

PATHWAY FOR A SAFER RETURN TO FOOTBALL FAI POLICY DOCUMENT MAY 15th 2020

INTRODUCTION

The Football Association of Ireland is committed to a return to football for all players, staff, match officials, administrators, volunteers and supporters as soon as it is safe and possible under the guidance of the HSE, the Department of Health, Sport Ireland, NHPET and UEFA.

The FAI remains in communication with all Government agencies regarding protocols around a pathway for a safe return to football in the SSE Airtricity League, Women's National League, adult amateur and underage football, incorporating all affiliates. The health and safety of all stakeholders is at the core of all FAI decisions in relation to a safer return to football and remains subject to change on the advice of Government agencies, UEFA and the FAI Medical Team, led by Medical Director Dr Alan Byrne. Dr Byrne has been appointed by Sport Ireland to the Medical Advisory Group, established to review the various sporting protocols for a return to action. Dr Byrne's priority as a member of the Medical Advisory Group is to provide a pathway for a return to action for all strands of football that is acceptable to all Government agencies and regarded as safe for all participants.

"The only certainty around a return to football during this COVID-19 pandemic is the uncertainty," said Dr Byrne. "As Medical Director of the Football Association of Ireland, I must look at any planned return to football from a medical viewpoint, with the health and safety of everyone concerned to the forefront in any decision making.

"My advice to clubs is not to return to training when we enter Phase One of the Government Roadmap on Monday, May 18th, not to open their grounds and pitches, even to groups of four, and not to consider collective training or playing football until the medical evidence suggests otherwise.

"Decisive actions by our clubs now, will improve the chances of a safer return to football for everyone. We must take small and deliberate steps before we can allow all football to return. My recommendation to the FAI is to begin with a pilot programme on June 8th for the four SSE Airtricity League teams who have qualified for European football. This will allow us to analyse every step of their journey back to football, beginning with a safe return to training.

"The information we will gather from that pilot programme will be invaluable for all players, at all levels of the game, as we look to establish a safer pathway to a return for all football, one that can be approved by all Government agencies and UEFA. We all want football back in our lives but it is not worth risking one life by rushing to get our game back."

DIRECTIVES TO FACILITATE A SAFER RETURN FOR ALL FOOTBALL

The Football Association of Ireland has made the following decisions:

SSE AIRTRICITY LEAGUE

- The cessation of all football under the jurisdiction of the FAI is extended to July 20th with the exception of SSE Airtricity League clubs and UEFA Women's Champion's League representatives, Peamount United
- All clubs are advised not to facilitate any organized training, including in groups of up to four, under Phase One of the Government's Roadmap For Reopening Society and Business
- Four SSE Airtricity League clubs – Dundalk, Shamrock Rovers, Derry City and Bohemians - will be invited to return to training initially followed by a return to playing, in a behind closed doors tournament, as part of a pilot programme for a return to football for everyone
- Players and staff from the four invited SSE Airtricity League clubs will undergo regular COVID-19 testing from May 26th
- The four invited SSE Airtricity League clubs can return to collective training on June 8th
- These four clubs will participate in a four-team tournament at a neutral venue, ahead of their European Club competition games in late July/ early August
- The four-team tournament will provide all stakeholders with an opportunity to learn in the current environment from these games, thus providing a safer template for SSE Airtricity League, International games and all football going forward
- All other SSE Airtricity League squads can return to collective training on June 29th under Phase Three of the Government's Roadmap For Reopening Society and Business, with players and staff undergoing regular COVID-19 testing
- The FAI Medical Team will provide a detailed and transparent analysis of the testing results to stakeholders, Government agencies and UEFA on an ongoing basis

WOMEN'S NATIONAL LEAGUE, ADULT AMATEUR, UNDERAGE AND ALL OTHER AFFILIATED FOOTBALL

- All clubs are advised not to facilitate any organized training, including in groups of up to four, under Phase One of the Government's Roadmap For Reopening Society and Business
- The FAI Steering Group will monitor the pilot programme for the four invited SSE Airtricity League clubs, to be launched on June 8th, and will use all information gathered in the preparation of a protocol document for a return for all adult amateur and underage football
- The cessation of all football activities under the jurisdiction of the FAI is extended to July 20th for all affiliates, with the exception of SSE Airtricity League clubs and UEFA Women's Champions League representatives, Peamount United. A decision on

Peamount United's return to training will be made once dates are known for the UEFA Women's Champions League

- Under Phase Four of the Government's Roadmap For Reopening Society and Business, all adult amateur and underage clubs can begin their return to training programmes from July 20th, subject to FAI protocols to be agreed with Government agencies
- Under Phase Five of the Government's Roadmap For Reopening Society and Business, all adult amateur and underage clubs can return to full collective training from August 10th
- All adult amateur and underage clubs can return to playing from August 28th
- A pilot tournament for the Women's National League, including Peamount United, will be launched once dates are known for the UEFA Women's Champions League
- A pilot programme for adult amateur and underage football will be launched on August 14th and run until August 28th
- Regional, provincial and national competitions in season 2019/20 can return from August 28th with FAI approval
- Winter Leagues wishing to complete their 2019/20 season will be given the option of applying to the FAI, via their affiliates, for an extension to their season until October 11th
- Applications from Winter Leagues looking to complete the 2019/20 season must be made to the FAI by June 15th with details to be forwarded to affiliates from the Steering Group by May 22nd
- Winter Leagues not wishing to complete their 2019/20 season can start their new 2020/21 season on October 16th
- 2020 Summer Leagues can return on August 28th and will be provided with support to create a shortened schedule to run up to December 13th
- All decisions around a return to collective training and playing for all adult amateur and underage football, will be based on the health and safety of all players, coaches, match officials, administrators and club volunteers
- All decisions will be subject to change on the advice of Government agencies, UEFA and the FAI Medical Team, led by Medical Director Dr Alan Byrne