

Ontario Non- Contact Football Officials Association

COVID-19 Return to Refereeing Plan

2020/08/10 Version 1.0

Adopted from NCOA & Football Canada RTP
Guidelines

Table of Contents

- 1.0 Purpose 4**
- 2.0 General Information Regarding C19 Pandemic 5**
 - 2.1 Virus Information 5**
 - 2.2 Symptoms 5**
- 3.0 The Game 7**
 - 3.1 Preparation 7**
 - 3.2 Game Day Considerations 8**
 - 3.2.1 Pre Game..... 8
 - 3.2.2 The Game..... 8
 - 3.2.3 Post Game 9
 - 3.3 Referee Equipment 9**
 - 3.4 Rules..... 10**
 - 3.4.1 No Spitting on the Field or Sideline (1st offence).....10
 - 3.4.2 No Spitting on the Field or Sideline (repeat).....10
 - 3.4.3 Violating Player Personal Space After Whistle.....10
- 4.0 COVID-19 Emergency Response Plan (ERP) 11**
 - 4.1 Planning Activities..... 11**
 - 4.2 Positive Test Phase 11**
 - 4.3 Post Pandemic Phase 11**
- 5.0 Return to Refereeing Protocols 12**
 - 5.1 The Officials 12**
 - 5.1.1 Self Assessment 12
 - 5.1.2 Secure Referee Area 12
 - 5.1.3 Sanitizing gear..... 12
 - 5.1.4 Sanitizing pads..... 12
 - 5.1.5 Additional information..... 13
 - 5.2 The Teams / Players..... 13**
 - 5.2.1 Self Assessment..... 13
 - 5.2.2 Secure Team Area..... 13
 - 5.2.3 Sanitizing gear..... 13
 - 5.2.4 Additional information..... 14

5.3 The Field	14
5.3.1 Ref Zone (Red)	14
5.3.2 Ref Zone (Yellow)	14
5.3.3 Team Zone (Blue).....	15
6.0 References / More Info	15

1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this document is to define the return to play / return to refereeing requirements for the Ontario Non-Contact Football Officials Association (ONCFOA) in the COVID-19 (C19) era.

The document outlines the requirements / expectations / planning / educational steps that the ONCFOA members will be putting in place to ensure the safest environment for the officials and players; as well as the expectations the ONCFOA has from leagues to also create the safest environment for the officials and players.

This plan is intended to comply with the Province of Ontario emergency orders and health authority directives from Ontario medical officers. Information has been gathered from the Ontario Government, Public Health, and Football Canada RTP plan. This plan is subject to change or be superseded by new orders and directives. This is not a legal document and is intended as a guideline based on available materials.

2.0 General Information Regarding C19 Pandemic

2.1 Virus Information

Corona viruses are a large family of viruses. Some cause illness in people and others cause illness in animals. Human corona viruses are common and are typically associated with mild illnesses, similar to the common cold.

COVID-19 is a new disease that has not been previously identified in humans. Rarely, animal corona viruses can infect people, and more rarely, these can then spread from person to person through close contact.

There have been 2 other specific corona viruses that have spread from animals to humans and which have caused severe illness in humans. These are the:

- Severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus (SARS CoV)
- Middle East respiratory syndrome corona virus (MERS CoV)

2.2 Symptoms

Those who are infected with COVID-19 may have little to no symptoms. You may not know you have symptoms of COVID-19 because they are similar to a cold or flu.

Symptoms have included:

Most common symptoms:

- fever
- dry cough
- tiredness

Less common symptoms:

- aches and pains
- sore throat
- diarrhoea
- conjunctivitis

- headache
- loss of taste or smell
- a rash on skin, or discolouration of fingers or toes

Serious symptoms:

- difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- chest pain or pressure
- loss of speech or movement

Symptoms may take up to 14 days to appear after exposure to COVID-19. This is the longest known incubation period for this disease.

Recent evidence indicates that the virus can be transmitted to others from someone who is infected but not showing symptoms.

This includes people who:

- Have not yet developed symptoms (pre-symptomatic)
- Never develop symptoms (asymptomatic)

While experts know that these kinds of transmissions are happening among those in close contact or in close physical settings, it is not known to what extent. This means it is extremely important to follow the proven preventative measures.

3.0 The Game

Decreasing potential exposure to respiratory droplets is the guiding principle behind social distancing and the use of facial coverings.

Officials must strictly adhere to the following key principles, there is no flexibility :

1. Implement all governmental guidelines – defined and clarified by the ONCFOA
2. Implement all sport guidelines – defined and clarified by the ONCFOA.
3. Maintain national, provincial, local and league screening and testing protocols.
4. If you are Symptomatic, Potentially Infected or have had Close Contact and have not received a negative test, **DO NOT ATTEND VENUE.** Phone or electronically report to your assignor. Follow prevailing provincial health care guidelines.

