

Golf in the UK under COVID-19 restrictions

Wednesday 29 April 2020

• **The R&A has been working with a range of bodies to develop guidance on how golf could be played in the UK when the government decides it is safe to begin lifting the current restrictions.**

It covers five main areas: course set-up, before, during and after the round and Rules of Golf related matters. This guidance forms part of a submission to the government and may be subject to change.

It is being provided to give transparency and clarity on current thinking about how the sport might resume in the UK in these challenging circumstances.

Any further updates will be posted here and shared through The R&A's social media channels.

Playing Golf in the UK Under COVID-19 Restrictions

The UK Golf Industry has carefully considered how to ensure the safe management of a golf facility when government COVID-19 restrictions are eased. Detailed industry guidelines have been issued for the benefit of all staff, including greenkeepers, club professionals and golf facility managers, administrators and, of course, all golfers (see <https://www.pga.info/covid-19-resource-hub/>).

There are many different types of golf clubs and golf facilities, requiring “safe golf” 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 will include all aspects of the golfing experience, from arrival in the car park shortly before the round to departure straight away on completion of the round. Golfers will be required to comply with the rules on social distancing throughout. Some temporary provisions in relation to the Rules of Golf will also be necessary to ensure safe play (see below).

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:

- a. Course Set Up
- b. Before the Round
- c. During the Round
- d. After the Round
- e. Rules of Golf Related Matters

a. Course Set Up

For up to date guidance on essential maintenance, please refer to the most current version of the “Essential Maintenance Statement for Golf Courses during COVID-19 Outbreak”.

- **On-Course Items**
 - All rakes and ball-retrievers to be removed.
 - Ball washers and drinking fountains to be covered up.
 - Benches and bins to be removed, covered or sign-posted in such a way that players don't touch them.
 - 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 that 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, to be closed unless safe sanitising practices can be guaranteed.

b. 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.
 - There is to be a minimum of 10 minute intervals between tee times, but longer intervals may be more appropriate depending on the club/facility.
- **Arrival and Waiting to Play**
 - The clubhouse and locker room facilities will be closed. Limited essential access (for example to use the toilets) may be allowed by the club/facility.
 - Clubs/facilities to communicate in advance with golfers to advise on social distancing requirements that are being applied on arrival at the club/facility, for example not leaving cars until a certain time before their tee time.
 - 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.
 - No trolleys, carts or other items to be available for hire unless safe sanitising practices can be guaranteed.

- 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.

c. During the Round

Guidance and reminders should be provided by clubs/facilities to golfers is to ensure that they keep at least 2 metres apart during the round.

- **Teeing Areas**
 - Remind golfers to keep 2 metres apart at teeing areas due the normal close proximity of golfers to one another when tee shots are being played.
- **General**
 - Remind golfers to stay more than 2 metres apart 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 keep 2 metres apart on the putting greens and not to touch the flagstick.

d. After the Round

Remind golfers that social distancing is as important after a round as it is during the round, so when the round is over they must leave the course and the club/facility immediately so that there are no gatherings around the clubhouse area.

e. Rules of Golf Related Matters

Until further notice, the following provisions are considered acceptable on a temporary basis:

- **Forms of Play and Scoring**
 - It is recommended that non-competition play is used during the initial period of golf being played, and that stroke play competitions involving players in different groups are avoided.
 - 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.
- **Bunkers**
 - If golfers take due care when smoothing bunkers, there should be no need to provide a Local Rule for bunkers. But if the Committee feels that the enjoyment of the game is being significantly affected by there being no rakes, it may introduce preferred lies in bunkers and provide that a player may place a ball in the bunker within one club-length of the original spot and not nearer to the hole than that spot.
- **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.
- **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.
 - To minimise the need to lift the ball from the hole, it is recommended that the Committee provides that a ball is holed with the next stroke if it is within 12 inches of the hole (which is just over the length of a standard putter grip). This does not prevent a player in match play conceding a stroke that is outside this length.
 - The Committee may decide to have the hole liner sitting above the surface of the green and treat a ball as holed if it strikes the liner.

Note: Consult the relevant handicapping authority on whether scores using any of the above provisions are acceptable for handicapping purposes.