

High Performance and Professional Sport

Guidance Note: Return-To-Play

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Introduction	2
1.1	Purpose.....	2
1.2	Background	2
2	Victorian Government Directives.....	2
2.1	Directions permitting professional and high-performance sport	2
2.1.1	Latest advice – 7 August 2020	2
2.1.2	Updates to this Guidance Note	4
2.1.3	COVIDSafe Plans.....	5
2.1.4	Permitted Worker Permit	5
3	Coronavirus (COVID-19) Risk Management and Community Safety Plans	6
3.1	Guidance on development of plans.....	6
3.1.1	General	6
3.1.2	Consultation	6
3.1.3	Community Safeguards.....	6
3.1.4	Coronavirus Operational Safety Protocols	6
3.1.5	Training & Competition Venue Assessment(s).....	8
3.1.6	Season Structure & Fixture Scheduling.....	9
3.1.7	Media	9
3.1.8	Spectators/ gatherings	9

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This guidance note is intended to assist high performance organisations and professional sporting clubs to develop coronavirus (COVID-19) Risk Management and Community Safety Plans for their sporting activity that will outline their risk mitigation strategies to ensure the health of participants (including athletes, support staff and others) and the Victorian community.

1.2 Background

Sport is a significant part of Australian life. High performance sport and elite athletic performances provide inspiration, entertainment and pride to Victorians. Major and significant sporting events play an integral role in inspiring participants, spectators and competitors to increase their participation and engagement in sport. Sport also provides multiple social, health, cultural and economic benefits to our State. Victoria is noted for its strength and world class expertise in sporting infrastructure and high-performance pathways.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions have resulted in the closure of sporting venues and cancellation of sporting activities and events, significantly impacting the sports sector from the grassroots level right through to professional competition.

On 1 May 2020, National Cabinet considered and endorsed [National Principles for the Resumption of Sport and Recreation Activities](#) developed by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC), in consultation with sporting bodies across Australia. The [Framework for Rebooting Sport in a COVID-19 Environment](#) developed by the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) also provides a guide to the staged resumption of sport and recreation in Australia.

Decisions about specific implementation methods were delegated to the state and territory public health authorities. As such, the Victorian Government has utilised this framework to inform its planning and decision making around return to play for high performance and professional sport activities.

Any changes to professional sport are made within the context of changes to Chief Health Officer Directions.

The Victorian Government has consulted with professional sporting organisations, the Victorian Chief Health Officer and Australian Health Protection Principal Committee to resolve a position on return to play for major sporting codes.

This guidance note is intended to provide assistance to high performance and professional sport(s) that seek to resume or continue training and competition in Victoria.

The safety and wellbeing of the Victorian community will remain the priority in any future decisions surrounding the resumption of sport. Accordingly, organisations and individuals remain subject to the directions issued by the Chief Health Officer. The Government, through formal directions or guidance material, reserves the right to make changes to the directives at any time.

2 Victorian Government Directives

2.1 Directions permitting professional and high-performance sport

2.1.1 Latest advice – 7 August 2020

On 2 August 2020, Stage 4 restrictions were announced for metropolitan Melbourne (from 6pm on 2 August 2020) and Stage 3 restrictions were announced for regional Victoria, including Mitchell Shire (from 11.59pm on 5 August 2020).

Under the latest directions, professional and high-performance athletes in metropolitan Melbourne are permitted to continue training, and professional and high-performance athletes in regional Victoria and Mitchell Shire are permitted to continue training and competing, provided that sporting organisation they belong to and/or venues that host training or competition have a Risk Management and Community Safety 'Return to Play' Plan in place.

Under Stage 4 restrictions, sporting organisations and venues located in metropolitan Melbourne are also required to have:

- a COVIDSafe Plan to ensure their workplace and facilities are safe (this can be the same document as the Return to Play plan as long as it meets all COVIDSafe Plan requirements); and
- Permitted Worker Permit in place for all athletes and essential staff attending training.

All professional and high-performance sporting organisations and venue operators should regularly review their plans and update as necessary in line with the latest public health directions.

Where they are allowed to open, venue managers that provide exclusive access to professional and high-performance sporting organisations and athletes will also be responsible for developing their own COVIDSafe Plan and Risk Management and Community Safety Plan to work with their tenant sporting codes/clubs.

Athletes who meet one or more of the following conditions will be defined as professional or high-performance athletes:

- perform their sporting activity in an open-aged national or international competition;
- contracted to an employer (e.g. a professional club) to perform that sporting activity as their primary source of income;
- a National Institute Network Scholarship holder; and
- derive regular and meaningful employment from competing in their sport.

