

Further to the recent Government announcements particularly with reference to the emergence of the Omicron variant of COVID, the EFL has taken the decision to mandate that all Clubs must move to Red Protocols for First Team Training from Saturday 18 December 2021.

A copy of the EFL First Team Training Ground Protocol is attached for your information.

As a reminder, The League may implement such measures as it considers necessary to enhance the bio-security of the Training Ground/ Academy Training Ground; protect the safety of Players and Staff; minimise the spread of COVID-19 among Players and Staff so far as possible and maintain Government and stakeholder support for the continuation of League matches involving the Club (RED Protocol).

Where the League determines that a Club needs to be subject to the RED Protocol, the League will notify the Club of the requirement to move to the RED Protocol along with the specific requirements that the Club must comply with. The Club will be required to comply with the requirements of the RED Protocol immediately. Failure to do so will constitute a breach of this Protocol.

This First Team Training Protocol sets out obligations binding on Clubs and incorporated into the Regulations, a breach of which will be dealt with under Section 9 of the EFL Regulations, albeit with an expedited timetable requiring response to the charge within 3 days, and hearing promptly thereafter. The obligations apply in respect of Season 2021/22.

For the avoidance of doubt nothing in this protocol replaces, reduces or affects in any way the obligations imposed on Clubs by statute and/or common law in the fields of medicine, occupational health and/or health and safety. Where Clubs consider that they can implement additional arrangements which help meet or exceed the standards set out herein, they should engage with the EFL at the earliest opportunity.

Our objective in increasing the requirements at this present time is to help guide Clubs as they seek to contend with a very difficult set of circumstances with the emergence of the Omicron variant of COVID.

Under RED Protocols Clubs are required to implement the following measures:

- i. [A regime for testing of individuals listed at paragraph 7 in the First Team Training Ground Protocols](#)

Each Club must ensure that:

- a) All Players and Staff as listed at paragraph 7 of the First Team Training Ground Protocols must be submitted to a LFD test on Matchday minus 1 (MD-1) which, returns a negative result. These must be undertaken under the guidance of a medical practitioner.
- b) The Board has also determined that when operating under Red Protocols Clubs should, for the time being, implement a daily screening programme. The Board recognises this will be subject to supply chain issues for LFD test and the Executive will issue further guidance on availability over the coming days.
- c) PCR tests must be undertaken by any Player or member of staff involved in First Team Training or Matches who displays symptoms of COVID-19 or has received a positive LFD test or as directed by the League in accordance with government advice.

- d) In respect of each PCR/LFD test taken by a Player or member of Club Staff, the Club Doctor must assess and contemporaneously record whether the individual submitting to the PCR/LFD test is experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19 at the time that the PCR/LFD test is taken.
- e) Clubs must comply with any requirement for individuals to isolate in relation to any instance of a positive PCR/LFD test result for one of its Players or members of Staff and/or record or any symptoms of COVID-19. This includes the requirement to undertake a PCR test on receipt of a positive LFD test. In case of conflicting results (LFD positive, PCR negative), Clubs must discuss with the EFL Medial Advisors.

ii. Physical Distancing

It is recognised that the Omicron variant of COVID transmits quickly and it is important that physical distancing measures are put in place at the Training Ground to slow down the spread, remove anyone as a close contact and keep the integrity of the squad in place.

At this time, there is no evidence that Omicron poses a risk to individual health above and beyond existing variants, however its rapid transmission merits regular review. Physical distancing will assist in restricting the spread of the virus.

Each Club must ensure that:

- a) All Players and Staff (with the exception of medical staff providing treatment) maintain physical distancing at all times when not undertaking training.
- b) No Player or Staff member (with the exception of medical staff providing treatment) must be in within 2m of another Player or Staff member for 15 minutes or more.