3.1 Preparation

- Familiarize with local, provincial and national guidance with respect to the pandemic. Leverage ONCFOA RTR document and provided links.
- Study, review, become familiar with all Covid-19 Rule Modifications.
- Know the risks.
- Maintain screening and testing protocols for officials including pregame check and contact tracking.
- Use of virtual meetings or proper social distanced physical gathering for ONCFOA discussions.
- Use of proper social distanced physical gathering for pre-game team and coach discussion.
- Adding soap/hand sanitizer to your equipment bag, belt, uniform.
- Masks to/from Venue; at Venue before/during/after competition as recommended.
- Only game officials should be in the changeroom if available - no visitors.

3.2 Game Day Considerations

3.2.1 Pre Game

- If Symptomatic, Potentially Infected or Close Contact and no negative test – advise supervisor. Follow national, provincial, league and local guidelines and directives. **DO NOT REPORT TO VENUE.**
- Prior to any assignment completion of a COVID-19 self assessment should take place.
- Travel to competition – Social Distancing/Grouping as permitted.
- Limit time at Venue – 15 minutes before/after the game.
- Arrive at Competition Venue in Uniform.
- Upon arrival thoroughly wash/sanitize hands.
- Upon arrival submit to provincial/league/local screening and testing protocols.
- You are entitled to a safe working environment. If an individual official or the crew are uncomfortable with the venue from a personal health perspective, they should refuse to officiate the contest. Document decision to supervisor.
- No sharing of equipment. Use only your personal equipment, water bottles, towels, etc.
- Do all stretching/warm-up off site (where possible).

3.2.2 The Game

- Pregame Field inspection – maintain social distancing.
- Coaches/Captains – meeting – maintain social distancing.
- Coin Toss – 1 captain or coach – maintain social distancing.
- As a crew – minimize group/follow up whistles – **one whistle to stop play.**
- Minimize Vocalization – essential vocalization only.
- Initial positioning – attempt to maintain social distance.
- Dead Ball – ball retrieved by offense once defending players leave.
- Speaking – maintain social distancing – officials, coaches, players.
- Personal Hand Sanitation – incorporate into routine.
- Penalties – Report by signal (ref com if available) only.
- Maintain social distancing.
- Options to designated coaches only.
- Preferably by signal - reduce vocalization.
- No handshakes, high-fives, etc.

3.2.3 Post Game

- Minimize time at Venue – 15 minutes.
- Wash/Sanitize hands before leaving.
- Wash/Sanitize uniform after every use.
- Sanitize/Disinfect equipment – particular attention to whistles.
- Continue to monitor/screen personal health in accord with national, provincial and league screening policies and testing protocols

3.3 Referee Equipment

The ONCFOA will be recommending the following referee equipment / changes to mode of operation during the C19 pandemic :

- In general, referees should not share equipment. If sharing occurs (e-whistle, pen), then sanitization must occur prior to hand-off to another referee (Lysol or disinfectant wipe- down).
- Whistles – standard pea or pea-less whistles will be used with face mask pouch or electronic whistles or audible commands (“touch”, “flag”, “stop”, “start” etc). Note that electronic whistles shared between referees must be sanitized before hand-off.
- Flags – the referee that throws the flag will pick up the flag. Other referees and players are not to recover a referee’s flag.
- Bags – the referee that places the bags will retrieve the bags. Other referees and players are not to recover the bags.
- Pens / notepads / game cards – are individual to each referee and not to be shared.
- General gear, stop watches, coins, water, chairs, snacks – are individual to each referee and not to be shared.

It is understood by the ONCFOA and leagues that new guidelines above will slow game play but are essential to ensuring the safety of all participants.

3.4 Rules

The ONCFOA recommends the addition of new rules / changes during the C19 pandemic in order to improve safety for officials and players.

Status Rule Penalty

New - No spitting on the field or sideline (1st offence) 5 min timeout

New -No spitting on the field or sideline (repeat) Ejection

New Violating player personal space after whistle OC + 5 min timeout

3.4.1 No Spitting on the Field or Sideline (1st offence)

- It is a tough one to enforce; do not want to wreck a player's experience as spitting was very common pre-C19.
- Recommend a 5 min timeout for the player in question. Team can add another from the sideline to take their place.

3.4.2 No Spitting on the Field or Sideline (repeat)

- Automatic ejection; referees need to track first offence on score card or in notes.

3.4.3 Violating Player Personal Space After Whistle

- Again, a tough one since some back talk / taunting used to occur pre-C19 without penalty.
- If players purposely enter opposing team players' personal space after the whistle with the intent to provoke / taunt / cause confrontation, issue an OC and 5 min timeout for the instigating player. Team can add another from the sideline to take their place.

4.0 COVID-19 Emergency Response Plan (ERP)

4.1 Planning Activities

- Educate all officials, leagues and associations on COVID 19 protocols
- Establish point of contact for any reported exposures

4.2 Positive Test Phase

- The confirmation of a positive test for COVID-19 within the association will trigger the time to execute this part of the Emergency Response Plan. The key goal is to prevent further infection and remains in place until the impacted members are isolated, under control of health professionals, and there is no further threat to other officials / players.

Clean and Disinfect Areas :

- All items in the zone(s) occupied by the impacted person(s) need to be disinfected. This includes shared and non-shared items. Please note that particulates can travel, especially from coughing.
 - Disinfecting materials safely stored so that officials / players / spectators (esp. children) cannot access.

