



ENGLAND  
GOLF

WHEN WE RETURN

**PLAY SAFE**  
STAY SAFE

**A FRAMEWORK FOR  
PLAYING GOLF**

## Guidance Updated 13 July 2020

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 – [www.englandgolf.org](http://www.englandgolf.org)

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

## 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

- Practice areas, including practice nets, may be opened if safe sanitising practices can be guaranteed

## 2. Before the Round

### Bookings

- Clubs/facilities to organise a system of booking and allocation of tee times that ensures the safety of staff and golfers
- The maximum number of golfers in a group per tee time to be confirmed by the club/facility and must be in accordance with any government requirements
- 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. Whilst the bar and restaurant may open, locker rooms should remain closed, except for allowing access to toilets and wash-hand basins. Guidance on the safe re-opening of clubhouses can be found in our Framework for Opening Your Clubhouse – [click here](#).
- 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
- 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 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 now permitted to open. Social distancing remains important at all times. Clubs must provide a safe and sanitised indoor environment in line with government guidelines
- Clubs/ facilities should also remind all members and visitors of the need to adhere to government guidelines

## 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.

### **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 (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 - <https://www.congu.co.uk/guidance-on-qualifying-scores-during-the-covid-19-restrictions/>

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

- If competitive stroke play is played, a method of scoring needs to be used that does not require any handling or 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.  
<https://www.congu.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Return-of-Qualifying-Scores.pdf>

### **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') is to 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