Importantly, professional and high-performance athletes can use otherwise restricted physical recreation facilities (i.e. gyms and high-performance training venues) where they have exclusive access to these facilities at the time of training, in recognition that these venues and facilities are places of work and that public health risks associated with operating the facility must be managed.

If the metropolitan Melbourne professional and high performance organisation or the venue where training is conducted do not have a COVIDSafe Plan, a coronavirus (COVID-19) Risk Management and Community Safety Plan and Permitted Worker Permits for all athletes and essential staff in place that is consistent with the Chief Health Officer's Directions and this guidance note, sporting activity is not permitted under current restrictions. In regional Victoria, professional and high performance organisation or the venue where the training and competition is conducted, must have a Risk Management and Community Safety Plan.

2.1.2 Updates to this Guidance Note

In line with directions from the Victorian Chief Health Officer, the following restrictions are in place for professional and high-performance sporting activity in Victoria.

- Under Stage 4 restrictions, in metropolitan Melbourne from 2 August 2020:
 - organised sporting competition is no longer permitted
 - only non-contact training is permitted – athletes must not undertake full body contact training (e.g. tackling, or wrestling);
 - employers must issue a Permitted Worker Permit to all athletes and essential staff required to attend training in metropolitan Melbourne. If athletes are not formally employed by a professional or high-performance sporting organisation, the relevant National or State sporting association should issue the permit.
 - all workplaces that remain open must have a [COVIDSafe Plan](#) in place that is regularly updated (except small businesses with fewer than 5 employees).
 - the number of attendees at training and competition venues should be kept to the bare minimum of essential individuals to conduct the activity;
 - any activity which can reasonably be undertaken at home should be;
 - athletes and staff should wear a face covering at all times, except for during training where it is not feasible; and
 - athletes should travel to the closest suitable facility that meets their needs. This facility must have a COVIDSafe Plan and a Risk Management and Community Safety Plan in place. Athletes can continue to travel to elite training centres if venues closer to their home do not have equivalent facilities.
- Under Stage 3 restrictions, regional Victoria including Mitchell Shire from 6 August 2020:
 - competition may take place, but only if it had already been planned or scheduled to take place in regional Victoria prior to the publishing of these guidelines.
 - competitions or scheduled events which were planned to take place in metropolitan Melbourne may not be moved to take place in regional Victoria.
 - the number of attendees at training and competition venues should be kept to the bare minimum of essential individuals to conduct the activity;
 - any activity which can reasonably be undertaken at home should be;
 - athletes and staff should wear a face covering at all times, except for during training and competition where it is not feasible; and
 - athletes should travel to the closest suitable facility that meets their needs. This facility must have a Risk Management and Community Safety Plan in place. Athletes can continue to travel to elite training centres if venues closer to their home do not have equivalent facilities.

2.1.3 COVIDSafe Plans

Under the Stage 4 restrictions, all workplaces in metropolitan Melbourne that are permitted to remain open must have a [COVIDSafe Plan](#) in place that is regularly updated (except small businesses with fewer than 5 employees). As such, sporting venues and organisations that operate for the purposes of professional sport training must have a COVIDSafe Plan in place.

If the professional or high-performance sporting organisation or venue already has a Risk Management and Community Safety Plan, it does not need to prepare a separate COVIDSafe Plan, as long as the Risk Management and Community Safety Plan fulfils all COVIDSafe Plan requirements.

A [template](#) and [further guidance on development of COVIDSafe Plans](#) are available at business.vic.gov.au/creating-a-covid-safe-workplace.

2.1.4 Permitted Worker Permit

Consistent with the Permitted Worker Scheme, from 11.59pm on Wednesday 5 August 2020, employers must issue a Permitted Worker Permit to all athletes and essential staff required to attend training in metropolitan Melbourne. If athletes are not formally employed by a sporting organisation, the relevant National or State sporting association should issue the permit.

There will be on-the-spot fines of up to \$1,652 (for individuals) and up to \$9,913 (for businesses) for anyone who breaches the scheme requirements. This includes employers, and employees who do not carry their worker permit when travelling to and from work.

After 11.59pm on 5 August 2020, an athlete or essential staff member may travel to work without a worker permit once to collect their Permitted Worker Permit.

An athlete or essential staff member must not use a worker permit, even if they have been issued one, if:

- they test positive to coronavirus (COVID-19) and are required to self-isolate;
- they are a close contact of someone who has tested positive; and
- they are feeling unwell and have symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Further guidance on the Permitted Worker Scheme is available at <https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/permitted-worker-scheme>.

3 Coronavirus (COVID-19) Risk Management and Community Safety Plans

3.1 Guidance on development of plans

Organisations should give consideration of the following issues in developing their coronavirus (COVID-19) Risk Management and Community Safety Plans.