There is no reason why individuals would need to fall into the criteria of 'close contact' during normal day-to-day Training Ground activities with the exception of when treatment is required. Should a Club report close contacts occurring inside the Training Ground, this would constitute a breach of Protocols.

iii. Restrictions on the use of indoor spaces at the First Team Training Ground

Each Club must ensure that:

- a) Face coverings must be worn at all times in any indoor area.
- b) Poorly ventilated gym areas where social distancing cannot be maintained must be closed and use of any other gym areas must be risk assessed, socially distanced and with staggered use considered.
- c) Clubs use of kitchens and dining facilities must strictly following the government guidance in this area. The use of such facilities must be risk assessed by a suitably qualified specialist in health and safety and meet infection control, ventilation and physical distancing requirements. Kitchen staff must be kept to a minimum required and use face masks as far as reasonably practicable. Staggered use must be considered.

- d) The use of showering and changing room facilities must be risk assessed by a suitably qualified specialist in health and safety. The risks must be managed to as low as reasonably practicable and conducted with due attention to infection control, ventilation and physical distancing. Approaches to achieve this include but not limited to removal of some showerheads. These must be formally documented in the risk assessment. Where dressing room facilities are utilised Players must be limited to 15 minutes maximum. This may require Clubs to consider a staggered approach to arrival times and usage. (Note: the provision of changing room usage for Academy games at the Training Ground remains dependent upon the Home Clubs risk assessment).
- e) Team Meetings in poorly ventilated rooms must be avoided or strictly time limited if not. Alternatives must be considered with a preference for virtual meetings.
- f) There must be no congregation in communal areas at the Training Ground, including but not limited to changing rooms, medical rooms, social areas, sports halls, canteens, meeting rooms

iv. Restrictions on manual therapy by Staff

Each Club must ensure that:

- a) No manual therapy treatment of Players by Staff (including soft tissue therapy and massage) is conducted unless it is absolutely essential and approved by the Club Doctor in advance
- b) Any essential manual therapy treatment, where permitted, must last no longer than 15 minutes and be conducted in a well ventilated area. Players must wear a facial covering as a minimum and the practitioner must wear a surgical face mask, but FFP2 or above are preferable to reduce aerosol transmission (see viii below).

v. Restrictions on the use of ice baths and/or cryogenic chambers

- a) Ice baths, may be used on a single occupancy basis and their use must also adhere to the infection control management recommendations highlighted through these Protocols.
- b) Cryotherapy may be used on a single occupancy basis and their use must also adhere to the infection control management recommendations highlighted through these Protocols.

vi. Restrictions on training methods

There are no additional requirements on Clubs in this area at this time.

vii. Limitations on use and access to the First Team Training Ground by anyone other than those individuals listed at paragraph 7 of the First Team Training Ground Protocols

- a) Attendance at the First Team Training Ground must be limited only to Players and essential Staff. Note: It is recognised that Academies may continue operate from the same venue as

First Teams however, in this scenario, separation of First Team Staff and Players from Academy staff and Players must be maintained and the provisions of point ix) of this protocol shall apply at all times)

- b) The Club must procure that every Player or member of Staff who attends the Training Ground must, prior to entering the site, accurately completes a screening protocol to detect symptoms of COVID-19 infection in a manner devised by the Club Doctor (which will include a medical questionnaire).
- c) Each Club must ensure that, every day, after the Training Ground has been vacated by all Players and members of Staff, cleaning of the Training Ground is undertaken in accordance with the latest Government guidance.

viii. Requirements in respect of personal protective equipment

Each Club must ensure that:

- a) Any member of Staff performing essential physiotherapy or soft tissue treatment wears appropriate PPE throughout the treatment. We would recommend however the use of FFP2 standard and above if available. It should be remembered that infected medical and therapy staff have the potential to transmit to multiple contacts readily, and such PPE can prevent this.
- b) Whilst there is no formal requirement to wear an apron, the virus is transmitted in an airborne manner so other PPE should be used in accordance with usual healthcare practice standards.
- c) Every member of Staff involved in such physiotherapy or treatment must replace their face mask whenever it becomes moist or soiled
- d) Where a member of Staff is conducting an examination of a Player's mouth, head or ear, nose and throat areas, they must wear a **fluid resistant visor**.
- e) All used PPE items must be disposed of in a yellow bin, with clinical waste removed from the training ground as often as possible.
- f) Hand sanitiser dispensers must be freely available throughout the Training Ground premises, handwashing facilities must be clearly signposted and soap dispensers must be adequately filled at all times.

ix. A review of Academy activities to be undertaken to ensure the protection of the First Team environment.

