



## **AFL COVID Guidelines for Community Football**

### *January 2022*

The AFL COVID Guidelines for Community Football have been developed to provide States, Regions and Leagues (**Controlling bodies**) with key principles and guidance around delivering community football in 2022 and a range of COVID considerations.

These guidelines are intended to assist in removing ambiguity around decision making, reduce the stress and anxiety on administrators/volunteers and outline a way forward in a simple format.

It is proposed that provisions be made by each League to adopt by-laws and regulations to manage the scenarios of a COVID impacted season.

#### Guiding Principles:

- **Continue to follow government regulations** – controlling bodies must continue to follow all relevant Government regulations related to community sport. Controlling bodies should provide clear directions to clubs around:
  - The need to follow directions from the State / Territory Health Authorities should a player or official receive a positive COVID test result
  - Interpretation of a close contact and steps to follow where a COVID positive person participates in a match / training session or attends a club / venue
  - Vaccination requirements (if any)
- **Play where possible** – the priority is continuing to provide an opportunity for people to play football. Competition integrity / equitability are important, however, should not override the priority to play in this environment. Flexibility and support from everyone will be important in managing any impacts resulting from COVID.
- **Health and safety must remain as a key focus** – like any illness / injury, players and umpires should seek medical clearance before returning to play after having COVID. An individual may require longer than the designated isolation period to be ready to participate in football. Whilst playing where possible should be the aim, the health and safety of participants with respect to rescheduling, 'playing-up' or 'doubling-up' remains the priority.

#### Principles for Fixturing / Season Structure:

- Where possible, controlling bodies should schedule their home and away fixtures and finals within traditional timeframes. However, controlling bodies may wish to start earlier to provide flexibility at the end of their season to push the season out if required.
- It is not recommended to schedule additional byes (where they otherwise would not) in anticipation that seasons will be impacted by COVID.
- Equality in the draw is less important than opportunity to participate whenever possible in this environment.

## Recommended By-Laws for Consideration by Controlling Bodies:

### ROUND IMPACTS:

- 1. Whole rounds should only be cancelled if required by the relevant Government authority**
  - If individual matches are impacted by COVID, the remainder of the round should continue where possible
- 2. Impact of a COVID interruption on a single round, consecutive rounds, or multiple rounds**
  - Should an entire round (or rounds) of matches be abandoned, no points or percentage shall be awarded to any team
  - The season shall recommence with the next scheduled round that is permitted (e.g. if round 3 is abandoned, the season shall recommence with round 4 if permitted)
  - The season shall continue until the original finals are scheduled to commence
- 3. Return to Play following COVID interrupted rounds**

Number of consecutive rounds abandoned	Recommencement period
1 – 3 consecutive rounds	Next scheduled round
4 – 6 consecutive rounds	Next scheduled round following a minimum of 7-day training period
6+ consecutive rounds	Next scheduled round following a minimum of 14-day training period

### MATCH IMPACTS

#### 4. Impact of a COVID interruption on individual teams – minimum requirements

- If players are unable to participate in a match or matches due to directed quarantine, isolation, recovery from COVID or border closures the minimum requirement to field an individual team is:

	Minimum numbers	Playing multiple matches / weekend
<b>Seniors</b>	16 players on field + 2 on the bench	
<b>Reserves / Masters</b>	14 players	Only 4 players can 'double-up'
<b>U19 – U13</b>	12 players	Only 4 players can 'double-up'
<b>U12 – U9</b>	9 players	Only 2 players can 'double-up'
<b>U8</b>	6 players	No players can 'double up'

*Note: the minimum numbers for underage competitions are guided by the junior match policy. Controlling bodies may vary the minimum numbers listed based on the individual nature of their competitions. A player will be considered to have 'double-up' should they play more than one match in a weekend.*

- Where a club can only field one senior team due to reduced player numbers, priority shall be given to fielding their most senior team over any senior teams in lower grades (e.g. reserves).
- Teams must always have an equal number of players on the field at the start of a match for the match to proceed.
- Teams are encouraged to share players (excluding in Senior matches) to facilitate games being played. If one team has more players than the other team, it is encouraged to share players until each team has an equal number of players. Where the number of excess players from the club with more players is an odd number, then the team with the greater number of players will retain one extra player for their bench.
- Where games are unable to proceed due to minimum numbers not being met, teams are encouraged to play a modified-rules practice match with available numbers where possible.

