



Temporary rule changes for COVID-19

19th July 2021

1 General principles

1.1 Stay away

We expect that anyone who has tested positive, is experiencing COVID-like symptoms or has been advised to self-isolate will stay away from all football activity. Disciplinary action will be taken against anyone breaching that principle.

Similarly, if anyone feels particularly vulnerable to COVID, they should not be criticised for making a personal choice to stay away from American football activity.

1.2 Maintain social distancing

Although many legal restrictions have now been lifted and the majority of adults have been vaccinated, it is still possible to catch and spread COVID-19. This is the case even if you are fully vaccinated, and we are still in the third wave of this pandemic in the UK. Therefore, everyone in the sport has a responsibility to reduce the risk of spreading the disease.

As we open up, it is important to consider that others may wish to take a more cautious approach. We must all be considerate of this, and provide the opportunity and space for others to reduce close contacts if they wish.

So:

1. social distancing should be maintained whenever possible; and
2. a face covering is recommended to be worn whenever close to other people for a prolonged time, or in crowded or poorly ventilated areas (unless you have an age, health or disability reason for not wearing a face covering as per government guidance).

We encourage people to wear a face covering because they may find it difficult to distance in a crowded area like a sideline or forget themselves during the flow of the game.

The rule changes and game management points of emphasis below are based on those key principles.

1.3 Integrity of the game

Wherever possible, we want to maintain a "normal" game of American football. The changes we have made are mainly related to the game management and dead-ball periods of the game rather than the relatively brief (in comparison) live-ball periods. Because the ball is live typically for only a few seconds, the risk of transmission during that time is low (but not zero).

1.4 Review

These changes will be kept under regular review and will be changed if necessary to remain consistent with relevant legal requirements and government guidelines.

Please be aware that local requirements may be different in England, Scotland and Wales.

2 Rule changes (contact)

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change
1.	1-2-4-a and 1-2-4-d	Team area Replace "25-yard lines" by "10-yard lines".	Expand the team area to provide more space for social distancing by team personnel.
2.	1-2-4-b	Team area Replace "25 other individuals" by "15 other individuals".	Reduce the number of non-players in the team area and coaching box.
3.	1-3-2	The ball Add: j. Whenever there is sweat, saliva or another body fluid on the ball, it should be swapped from the field and sanitised. (Game management is responsible for providing cleaning materials.)	Ensure that virus particles are unlikely to accumulate on the ball and be transferred to other participants.
4.	3-1-1-c	Coin toss. Replace "not more than four field captains from each team" by "one field captain from each team".	Reduce the number of people at the coin toss ceremony to one captain from each team.
5.	3-1-2	End of periods Add: c. All balls shall be sanitised.	Ensure that virus particles are unlikely to accumulate on the ball and be transferred to other participants.
6.	3-3-2-1	Running clock Delete "Competitions may adopt regulations to: 1. forgo the rule in the first half of a game;"	To reduce the length of one-sided games. Currently, the running clock rule only applies in the second half. This means it can operate in the first half as well. Obviously it is rare that a lead in excess of 34 is reached in the first half.
7.	3-4-2-b	Delay of game Add: 9. Players who are not socially distanced from each other within 5 seconds of the first whistle when the ball is dead (Exceptions: 1. injured players; 2. entangled players)	To reduce the length of time in which players are in close proximity to each other. It is likely that on occasion there will be multiple infractions on the same play. Normally only one would be enforced. Sometimes there will be infractions by both teams. Those would simply offset.
8.	9-2-1-a-1	Unsportsmanlike acts Add: l. Intentionally breaching social distancing guidelines. m. Speaking to an opponent or official without social distancing (Exception: players).	Provide a rules penalty for participants who intentionally or negligently put others at risk of virus transmission. Flagrant offenders (including those who use proximity to an opponent or official to intimidate) should be disqualified.

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change
9.	Appendix D	<p>Field markings</p> <p>The coaching box line should be 12 feet outside the sideline.</p> <p>The team area line should be 24 feet outside the sideline.</p> <p>The limit line should be 36 feet outside the sideline and 6-18 feet beyond the back of the team areas.</p> <p>In stadiums where the total field surface does not permit this, the coaching box line must be at least 6 feet outside the sideline and the team area line at least 12 feet outside the sideline. Spectators must not be closer to the field of play or end zones than 36 feet.</p>	<p>Move coaching box and team area further outside the sideline (where stadium surface permits), thus distancing coaches and substitutes from personnel on the field.</p> <p>Other field markings should remain as normal. If a club has problems in marking the field, please look at http://rules.bafra.info/field/ in the first instance, or contact rules@britishamericanfootball.org for further advice.</p>

3 Additional rule changes for face covering (contact)

These rule changes also apply IF government guidance in your location requires you to remain socially distanced from anyone who is not in your household or support bubble.