Each Club must ensure that Academy Players and Staff must not:

- a) participate in the same training group or training session, or "mix" (i.e. be present at the same time) in the same indoor environment (e.g. changing areas, dining areas, corridors, treatment

rooms, social areas, office spaces) as Players or Staff who are involved in the First Team squad / staffing structure

b) be involved in a staffing or playing capacity on a First Team match-day.

In this scenario any Player or member of staff who is involved with First team Players or members of Staff as outlined above should be subject to the provisions of associated First Team protocols (including in regard to the applicable First Team Covid-19 testing regime).

X. Requirements in respect Media at the Training Ground

There must be no media in attendance at the Training Ground at this time, so please arrange virtual pre-match press conferences.

In addition, whilst at this stage we are not mandating moving to RED First Team Matchday Protocols, we are requesting Clubs implement the following processes on a Matchday:

i) Travel

Each Club must ensure that:

- a. car sharing is avoided
- b. they consider having people travel separately to matches, such as staff.
- c. they aim for 2-meter gaps between Players and Staff where possible. An arms' length is a good guide for 1 meter gap.
- d. they avoid seating Players and Staff directly in front or to the side of one another on coach travel where possible.
- d. everyone must wear a face covering during the journey unless medically exempt
- e. that there must be ventilation. Clear the air: Ensure windows are open, even a slight opening is enough on each side of the bus
- f. they build in breaks for longer journeys to refresh air and let people out. These only need to be short breaks and are not cumbersome.
- g. Players in key positions, such as Goalkeepers, are not placed in situations where they would be classed as close contacts of one another.

ii) Hotels

Each Club must ensure that:

- a. they Reduce occupancy to as low as reasonably practical. Single rooms and if not possible use the risk tool outlined in the Omicron Medical Update of 9th December to reduce odds of illness
- b. Players in key positions, such as Goalkeepers, are not placed in situations where they would be classed as close contacts of one another

iii) Testing

Each Club must ensure that:

- a. all individuals as listed at paragraph 8 of the First Team Matchday Protocols with access to the Red Zone must have undertaken a LFD test on MD-1 prior to each fixture which returns a negative result.

iv) Players' Tunnel

Each Club must ensure that:

- a. Physical distancing must be maintained at all times within the tunnel area (including during the warm-up, when entering and exiting the pitch, during half-time and after the Match).
- b. To meet these requirements:
 - i. Players and Match Officials' entry must be staggered onto the pitch (Visiting Team walk first; Home Team walk second)
 - ii. Only staff necessary to tunnel operations must be permitted access to this area.
 - iii. Individuals must not congregate in the Tunnel area at any time
 - iv. The area around the tunnel must be kept clear at all times to ensure safe access and egress to the pitch.
 - v. Face coverings must be worn in internal areas (unless medically exempt)

v) Matchday Behaviour

Each Club must ensure that:

- a. Individuals maintain physical distance whenever possible including during goal celebrations, in the warm-up and when entering and leaving the pitch.
- b. There should be no shaking of hands
- c. There should be no spitting or nose clearing
- d. Hand sanitisers should be used before and after every match
- e. Players should use their own water bottles.

vi) Post Match

Interaction between Players and Football Staff at the end of the match must be minimised. This includes Players and Staff not partaking in handshakes, hugs and post-match socialising and drinks.

vii) **Media Matters**

It is recommended that you do not make substantial changes to your matchday media protocols at this present time.

However, contact with attending media and managers and players on matchdays must be kept to a minimum and based on risk assessments undertaken by the Club.

For grounds where COVID Certification is mandated, please advise all attending media to your fixture that they will need to demonstrate they have valid COVID Certification in the form of proof of being double vaccinated or a negative Lateral Flow Test to gain entry.

Face coverings in indoor spaces must be worn at all times and please ensure that hand sanitisers are available in all media areas.

Clubs have already received some suggested COVID Certification guidance for you to issue to supporters so that they can Be Prepared ahead of your next fixture. For reference, please view our latest COVID-19 Certification guidance by clicking here - <https://www.efl.com/news/covid-19/>.

If you have any further media-related enquiries please email the Media Team at media@efl.com.