

COVID-19

International Travel for High Performance Sporting Activities During
The COVID-19 Pandemic

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1. Summary

International travel is an essential part of normal preparation and competition for many High Performing (Elite) athletes. Athletes have to travel overseas to compete, for qualification competitions and to attend training camps. For some elite athletes this is part of them fulfilling their employment activities (eg professional rugby players travel for PRO14 league games). The purpose of this document is to outline the steps which can be taken, in a sporting setting to mitigate against athletes / players becoming infected with COVID-19 whilst abroad and also to mitigate the risk of visiting athletes coming to Ireland infected with COVID-19 and transmitting the virus whilst here. These measures are aimed at risk minimisation of COVID-19 amongst sports participants and the associated support staff.

The key concept is the daily monitoring of the athletes health prior to travel, the creation of a “Travel Bubble” whilst abroad which limits the athletes’ social interaction whilst abroad and the restriction of movement and daily monitoring of health on return.

2. Definition

High Performance is defined by Sport Ireland as covering those who are:

- Professional Sports People
- Member of a high performance team funded by Sport Ireland.
- Those who compete at major international events including European and World Champions, Olympic and Paralympic Games. Specifically, the athletes and players associated with this priority list which includes:
 - Athletes on the 2020 International Carding Scheme
 - Players on the 2020 Team Ireland Golf Scheme
 - Senior riders in Show-Jumping, Eventing & Dressage
 - Senior team players in Hockey, Cricket, and Rugby Sevens.
- Sports people who participate within professional competition

3. Key Points

1. Mitigation factors are aimed at;
 - Limiting the number of people travelling (playing group, support staff and essential support services).
 - Ensuring only the well travel.
 - Limiting the risk whilst travelling.
 - Limiting the duration of stay abroad.
 - Cocooning the athletes form interactions with the community to which they travel as much as possible.
 - Monitoring health whilst abroad.
2. A travel / event risk assessment should be completed prior to travel
3. Travel parties should appoint a COVID-19 Compliance Officer.
4. Athletes and support staff must adhere to strict COVID-19 risk mitigation behaviours whilst abroad (ie within the travel bubble).
5. The athletes’ health will be monitored whilst abroad and on return.
6. On return to Ireland athletes need to be able to continue to train without quarantining for 14 days in order to continue to perform / work.

7. Social (Physical) distancing, hand hygiene, good respiratory etiquette and wearing of face coverings remain key practices in lessening the risk of COVID transmission and should be observed by all.
8. No activity is risk free, the aim is to mitigate risk. Behaviour outside of the Sporting context is very important as very often a greater risk occurs in activities of daily living
9. On return to Ireland the travelling party should restrict movements outside of sporting commitments for 14 days following return.
10. Travel parties will adhere to the HSE COVID-19 guidelines whilst abroad (ie guidance on face masks, social distancing 2 metre....) whilst also complying with any other local mitigation guidance.

4. Travel / Event Risk Assessment

For each sporting event, an up to date risk assessment should be conducted to determine the risk level for COVID-19 transmission related to the particular activity or event. Based on this risk assessment a decision will be made about the risk posed by travelling to and attendance at the sporting event and what measures are needed to reduce this risk. This should ideally be conducted by a National Governing Body of a sport to assess the contact risk within its sporting activity.

The issues to consider in the risk assessment are;

- The prevalence of COVID-19 in the area to which athletes are travelling
- The nature of the event.
- The duration of the stay abroad.
- The travel itinerary.
- The ability to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 infection by using the guidelines.
- The importance of the event.
- The level of medical support available.
- The ability to cocoon whilst abroad.
- Insurance cover.

4.1 Risk assessment related to COVID-19

The risk assessment allows the travelling party to review the main questions posed by the COVID-19 epidemic for the attendance at a sporting event. This will help the travel organisers understand and manage any additional risks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This risk assessment must be regularly reviewed and updated immediately before travelling, in particular in the light of the rapidly evolving pandemic. The travel organisers may refer to the guidelines and status reports updated by the national public health authorities of the country being visited, the Centre for Disease Control and / or WHO.

The questions included in the COVID-19 risk assessment deal with the pandemic phase in the country in which the event will take place, risk factors linked to travel, human movement, and the possibility of the spread of the virus linked to characteristics of the competition itself.

Total COVID-19 risk score

Additional risk of COVID-19 to the mass gathering sporting event	Yes (1)/No (0)	Score
Will the event be held in a country that has documented active local transmission of COVID-19 (community spread)?	1	1
Will the event be held in multiple venues/cities/regions/countries?	1	1
Will the event include non- local/international participants (athletes and spectators) from areas that have documented active local transmission of COVID-19 (community spread)?	1	1
Will the travelling party include a significant number of participants (athletes or spectators) at higher risk of severe COVID- 19 disease (e.g., some athletes with disabilities, people with underlying health conditions)?	1	1
Will the event include conditions that could increase the risk of spread for COVID-19 (e.g. mass start or mass arrival, medical intervention, unavoidable contact or limited distancing measures)?	0	0
Will the event be held indoors?	0	0
Total COVID-19 risk score		4

4.2 List of mitigation measures for COVID-19

Specific risk mitigation measures can be put in place to reduce the risk of transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 linked to the sporting event. Again, it must be remembered that while mitigation measures can reduce the risk of infection with the novel coronavirus, they cannot completely eliminate the threat.