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change
10.	1-2-4-b	<p>Team area</p> <p>Add:</p> <p>All personnel in the team area are recommended to wear a face covering if they cannot maintain social distancing for prolonged periods. Exception: squad members in full uniform who are standing and ready to enter as substitutes.</p>	<p>Those in the team area who have to be close to others should wear a face covering except for squad members preparing to enter the field.</p> <p>This is an issue for teams to manage, not for officials to penalise.</p>
11.	9-2-1-a-1	<p>Unsportsmanlike acts</p> <p>Add:</p> <p>l. Intentionally breaching social distancing guidelines.</p> <p>m. Speaking to an opponent or official without <u>wearing a face covering or social distancing</u> (Exception: players).</p>	<p>Provide a rules penalty for participants who intentionally or negligently put others at risk of virus transmission.</p> <p>Flagrant offenders (including those who use proximity to an opponent or official to intimidate) should be disqualified.</p>
12.	13-4-1	<p>Officials' assistants</p> <p>Add:</p> <p>g. Officials' assistants are recommended to wear face coverings during the game.</p>	<p>The chain crew and ball persons work close to players, officials and each other.</p> <p>Wearing a face covering provides extra protection against transmission.</p>

4 Rule changes (flag)

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change
1.	1-2-1	The ball Add: All balls shall be sanitised at the end of each period. Whenever there is sweat, saliva or another body fluid on the ball, it should be swapped from the field and sanitised. (Game management is responsible for providing cleaning materials.)	Ensure that virus particles are unlikely to accumulate on the ball and be transferred to other participants.
2.	2-1-8	Team area Add: The team area is limited to squad members and a maximum of 5 other individuals involved in the game.	Limit the number of non-players in the team area and coaching box.
3.	3-1-1	Coin toss. Replace "the captains from each team" by "one captain from each team".	Reduce the number of people at the coin toss ceremony to one captain from each team.
4.	4-1-3	Add: Delay of game Players must be socially distanced from each other within 5 seconds of the first whistle when the ball is dead (Exceptions: 1. injured players; 2. entangled players)	To reduce the length of time in which players are in close proximity to each other. It is likely that on occasion there will be multiple infractions on the same play. Normally only one would be enforced. Sometimes there will be infractions by both teams. Those would simply offset.
5.	9-2-1-c	Unsportsmanlike Acts Replace "It is preferable for players to return the flag to the opponent." by "It is preferable for players to leave the flag at the dead-ball spot."	Reduce the occasions when players have to come into physical proximity.
6.	9-2-1	Unsportsmanlike acts Add: e. Intentionally breaching social distancing guidelines. f. Speaking to an opponent or official without social distancing (Exception: players).	Provide a rules penalty for participants who intentionally or negligently put others at risk of virus transmission. Flagrant offenders (including those who use proximity to an opponent or official to intimidate) should be disqualified.

5 Additional rule changes for face covering (flag)

These rule changes also apply IF government guidance in your location requires you to remain socially distanced from anyone who is not in your household or support bubble.

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change
7.	2-1-8	Team area Add: All personnel in the team area are recommended to wear a face covering if they cannot maintain social distancing for prolonged periods. Exception: squad members in full uniform who are standing and ready to enter as substitutes.	Those in the team area who have to be close to others should wear a face covering except for squad members preparing to enter the field. This is an issue for teams to manage, not for officials to penalise.
8.	9-2-1	Unsportsmanlike acts Add: e. Intentionally breaching social distancing guidelines. f. Speaking to an opponent or official without <u>wearing a face covering or social distancing</u> (Exception: players).	Provide a rules penalty for participants who intentionally or negligently put others at risk of virus transmission. Flagrant offenders (including those who use proximity to an opponent or official to intimidate) should be disqualified.
9.	11-3-2	Officials' assistants Add: e. The down indicator operator is recommended to wear a face covering during the game.	The down indicator operator works close to players and officials. Wearing a face covering provides extra protection against transmission.

6 Officiating points of emphasis

1. **Encourage players to avoid standing around in clusters.** As long as they respond to this encouragement, there will be no need for a penalty. Inadvertent clusters are not a foul provided the players disperse when reminded.
2. In contact football, if the ball carrier is in a crowd of other players, blow your whistle when further forward progress is unlikely. **Tilt the balance towards early whistles.**
3. For your own safety, have zero tolerance for persons subject to the rules who **complain to you while not socially distanced and not wearing a face covering.**

7 Game management points of emphasis (officiating-related)

1. Ensure that you include the **needs of the game officials** in all preparation and planning for the game.
2. Ensure that areas of the playing enclosure and (if necessary) indoor facilities are **set aside for the officials' exclusive use** and that these areas are big enough for the officials to maintain social distancing from each other.
3. **Provide sanitising materials** for the officials, chain crew and ball persons.
 - a) Ensure the chain equipment and balls are thoroughly sanitised before and after the game.
 - b) Ball persons must be provided with enough cleaning materials with which to sanitise the ball regularly during the game.
 - c) For sanitising the balls, a supply of soapy water and cleaning cloths is adequate, but antiviral wipes may be used if desired. (We are conscious that some types of cleaning material may be damaging to the condition of the ball, so take care.)
4. If a **radio microphone** is provided for Referee announcements, ensure it is sanitised before and after use.
5. **Sideline staff are encouraged to wear face coverings** unless socially distanced from everyone.