facilities in providing as safe an environment as they can. Failure to follow this guidance may leave clubs/facilities open to enforcement action from local authorities and/or Police, or subject to disciplinary procedures from England Golf.

## 1. Course Set-up

### On-Course Items

- All rakes and ball-retrievers to be removed. Players may bring their own personal rakes and retrievers, which should only be handled by that player and taken away at the end of their round
- Ball washers and drinking fountains to be covered up
- Open-top bins may be used on course, provided that measures are taken to sanitise the bin and to ensure players do not touch the bin or its contents
- All other removable items to be removed, except that stakes defining areas of the course can be treated as immovable obstructions

### Hole and Flagstick

- Flagsticks can be retained but it is strongly recommended that a sign is put on the flagstick stating that it is not to be touched
- A method of inserting the hole liner to be used that means all of the ball does not fall below the surface of the putting green and can be easily retrieved by handling the ball only

### Practice Areas and Lessons

- Practice areas, including driving ranges and practice nets, may be opened if safe sanitising practices can be guaranteed
- In Tier One, indoor practice areas and swing studios may also be opened if appropriate risk management, sanitising practices and social distancing can be guaranteed
- Lessons, including group lessons, may take place providing government guidelines are followed and appropriate sanitisation is guaranteed
  - Junior group lessons classified as 'Out-of-School-Settings' are covered by government guidance – [click here to access this guidance](#)
  - Adult group lesson sizes are covered by the government's general advice on social groupings
- In Tier Two and Tier Three, indoor coaching may continue for either one-to-one lessons or where the lesson is for members of the same household or support bubble. Social distancing must be maintained throughout and care taken to sanitise equipment between lessons

- In Tier Four, outdoor lessons may continue either one-to-one or where the lesson is for members of the same household or support bubble. Social distancing must be maintained throughout and care taken to sanitise equipment between lessons.

## 2. Before the Round

### Bookings

- Four-ball groups are permitted on-course with no restriction on the mixing of households within those groups in Tiers One to Three. Overall group sizes must not exceed six, including any caddies or chaperones
- In Tier Four areas, a maximum of two-ball groups is permitted, except when playing exclusively with people from your household or support bubble
- Clubs/facilities to organise a system of booking and allocation of tee times that ensures the safety of staff and golfers
- A minimum 10-minute interval is advised between tee times, but clubs may use shorter intervals, provided that they can demonstrate that this is safe and ensures appropriate social distancing

### Arrival and Waiting to Play

- Clubhouse bar and catering facilities may be open in Tier One and Tier Two
- It is illegal for gatherings of more than six people to take place either indoor or outdoor, except for limited exceptions
- Clubs/ facilities have a legal obligation to collect details of all members and visitors entering the clubhouse for track and trace. These details must be stored, in compliance with GDPR, for 21 days
- Clubs/ facilities must also display an official NHS QR Code poster so that visitors can 'check-in' as an alternative to providing their contact details. [Click here for more detail and to create a QR Code](#)
- In all tiers, locker rooms may be open for storage of golf clubs in allocated personal lockers. Players should still arrive changed for play and refrain from showering or changing in locker rooms
- Toilets and wash-hand basins in locker rooms may remain in use
- Face coverings must be worn by staff, golfers and visitors in all public indoor areas of the club/ facility, as well as in Pro's Shops. Coverings may only be removed when seated in bar and restaurant areas. There are some exemptions to wearing face coverings including children under the age of 11 and those with certain disabilities. [Clubs should refer to government guidance to ensure compliance](#)
- Clubs/facilities to communicate in advance with golfers to advise on social distancing requirements that are being applied on arrival at the club/facility

- Clubs/facilities to have procedures in place to ensure social distancing requirements in the area of the professional's shop or starter's building in advance of golfers teeing off. In Tier Four shops must be closed.
- It is a decision for facility managers whether or not they hire out equipment. Where they are hired, individuals can use trollies. These should not be shared. Two members of the same household may share buggies but otherwise they should be used by individuals only. Facilities should follow sensible precautions and clean equipment after every use
- Clubs/facilities to have procedures in place for the practice putting green, for example giving priority of use to the players in the next group due to tee off

### **3. During the Round**

Guidance and reminders should be provided by clubs/facilities to golfers to ensure that they maintain appropriate social distancing during the round.