3.1.1 General

- While these guidelines include advice about competition, under the Stage 4 restrictions, in place in for metropolitan Melbourne from 6pm on 2 August 2020, only non-contact training is permitted - no competition is allowed. Under Stage 3 restrictions, in place in regional Victoria from 6 August 2020, both training and competition is permitted for professional and high-performance athletes;
- all athletes and staff must be told to get tested and isolate at home - and not attend training or competition - if they are feeling unwell with any symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19), however mild they are, or if they have been in contact with an individual who has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19);
- consistent with the Permitted Worker Scheme, from 11.59pm on Wednesday 5 August 2020, employers must issue a Permitted Worker Permit to all athletes and essential staff required to attend training in metropolitan Melbourne. If athletes are not formally employed by a sporting organisation, the relevant National or State sporting association should issue the permit;
- athletes and staff should wear a face covering at all times, except for during training and competition if it is not feasible;
- any plan to resume training and competition activities should be in accordance with the directions issued by the Chief Health Officer and the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) Framework for Rebooting Sport in a COVID-19 Environment; and
- organisations must stay up-to-date with changes to directions issued by the Chief Health Officer (available at www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus) and be ready to respond at any time to changes.

3.1.2 Consultation

- Engagement with Sport Australia and the Victorian Government;
- relevant National Governing body;
- player associations or equivalent representative groups; and
- other medical practitioners' advisory services, as required.

3.1.3 Community Safeguards

- Limit, as far as practicable, public viewing/vantage points of training and matches;
- living and accommodation arrangements for athletes/staff, including safety and isolations measures during travel and at place of residence if applicable; and
- travel & logistics of athletes & staff (e.g., to-and-from training and/or accommodation venues).

3.1.4 Coronavirus Operational Safety Protocols

- Prevention:
 - Accommodation, quarantine and travel including:
 - arrangements for individuals from overseas, interstate or based in the jurisdiction where the activity is being held; when an individual can leave their accommodation; what the report requirements are; and who else will have access;
 - preference for same-day travel to venue – minimise overnight stays;
 - essential participants only to travel to venues;

- movement from home to airport and from home to venues for persons residing at home via private transport – no carpooling except with household members;
 - preference for parking, set down points to be secure to avoid public interaction;
 - movement from airport-ground, or airport to accommodation for travelling athletes, or movement from accommodation-venues via private coach;
 - preference for private charter flights for air travel where possible and compliance with any state government rules in relevant jurisdictions;
 - negotiate arrangements with airports/carriers to minimise potential for public interaction in airport terminals;
 - maintain physical distancing between athletes during travel where possible; and
 - athletes visiting Victoria can stay in regular hotel accommodation. When visiting Victoria, participants should, at a minimum, observe all directions issued by the Chief Health Officer to people in Victoria. These are outlined at <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>.
- Training and matches including:
 - preference for 'get in, train and get out' where use of change rooms and communal facilities is minimised;
 - in metropolitan Melbourne, athletes and teams must not undertake competition or full body contact training (e.g. involving tackling, or wrestling);
 - relevant social distancing measures; use of shared equipment; use of shared common areas; any other relevant hygiene protocols; and plans for injury management;
 - physical distancing should be practiced at all times off-field, including remaining 1.5 metres away from other people, avoiding gatherings (particularly indoors), and not having more than 1 person per 4m² in any undivided indoor space; and
 - any training activity which can reasonably be undertaken at home should be.
- Face coverings
 - all Victorians are required to wear face coverings when out of the house and reasonable to do so, including while at training and work;
 - professional sportspeople when training or competing are exempt from the face covering requirement; and
 - protocol around face coverings should be in line with [DHHS guidance on the use of facecoverings in workplaces](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-coverings-work-covid-19). <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-coverings-work-covid-19>
- Detection
 - Daily Health Monitoring
 - all team members that will attend training and match venues should be subject to daily health monitoring – including self-monitoring for any symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) and taking temperature (as a secondary indicator);
 - the professional or high-performance sporting organisation to demonstrate they have a protocol in place that ensures immediate exclusion and testing of anyone symptomatic;
 - the protocol should exclude any team member non-compliant with the health monitoring regime established; and
 - any team/staff member displaying symptoms should be tested ASAP by swab/PCR for coronavirus (COVID-19) and excluded until results show that the team/staff member is negative for coronavirus.
 - Regular asymptomatic testing
 - not required; and
 - should any sporting body decide to undertake asymptomatic testing, this should not negatively impact testing capacity or supply that could be needed for broader public purposes. Any costs of asymptomatic testing should be met by the sporting body itself.