Mitigation measures cover a wide variety of topics, including the overall assessment of the COVID-19 situation, emergency preparedness and response plans, coordination of stakeholders and partners, control of communication-related risks, anti-COVID-19 public health awareness campaigns, etc.

4.3 Matrix for the final decision.

The risk vs mitigation matrix combines the COVID-19 total risk score and the risk mitigation score to determine a “colour” that identifies the total risk of transmission and spread of COVID-19. This provides a clear indication of whether travelling to an event is recommended or not, or whether other mitigation measures should be introduced. The meanings of the colours are shown in the table below, with an overall risk and suggestions for recommendations.

Total Risk Assessment Score	Very Prepared to Mitigate COVID-19 Impacts (76-100)	Somewhat Prepared to Mitigate COVID-19 Impacts (51-75)	Somewhat Unprepared to Mitigate COVID-19 Impacts (26-50)	Very Unprepared to Mitigate COVID-19 Impacts (0-25)
0 - Negligible	Very low	Very low	Very low	Very low
1 - Very Low Risk	Very low	Very low	Low	Low
2 - Low Risk	Low	Low	Low	Moderate
3 - Moderate Risk (low-moderate)	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
4 - Moderate Risk (high-moderate)	Moderate	Moderate	High	Very High
5 - High Risk	High	High	Very High	Very High
6 - Very High Risk	Very High	Very High	Very High	Very High

KEY FOR COLOUR DETERMINATION OF OVERALL RISK	
VERY LOW	Overall risk of transmission and further spread of COVID-19 in relation to the mass gathering is considered very low .
LOW	Overall risk of transmission and further spread of COVID-19 in relation to the mass gathering is considered low . Recommend checking whether mitigation measures can be strengthened.
MODE RATE	Overall risk of transmission and further spread of COVID-19 in relation to the mass gathering is considered moderate . Recommend significant efforts to improve mitigation measures or reduce risk of transmission (decrease risk assessment score).
HIGH	Overall risk of transmission and further spread of COVID-19 in relation to the mass gathering is considered high . Recommend significant efforts to both improve mitigation measures and reduce risk of transmission (decrease risk assessment score).
VERY HIGH	Overall risk of transmission and further spread of COVID-19 in relation to the mass gathering is considered very high .

5. Measures to reduce the risk of COVID-19 whilst abroad

Considerations:

Essential Travellers

Sport bodies should look review who needs to travel to a particular sporting event. Only those essential for the event should travel. Everyone who travels should have a clear purpose , necessary to achieve the travel objective.

Travellers health

Only asymptomatic, well individuals should travel. The athletes should be self-monitoring their health with a daily questionnaire and temperature checks, and this should be documented . Where possible all the travelling party should have a medical review 2 to 4 days pre travel to check for the absence of subclinical symptoms of COVID-19 infection. Consideration should be given to performing a COVID-19 RT-PCR test on all the travelling party as close to travelling as is practicable in order to have the test result pre travel. Consideration should be given to the appropriateness, of people in an at risk group travelling

Journey Considerations:

With regards to travelling the following should be considered

- Detailed itinerary that includes transit through airports / ferry terminals, transfers within the country being visited.
- If Flying - chartered flights for large groups where practicable.
- Fast track through airports / terminals with dedicated passport control and baggage reclaim.
- Travel for large parties should be by dedicated bus transport with maximum 26 persons per 52-seater (as per HSE guidelines).
- Buses should be sanitised before and after every journey.
 - Players and staff to hand sanitize before entering and leaving the bus.
 - Bus companies to allocate the same bus throughout camp.
 - Snacks and water should be provided to players before getting on the bus rather than on the bus.
- Taking the most direct travel route to the event / accommodation (ie with the least modes of transport)
- Limiting use of public transport as far as possible.
- Essential Travellers – the travel party should include only those people whom are necessary to deliver the performance goals of the event/trip. The part may include, athletes, support staff and service people)

The aim should be to limit possible interactions / mixing with members of the public, ensure maintenance of social distancing, hand hygiene and the wearing of face coverings at all times in public areas.

Stay abroad:

With regards to the time abroad the following should be considered

- Limit the duration of the stay - Ideally fly in and out to an event
- Use dedicated transport where possible, with seating to enable asocial distancing.
- Wearing of face coverings at all times except during sporting activities.
- Always stay within the “travel bubble”, travelling only between the event and hotel / accommodation. There should be minimal / no social events.

Accommodation / Hotel arrangements:

- Dedicated area / lanes for fast track check-in and check-out.
- Single room hotel occupancy ideally on a single floor or dedicated hotel area.
- Dedicated area with the hotel for travel party (eg rooms on same floor, private meeting rooms and dining areas).
- Ensure hotel have
 - Adequate cleaning protocols
 - Appropriate staff use of PPE,
 - staff adherence to social distancing,
 - adequate signage
 - Provision of adequate hand sanitiser stations (eg in room and team common areas)
 - Open door and lights on policy in team common areas.
 - Regular cleaning of common touch surfaces.