#### **Teeing Areas**

- Remind golfers to maintain appropriate social distancing at teeing areas due to the normal close proximity of golfers to one another when tee shots are being played

#### **General**

- Remind golfers to maintain appropriate social distancing when walking to the ball, searching for a ball and playing shots
- Remind golfers not to touch stray balls

#### **Bunkers**

- With no communal rakes allowed on the course, remind golfers to make their very best efforts to smooth the sand using their club and/or their feet

#### **Putting Green**

- Remind golfers to maintain appropriate social distancing on the putting greens and not to touch the flagstick

#### **Caddies**

- Caddies may be used, provided group sizes do not exceed those specified by government
- Where used, caddies should only provide guidance to players and should not handle clubs
- Appropriate social distancing and sanitising should be maintained by players and caddies at all times

- Competition organising committees should consider whether to permit caddies during competition play

#### 4. After the Round

- Bar and catering facilities within clubhouses are permitted to open in Tier One and, with additional conditions, in Tier Two
- Social distancing remains important at all times. Clubs must provide a safe and sanitised indoor environment in line with government guidelines
- Where open, last orders for service must be by 10.00pm with facilities closed by 11.00pm
- Food and beverage must be provided as table service. Take-aways may also be served for consumption off the premises
- In Tier Two, alcohol may only be served along with a 'substantial meal'
- **In Tier Three and Tier Four, clubhouses must be closed and may only serve food and beverage as take-aways for consumption away from the premises**
- Clubs/ facilities should also remind all members and visitors of the need to adhere to government guidelines - it is illegal for gatherings of more than six people to take place either indoor or outdoor, except for limited exceptions – [click here for more detail](#)

#### 5. Competitions and Rules of Golf

Clubs may choose to run competitions provided all social distancing and safety rules are strictly observed. Gatherings of people must be avoided at all times, including for registration or for presentations.

It is the responsibility of the host club to ensure that all relevant guidelines are followed and that a safe environment is provided for all players. Failure to do so may leave the club liable for enforcement action.

##### Registration Process

- Where Open competitions take place, Organising Committees must put in place a registration process to capture full contact details of all players in case of the need to track and trace following a confirmed case of COVID-19.

##### Shotgun starts

- We do not recommend the use of shotgun starts at this time because of the increased likelihood of creating congregations of people before and after the round.

##### Foursomes and Greensomes formats

- Each partner should use their own golf ball, which is only handled by that player. For example, the player teeing off from hole 1 is the only player that touches the ball from teeing off through to completion of the hole. The partner teeing off from hole 2 does likewise with their ball. Under the Rules of Golf, a partner is permitted to drop the side's ball in taking relief. It is also permissible to drop another ball when taking relief.
- When marking and replacing the ball on the putting green this should be conducted by the partner the ball belongs to. Under this situation (or any other where the ball must be replaced) the original ball must be used and must not be substituted by another ball.

### **Handicapping Provisions**

To enable some of the changes to the way the game is played, CONGU (GB&I Handicap Authority) has issued some temporary adjustments to the playing of scores for handicap purposes, which may differ from the temporary changes to the rules of golf. Some of these are outlined below.

**Note:** Consult the relevant handicapping authority on whether scores using any of the provisions below are acceptable for handicapping purposes - [click here to access CONGU guidance](#)

### **Forms of Play and Scoring**

- If competitive stroke play is played, a method of scoring needs to be used that does not require any exchanging of scorecards
- Committees may choose to allow methods of scoring in stroke play that do not strictly comply with Rule 3.3b, or do not comply with the normal methods used under Rule 3.3b. For example
  - Players may enter their own hole scores on the scorecard (it is not necessary for a marker to do it)
  - It is not necessary to have a marker physically certify the player's hole scores, but some form of verbal certification should take place
  - It is not necessary to physically return a scorecard to the Committee provided the Committee can accept the scores in another way
- As provided in the Rules of Golf, scorecards can be electronic, which could include emailing or texting scores to the Committee.
- Further Guidance on this has now been provided by CONGU - [click here to access the guidance](#)

### **Bunkers**

- The distance for preferred lies in the bunker is limited to 6 inches and the area cannot be smoothed before placing.



**Flagstick**

- Golfers are required to leave the flagstick in the hole at all times and not to touch it. It is a matter for the Committee to decide whether it establishes this policy by way of a Code of Conduct or Local Rule, and whether it provides a penalty under the Code of Conduct or for a breach of the Local Rule
- As a temporary provision, flagsticks can be used for the purpose of player safety which do not meet the specifications in Part 8 of the Equipment Rules
- Allow players to centre the flagstick in a safe manner which does not involve using the hand, even when wearing a glove or using a towel (for example, by using a club). The centring of the flagstick may be allowed while another player putts (this may be desirable in windy conditions when the flagstick is required to be left in the hole and is leaning towards the player making the stroke).

**Hole and Holed**

- The hole liner (sometimes referred to as the hole 'cup') may be set in a way that means that all of the ball cannot be below the surface of the putting green, so the ball is considered holed if any part of it is below the surface of the putting green