- Outbreak management in response to positive test(s), management of illness, suspected or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) cases:
 - the Department of Health and Human Services will undertake contact tracing of any confirmed cases;
 - deep cleaning done in accordance with [Cleaning and disinfecting after a COVID-19 case in the workplace](#)
 - organisations to commit to supporting any investigations by public health officials, and supporting any required actions requested by public health officials to interrupt transmission;
 - athletes and staff who have tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) or come into close contact with a confirmed case, must self-isolate until receiving clearance from the Department of Health and Human Services;
 - safety and welfare of athletes, umpires, staff, broadcasters & suppliers; and
 - mental health monitoring and support, education and training gaps around coronavirus (COVID-19).
- Minimum essential attendees at training and competition
 - the number of attendees at training and competition venues should be kept to the bare minimum of essential individuals to conduct the activity;
 - any activity which can reasonably be undertaken at home should be;
 - consistent with the Permitted Worker Scheme, from 11.59pm on Wednesday 5 August 2020, employers must issue a Permitted Worker Permit to all athletes and essential staff required to attend training and competition. If athletes are not formally employed by a sporting organisation, the relevant National or State sporting association should issue the permit;
 - athletes and staff should wear a face covering at all times, except for during training and competition if it is not feasible; and
 - athletes should minimise travel by training at the closest suitable facility that meets their needs and has a venue risk management plan and up to date COVIDSafe Plan in place. To avoid doubt, athletes can continue to travel to elite training centres if venues closer to their home do not have equivalent facilities or a risk management plan.
- Periodic protocol evaluations and engagement as necessary with Victorian Government officials.

3.1.5 Training & Competition Venue Assessment(s)

- Venue availability & exclusive access arrangements;
- Entry and exit screening protocols;
 - screening for symptoms on arrival at venues should occur for all athletes, essential support staff and media personnel;
 - screening should include; temperature screening with protocol for elevated temperature, questionnaire for current symptoms with protocol if symptoms present;
 - protocol for isolating anyone with symptoms present and testing where necessary; and
 - coaches and support staff must be kept to the bare minimum and all athletes and essential staff must be issued with a Permitted Worker Permit.
- Training and competition venue protocols (on/off the field-of-play, use of internal common areas and facilities);
- Living and accommodation arrangements for athletes/staff, particularly during travel and at place of residence if applicable;
- Indoor physical recreation facilities (including communal areas/equipment);
- Cleaning and disinfection regimes based on [Cleaning and disinfecting to reduce COVID-19 transmission](#) daily or between user groups; and
- Food service management and control (meal preparation in-line with standard food safety requirements);
 - any food supplied to team members or media to be individually portioned. No shared platters or shared drinking bottles should be used;
 - any indoor eating areas to have seating at least 1.5 metres apart, and the lesser of 1 person per 4m² or a total of 10 persons in any undivided space; and

- hand hygiene (washing hands with soap and water or hand sanitisers) prior to and after meals.
- Minimum essential attendees at training and competition
 - the number of attendees at training and competition venues should be kept to the bare minimum of essential individuals to conduct the activity;
 - any activity which can reasonably be undertaken at home should be;
 - consistent with the Permitted Worker Scheme, employers must issue a Permitted Worker Permit to all athletes and essential staff required to attend training in metropolitan Melbourne, from 11.59pm on Wednesday 5 August 2020. If athletes are not formally employed by a sporting organisation, the relevant National or State sporting association should issue the permit; and
 - athletes should minimise travel by training at the closest suitable facility that meets their needs and has a risk management plan in place. Athletes can continue to travel to elite training centres if venues closer to their home do not have equivalent facilities or a COVIDSafe Plan and risk management plan in place.

3.1.6 Season Structure & Fixture Scheduling

- Consideration to training, match and season formats (flexibility in scheduling);
- integrity of remaining games / finals fixtures / continuity of content (e.g., contingency plans); and
- Opportunities for innovation.

3.1.7 Media

- There should be no direct contact between media personnel and team members;
- Organisations to have a media protocol in place and agreed by partners that provides the physical separation needed;
- Media at training
 - no media indoors at training venues;
 - media to remain 1.5 metres away from team members at all times.
- Matches
 - essential media staff only – any roles that can be undertake off-site should be;
 - separate entry point to venues for media from that used by team members;
 - media permitted on-field on the condition that 1.5m physical distance is maintained between all media and athletes; and indoors that 1.5m physical distance is maintained between all parties as well as no more than 1 person per 4m² in each enclosed space
 - no media in team rooms
 - post-match press conferences to apply physical distancing with the lesser of 1 person per 4m² or a total of personnel in any undivided space.

3.1.8 Spectators/ gatherings

- Not allowed at training or matches; and
- professional and high-performance sporting organisations to have a plan for dispersing crowds that might attend training, matches, hubs or hotels.