Management of suspected COVID-19 cases

When a group is travelling to multi-day events, consider designating a single room per team, an “isolation room” for anyone who presents COVID-19 symptoms, whilst arranging appropriate medical follow up. The room should be stocked with gloves, masks and hand sanitiser.

Arrangements should be made with the hotel, to ensure a thorough cleaning of the room after use.

Management of illness abroad

Appropriate measures should be taken to ensure that the travelling party will have access to medical services whilst abroad and if unwell, they may need to defer return home until well. It is recommended that travelling groups have appropriate travel medical insurance.

Behaviours:

All of the travelling party should adhere to strict COVID-19 mitigation behaviours

- Social distancing
- Hand hygiene
- Respiratory (cough and sneeze etiquette)
- Individual hand sanitisers and wipes.
- Use of face coverings indoors, in crowded areas where social distancing cannot be maintained.
- Avoidance of risk behaviour activities (eg indoor crowded activities, social events)
- Daily health questionnaires and temperature testing.

6. COVID-19 PCR Testing

It is strongly recommended that Sporting bodies should COVID-19 PCR test the travelling party as follow:

- Pre travel test: as close to departure, that enables getting the result prior to travel
- Post Event test: within 3 days of return to Ireland
- Event plus 7 test: seven days after post event test.

7. Return to Ireland

On return to Ireland the travelling party should:

- Restrict their movements outside of sport activities for 14 days.
 - o Do not use public transport.
 - o Limit visitors at your home to close family and the travel group
 - o Do not visit others, even if you usually care for them.
 - o Do not go to the shops or pharmacy unless it's absolutely necessary - where possible, order your groceries online or have some family or friends drop them off.
 - o Do not meet face-to-face with older people, anyone with a long-term medical condition or pregnant women.
- Complete a daily health questionnaire and temperature test.
- Report any COVID-19 type symptoms to the Team Doctor / National Governing Body Medical Officer immediately.
- Sporting bodies should consider COVID-19 PCR testing of the travelling party within 3 days of return and 7 days later.
- Mixture of returning party with others should be minimised,

8. Teams attending for Sporting events in Ireland

The same principles described above would be expected of athletes / teams coming to Ireland for Sporting activities.

Visiting sporting bodies / groups should understand the following:

- They must restrict attendance at the Competition to those individuals that are essential to the delivery of the Competition, and which are accredited by the Competition Organiser. Spectators will not be permitted
- Travelling parties from outside of Ireland, should be appraised of COVID-19 risk and the mitigation plans in place.
- Event / Competition organisers retain the right to remove any individuals from the Competition Venue if their actions are viewed to breach any health and safety protocols (COVID-19 related or otherwise).
- Appropriate risk mitigation through screening of individuals prior to entry into Ireland must be implemented and this may include, but not be limited to,
 - o Daily COVID-19 symptom questionnaires for the 2 week period prior to the event
 - o COVID-19 testing (either prior to entry to the Ireland or on arrival in Ireland)
- The travelling party must submit a travel itinerary the outlines;
 - o Outline of travel party with name and role of each person
 - o The duration of the stay abroad.
 - o The travel itinerary to include:
 - The country of embarkment of International Group
 - any entry requirements, such as visas, screening or isolation, to enter the Ireland.
 - All countries that the individual(s) have been in within the 14 days preceding entry
 - Travel and transit through international airports arrangements
 - Transport plans for within Ireland.
 - o The accommodation arrangements where applicable
 - o The behaviour protocol of the travelling party
 - o The COVID-19 mitigation plans and protocols of the visiting group.

- The level of medical support within the group.
- The “travel bubble’ plan during their stay in Ireland.
- Insurance cover.

The host National Governing Sports Body should:

- Ensure that all the visiting athletes and party have undertaken COVID-19 education emphasising
 - Social Distancing (2m in Ireland)
 - Hand hygiene and cough etiquette
 - The wearing of face coverings in public and on transport.
- Ensure that the event / Competition has medical plans and isolation areas for suspected or positive COVID-19 cases and has considered the medical care and health care requirements for International User Groups.
- Establish medical care pathways for the visiting athletes and support staff.
- Ensure that all plans, signage and instruction support the cultural and language requirements of International athlete and support staff groups.

8. References

1. UK Governemnt Elite Sport – return to cross border competition
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-phased-return-of-sport-and-recreation/elite-sport-return-to-cross-border-competition-guidance>
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3. World Athletics, In stadium outdoor athletics Competition – COVID-19 Guidelines, drafted by World Athletes Health and Science Department Version 10th June 2020. www.worldathletics.org
4. UEFA Return to Play Protocol.
5. World Rugby Safe Return to Rugby – in the Context of the COIVID-19 Pandemic, Update one June 25th, 2020 <https://playerwelfare.worldrugby.org/?documentid=219>
6. PRO14 COVID-19 Return to Training and Competition Operating Procedures Version Two as of June 2nd, 2020.

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