Softball Ireland: Return to Play Protocol

Facilitating the **safe** return of softball to Ireland during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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It is essential that all amateur and elite softball teams on the island of Ireland (including ROI and NI) follow these reasonable steps and guidelines in 2021 to keep our players safe and to reduce the spread of COVID-19:

	Mandatory	Recommended Best Practice
Equipment	• Each team is required to have (at every event): ‣ Hand sanitiser[3] - to disinfect hands; ‣ Anti-bacterial wipes (single use dry wipes and anti-bacterial spray also acceptable) - to disinfect equipment; ‣ Bin bags - to dispose of used cups, tissues etc. safely. • The designated home team must bring two (2) 11" and two (2) 12" game-quality balls to games. • Balls must be disinfected by the defensive team at the end of every half-inning. • Players must avoid sharing equipment. Each player should use their own helmet, glove, batting gloves etc. • Where possible, players must use their own bats.	• All personal and team equipment is recommended to be disinfected immediately before and after every event. This includes bases, training or game balls and team bats. • Game balls should ideally be new and unopened. • Where possible, ball exchange should be managed by a sub. • Balls should be disinfected every 15 minutes during training. • Bats should be disinfected between each use. • Helmets, gloves, face masks etc. should be disinfected between each use. • Personal belongings and equipment should have adequate separation in the dugout to avoid cross-contamination.
Venues	• Absolutely no tournaments or blitzes at the present time. • Absolutely no indoor events at the present time. • No more than two (2) teams permitted at each diamond. • Three (3) or more teams are permitted to use the same facility provided there are no more than two (2) teams present at any diamond at any one time. • If more than one (1) diamond is present at a facility, their home plates must be separated by at least 600 feet.	• If three (3) or more teams are using the same venue for a game or training, separate pitches should be used. • If three (3) or more teams are using the same venue for a game or training, teams not actively competing against each other should not interact. • Game and training times should be staggered to avoid congestion in public spaces e.g. car parks.
Arrival	• All participants must adhere to two (2) metre social distancing while arriving at venues[1]. • All participants must use hand sanitiser on arrival at venues. • COVID-19 Officers must update the covid tracking spread-sheet and immediately send home any symptomatic players.	• Players, coaches, and umpires are encouraged to travel separately or with members of their own household only. • Players, coaches and umpires are encouraged to wear face masks while arriving at the venue and while in the dugout area.
Warm Up	• All players must adhere to two (2) metre social distancing[3]. • All players must use hand sanitiser prior to warming up. • All equipment used must be disinfected before the game.	• Only one (1) team should warm up on the diamond at any given time. Consideration should be given to providing each team with an opportunity to warm up on the diamond.
Players	• Must conduct an online daily symptom assessment and remain home if symptomatic in the preceding 48 hours[1,2]. • Must adhere to two (2) metre social distancing except when the ball is in play[4]. This also applies to base coaches. • Must follow a 'no touch rule', refraining from high fives, hand-shaking and all other physical contact with their teammates, opposing players, umpires and spectators. • Must wait for all members of the opposing team to leave the field before taking up fielding positions at each changeover. • Must not chew gum, spit, lick fingers, smoke or vape.	• Players in the HSE High[6] or Very High[7] Risk groups are strongly discouraged from attending games or training. • Players should bring individual water containers and refrain from sharing bottled water with other players. • Regular hand sanitising is strongly recommended. • If a player is put out while batting, they are required to pick up their own bat (by the handle) upon leaving the field. • If a player gets on base while batting, the on-deck batter is required to pick up the bat (by the barrel) and return it to the dug out.
Umpires	• Must conduct an online daily symptom assessment and remain home if symptomatic in the preceding 48 hours[1,2]. • Must adhere to two (2) metre social distancing except when the ball is in play[3]. • Must ensure social distancing during all meetings. • Must wear face coverings (e.g. a mask) at all times. • Must not exchange physical documents or touch equipment. • Must be familiar with all aspects of this protocol.	• Are strongly encouraged to wear gloves at all times. • Regular hand sanitising is strongly recommended. • Lineups should be verbally dictated to the umpire or written, photographed and texted to the umpire. No paper lineups. • Umpires are encouraged to accompany all calls with extended visual signals to aid communication. • Plate umpires should allow a minimum of one (1) metre behind the catcher while still being able to perform their duty.
Spectators	• Are asked not to attend games or training sessions at this time, especially if symptomatic[2].	• If present against advice, must adhere to two (2) metre social distancing and wear a face mask while at the venue[1].
Departure	• Participants must not congregate in groups or exchange items following a game or training session and must adhere to two (2) metre social distancing while departing a venue[4]. • Visiting team must be allowed to depart the venue first.	• Players, coaches, and umpires are encouraged to travel separately or with members of their own household only. • Players, coaches and umpires are encouraged to wear face masks while departing the venue.

COVID-19 Officers - Updated 2021

Each team should nominate a minimum of one (1) **'COVID-19 Officer'** who will have the following responsibilities:

- Being a designated contact within their team, to be contacted in the event of updates to SI or WBSC guidance;
- Being familiar with all aspects of this return to play document;
- Ensuring the implementation and compliance of SI and WBSC guidance within their team at all training sessions and games, and;
- Keeping an electronic record of players' attendance and symptom assessments prior to all training sessions and games.
- Notifying SI immediately of any positive case(s) of COVID-19 within their team (email: covid@softball.ie).

