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Sport Ireland

Return to Sport and Physical Activity for Older People



www.sportireland.ie

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As a result of COVID-19, there are significant barriers to the resumption of physical activity for older people linked to increased anxiety, nervousness, loss of confidence, feelings of exclusion, weakening of physical activity related social contacts and physical deconditioning. We all want to see older people come back to sport and physical activity and we hope the following guidance will help inform, encourage, build confidence and in particular reassure older people as they return to a more active lifestyle, in accordance with the public health guidelines and the recommendations of your own sporting body or organisation.

As is always the case, it is important to note that not all older people will have an underlying health condition that may pose an added risk to their health and wellbeing in relation to COVID-19. Some older people may not require any adaptations or additional supports in their participation in sport or physical activity.

- The return of older people to sport and physical activity should be encouraged while considering specific concerns on a case by case basis depending on the nature of the activity, the environment, and if the participant has any underlying health conditions. It is the personal responsibility of each participant whether they are happy to return to sport.
- Older people who have been inactive for some time may have reduced strength, flexibility, balance or overall fitness levels. This should be taken into account when older people are being reintroduced back to recreational sport and physical activity.
- Where relevant, be considerate of individuals who may need extra support or care when transferring to or from their wheelchair, changing clothing, using equipment etc. Support where possible should be carried out by household members ideally, where Personal Assistants are required, use of PPE is recommended.
- Organisations should look to connect with older people using a personalised message to outline the changes that have been implemented. This may help alleviate any feelings of worry or anxiety that participants may be feeling on their return to sport.



Some additional considerations



Outdoor activities

Prioritise more outdoor activities for older people e.g. walking/cycling programmes where there is less risk of virus transmission. Consider adapting traditional indoor activities to an outdoor space if possible.



Designated times

Choose a specific time for the initial return to activity which is exclusively for older people. Knowing the initial session will be carefully managed may help limit any apprehension of returning.



Small group sizes

Accommodating smaller group sizes may help older people to return to activity as there may be less apprehension regarding large crowds and their ability to socially distance.



Social aspect

For many older people, the social element of their activities is just as important as the exercise. Care should be taken that tea/coffee/chat post-activities are not dismissed as being unnecessary when redesigning programmes. 'Bring Your Own' options could be used to accommodate socially distanced interaction.



Re-orientation events

A 'welcome back' event, day, time slot or publication could be created specifically for older people. This may provide an opportunity to visit a facility in order to reassure them that all appropriate measures have been put in place regarding their safe return to activity.



Mentoring

A specific older peoples' mentor could be nominated across your facility or sports organisation. This would give older people a specific individual contact who could answer any new or ongoing concerns relating to themselves or their groups. This could also be handed down to a member of that group then, once people are happy and settled back in.



Buddy system

A buddy system could be put in place where older people are linked in with other members of your facility or organisation to assist with their return. Friends may be slower to return to use the facility and having an identifiable support person, even for their initial visit, may increase their likelihood to return. This could also help to promote intergenerational solidarity.



Obtain feedback

Allow for some time pre and post-session to address any concerns that older people may have. This feedback from the participants themselves will be very useful in order to continue adapting your return to sport procedures. Ensure to conduct ongoing informal feedback during sessions, perhaps at break times.



Accessibility

Ensure that if entry and exit routes have been updated, that they are accessible for all users.



Car parking

If car parking spaces are being reduced across your car parks, ensure that accessible car parking spaces remain in use.

Considerations for participation in sport by older people

Whilst mitigating the risk of COVID-19 is more challenging for those who may require assistance in their sport participation, steps should be taken including:

Consider **DATE**:



- D** Distance
- A** Activity
- T** Time
- E** Environment



Ensure daily symptom checks

Limit the number of participants

Limit the duration of the activity

Consider the contact (proximity, direct touch, equipment sharing) and minimise where possible.

Train outdoors

Avoid slipstreams where possible

PPE

Consider the use of PPE for assisting the participant (for example, if they require assistance getting onto a bike). It is accepted that the use of PPE during sporting activities is not generally advised, however its use is promoted outside of field of play, where guidelines suggest.

This document is adapted from a comprehensive guidance document produced by Age & Opportunity. To view this full document, please click [here](#).

The Sport Ireland COVID-19 Return to Sport Phase 3 e-learning course is available [here](#). This course provides general information to support administrators, volunteers, coaches, parents and participants to return to sport in a safe & practical manner.

For further support or guidance on the return to sport and physical activity for older people, please connect with:

- Age & Opportunity (active@ageandopportunity.ie, 01 8057709 or www.ageandopportunity.ie)
- Your Local Sports Partnership (www.sportireland.ie/participation/lsp-contact-finder)
- Sport Ireland (www.sportireland.ie/covid19)

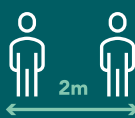
WE MUST CONTINUE TO ACT RESPONSIBLY AND WORK TOGETHER



Wash your hands



Practice good cough & sneeze etiquette



Stay 2 metres away from others



Avoid crowds



Know the symptoms

Please Note: All activity should be consistent with the government guidance regarding health, social distancing and hygiene. See latest Government updates at www.gov.ie/covid19