Resuming Play :

Resumption of the next scheduled game may occur if depending on exposure :

- Disinfecting has been completed
- There are officials to resume play
- There are players to resume play

○ Notify Local Health Officials and Close Contacts :

- The Association point of contact will notify local health officials, leagues, and officials that may have had close contact with the impacted individual in the event of a positive C19 test.
- Notified leagues will be required to execute their contact trace plan to advise players. -
- Notified officials will be required to notify their close contacts.

4.3 Post Pandemic Phase

Triggered when the province declares the pandemic over. Focus will be to return to normal operations, deactivate the pandemic return to

refereeing plan, and review lessons learned for future emergency response planning.

- Confirm the pandemic is over. Association will notify membership that the province has declared the pandemic over and we are returning to normal operations.
- Conduct a review of return to refereeing experience and determine what worked / what could be improved.
- Update the association plan for future use.

5.0 Return to Refereeing Protocols

It should be noted that provincial and local health guidelines supersede this document and while we make every effort to include these guidelines. The guidelines should be referenced and reviewed as part of any implementation of return to refereeing.

5.1 The Officials

- Self-assessment screening checklist completed / logged prior to first game of the day for each referee
- Secure area established for referee equipment / rest area
- Officials gear sanitized; hands sanitized

5.1.1 Self Assessment

- Using the [self-assessment tool](#) / guidelines.
- Ontario Health Guidelines for COVID-19.
- Head referee logs status of all officials on field for day.
- Head referee logs status received from teams.

5.1.2 Secure Referee Area

- As defined in Section 5.3 – The Field.

5.1.3 Sanitizing gear

- Wipe down e-whistles / pens / notebooks with disinfectant wipes.
- Spray bags / flags with sanitizer.
- Sanitize hands with sanitizer.

5.1.4 Additional information

Whistles (E Whistles)– required to prevent particulate spread from blowing traditional whistles.

Masks – required officials carry and wear a mask to protect officials and players whenever social distancing is not possible

Masks with pouches for whistles are recommended if not using E Whistle

5.2 The Teams / Players

Self-assessment screening checklist completed / logged for all players & report to head ref the results

Prior to game starting

- Secure area established for team equipment / rest area
- Team gear sanitized / hands sanitized every start and on every offence / defence line change.

5.2.1 Self Assessment

- Using the [self-assessment tool](#).
- Ontario Health Guidelines for COVID-19.
- Captain logs results for all players for game.
- Head referee logs teams have reported in compliance.

5.2.2 Secure Team Area

- As defined in Section 5.3 – The Field.

5.2.3 Sanitizing gear

Should be noted, this is recommended prior to start of game and on every offence / defense line change as players are on the sideline.

- Wipe down footballs / flags / belts with disinfectant wipes or spray.
- Sanitize hands with sanitizer.

5.2.4. Sanitizing Goal Post Pads

- Wipe down pads with disinfectant wipes before erecting or removal from posts.

5.2.5 Additional information

- Masks – recommend players wear a mask to protect officials and players. (It should be noted that leagues have been resistant to wearing masks during game play)

Football Canada Guidelines recommend:

- No huddles
- Use audible calls off the line
- 2m spacing on sidelines
- No holds / aggressive actions by players on the field
- If any official determines that game operations are presenting a risk to officials or players, they may halt the game.

5.3 The Field

It should be noted that not all fields are lined / marked and are not necessarily of the same dimensions as the example. These guidelines are intended as general guidance and are subject to ONCFOA interpretations.

5.3.1 Referee Zone (Red)

- Both sides of the field or at the center of field (Youth Flag)
- Between the 50 yard lines.
- Extending from the sideline to 2 yards back from the sideline.
- To be marked with cones and / or spray paint.
- No player access to this area at any time before / during or after game.
- Intended as safe space for referee breaks / gear storage.

5.3.2 Referee Zone (Yellow)

- Both sides of the field.
- Extending from the sideline to 2 yards back from the sideline.
- Referees occupy this space during game play.
- Players may cross to transit from field to team zones.
- Players must cross with 2 yard (6 ft) distance between referees and players.

5.3.3 Team Zone (Blue)

- Both sides of the field.
- Between the 20 and 45 yard lines.
- Extending from 2 yards back from the sideline (no depth limit).
- Teams occupy these areas when not on the field / not crossing a Yellow zone.
- Intended as safe space for team breaks / gear storage.
- No referee access to this area at any time.
- If both teams occupy the same sideline, then one zone per team, no x-zone interaction between teams.
- If teams occupy opposite sidelines, then each team may occupy both zones on the same sideline, again, no x-zone interaction between teams.
- ONCFOA recommends having one sideline as the “active” and one sideline as the “incoming” for the next game (alternating) so that teams can warm up and flow remains smooth.

6.0 References / Web Resources / References

- [Government of Canada – COVID 19 Reference Page](#)
- [Ontario Government – COVID 19 Reference Page](#)
- [Department of Health – COVID 19 Reference Page](#)
- [Ontario Self-Assessment for C19](#)
- [Football Canada](#)