[1] Daily Symptom Assessment - Updated 2021

- All players, coaches and umpires must undertake a symptom assessment[2] prior to attending any training sessions or games.
  - If symptomatic, players, coaches and umpires must not attend any training sessions or games
- Team COVID-19 Officers must keep an electronic record of players' attendance and daily symptom assessment outcome at all events to assist with contact tracing in the event of a positive case being detected within the softball community.

[2] Signs and Symptoms of COVID-19 (Current HSE/HSC Advice) - Updated 2021

- Fever (considered a temperature equal to or greater than 38°C).
- New cough (any new cough, not just a dry cough).
- Shortness of breath.
- Loss or change in your sense of taste or smell.

What to do if a Player is Symptomatic - New 2021

- The team COVID-19 Officer must:
  - Immediately send home the symptomatic player and anyone else from the same household (if present).
  - Advise the symptomatic player to remain at home (if not already present).
  - Advise the symptomatic player to follow local Government advise on testing and contact tracing.
  - Ensure the team electronic record of attendance and symptom assessments is up to date and accurate.
  - Advise the player to notify you immediately upon confirmation of a positive COVID-19 swab result.
- In the event that a symptomatic player has already been involved with a training session or game, all players should be advised to go home immediately and await further contact tracing advise.

What to do if a Player Tests Positive for COVID-19 - New 2021

- In the event that a player within a team tests positive for COVID-19:
  - Any game or training session involving the affected team in progress must cease immediately.
  - Softball Ireland must be notified immediately by the affected team's COVID-19 Officer (email: covid@softball.ie)
  - All training sessions involving the affected team must be suspended for a minimum of 14 days.
  - All games (including friendlies and tournaments) in the affected league must be suspended for a minimum of 14 days.
  - All players, coaches and umpires must follow local Government contact tracing advice and self-isolate if advised to do so.

[3] Hand Sanitiser Advice

Any player who has developed a reaction (e.g. allergy, dermatitis) to the provided hand sanitiser is advised to bring their own hand sanitiser supply for use.

[4] Social Distancing Recommendations

SI recognises the WHO, HSE and HSC recommendations on social distancing, in particular the benefits of decreasing viral transmission of COVID-19 through respiratory droplets. Softball is naturally a social distanced sport, however there are situations where players may come in close contact with each other during the course of a game or training. For this reason SI has made the following recommendations for all events:

- A physical distance of two (2) meters is recommended at all times for all players, umpires and coaches, except for;
- A physical distance of one (1) meter is permitted for plate umpires when the ball is being pitched;
- A physical distance of under one (1) meter is permitted by defensive players only if they are in the process of making a play.

[5] GDPR Declaration

- SI may request to view team player attendance and symptom assessment data in the event of a positive case of COVID-19.
- Information held may be shared with the HSE, HSC or other Government bodies, if requested, to aid with contact tracing.

General Hygiene and Hand Washing Tips (HSE/HSC Advice)

- ✓ Wash your hands properly and often (for 2 minutes).
- ✓ Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or the crease of your elbow when you cough and sneeze.
- ✓ Put used tissues into a bin and wash your hands.
- ✓ Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

- x Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean.
- x Do not share objects that touch your mouth - for example bottles, cups etc.

[6] High Risk Groups (HSE Advice) - Updated 2021

- are over 60 years of age
- have a learning disability other than Down Syndrome
- are being treated for cancer but are not very high risk
- have been treated for cancer of blood or bone marrow in the past 5 years
- have been treated for cancer in the past 1 year
- have chronic heart disease (e.g. heart failure)
- have chronic kidney disease (eGFR <30)
- have chronic liver disease (e.g. cirrhosis, fibrosis)
- have a condition affecting your brain or nerves
- have clinically stable cystic fibrosis
- have a lung condition that is not severe (e.g. asthma)
- have high blood pressure
- have diabetes
- taking medicine that makes you more likely to get infections
- have any condition making you high risk for getting infections
- have an inherited medical disorder but are not very high risk
- have obesity with a BMI between 35 and 40
- have a severe mental illness (e.g. bipolar, severe depression)

[7] Very High Risk Groups (HSE Advice) - Updated 2021

- are over 70 years of age - even if you are fit and well
- have Down Syndrome
- have cancer being treated with chemotherapy
- have lung or head and neck cancer being treated with radiotherapy
- are having certain complex cancer surgery (e.g. oesophageal)
- have advanced cancer or cancer that has spread elsewhere
- have cancers of the blood or bone marrow
- are on dialysis or have end stage kidney disease (eGFR <15)
- are having immunotherapy or antibody treatments for cancer
- have had bone or stem cell transplants in the last 12 months
- have severe respiratory conditions (e.g. unstable cystic fibrosis)
- have uncontrolled diabetes
- have any condition making you very high risk for infections
- have sickle cell disease
- have certain metabolic disorders
- have certain inherited metabolic disorders
- have obesity with a BMI >40

It is expected that all teams will comply with the mandatory modifications in full and are strongly advised to follow the recommended best practice modifications to ensure the safety of players, officials and spectators.

Please be aware that this is a 'living' document and will be updated on a regular basis to ensure Softball Ireland are following the most up-to-date ROI and NI Government advice. For the most up-to-date advice please visit our dedicated 'COVID-19 Hub' on the Softball Ireland website at: http://www.softball.ie/covid-19-hub.