- Controlling bodies may reserve the right to investigate any team that has players missing due to COVID (from quarantine, isolation, recovery from COVID or border closures) and seeks to reduce the number of players participating in a match or cannot meet minimum numbers but will do so by exception only.

#### **5. Impact of a COVID interruption on individual matches – abandoning matches**

- It is recommended that individual matches that are not able to proceed within a given be considered abandoned and teams shall be awarded 2 points each with the average weekly percentage of all participating teams of the same competition from that round of matches applied to both teams.

### FINALS IMPACTS

#### **6. Final qualifications in a COVID interrupted season**

- Should a season be impacted by COVID, the controlling body may determine final qualification requirements for players at their discretion at any stage during the season. It is recommended that final qualification requirements are only adjusted if multiple rounds are cancelled or if one or more teams miss multiple matches.

#### **7. Impact of a COVID interruption on individual finals matches**

- The same minimum player requirements will apply to finals matches
- The final date for completion of the [insert league] competition will be [insert date]. If the League has allocated spare weekends for finals, the League will attempt to reschedule finals games interrupted by COVID within this timeline.
- Where time does not permit for an individual finals game to be rescheduled, the team with a higher ladder position at the end of the home and away season shall be deemed the winner by virtue of higher ranking.

#### **8. Impact of a COVID interruption on a grand final**

- Where time does not permit for the grand final to be rescheduled by the stated completion date and the grand final must be abandoned, no premier shall be awarded.

#### **9. Impact of a COVID interruption on the entire finals series**

- If no finals matches are played, no premier shall be awarded.
- The minor premiership should be awarded immediately on completion of the H&A Season if the minimum number of rounds have been completed.

### OTHER:

#### **10. Consequence of a suspension in a COVID interrupted Season**

- All suspensions must be served in accordance with the regulations of the controlling body and suspensions apply to games played (not dates).

#### **11. Impact of COVID Interruption on the Allowable Player Payment Rule**

- Should a round be abandoned, then the Allowable Player Payment Caps shall immediately be calculated on a pro rata of games played.
- Leagues may make application to their controlling body to reduce the Allowable Player Payment Cap at any stage during the season should a minimum of 6 Rounds be abandoned

#### **12. Impact of COVID Interruption on the Player Point System**

- Regardless of any rounds being abandoned, the Player Point System regulations and categories shall not be affected.

- Should individual matches be abandoned, clubs may make application to the relevant controlling body for special consideration for individual player reassessment for the following season.

### **13. Impact of COVID Interruption to Umpire availability**

- Should umpires be unavailable to be appointed to matches as scheduled by the league/umpire association due to COVID isolation requirements, Senior matches (Men's and Women's) shall be a higher priority than lower grades.
- Should umpires be unavailable to be appointed to Senior matches as scheduled by the league/umpire association due to COVID isolation requirements, Field umpires will be appointed as the first priority, Goal umpires will be appointed as second priority, Boundary umpires appointed as third priority.
- Should there not be enough Field umpires available to appoint Field umpires to all Senior matches, any available Goal and Boundary umpires shall be appointed as Field umpires until:
  - All Senior matches have appointed Field umpires, or
  - All available umpires have been appointed.
- Where only partial umpire panels are appointed (e.g. Field umpires only) the competing Teams may appoint an umpire(s) to officiate in the roles not filled.
- Where a match is not appointed any league/association Field umpires, clubs will refer to Law 8.1.4 where the competing Teams may appoint a Field Umpire each to officiate the match.

### **14. Awards & Votes**

- Awards and votes will be awarded for games played and will not be prorated for missed matches.

### **15. Matters not covered by COVID By Laws**

- Should any scenario occur which is not covered within these by-laws, then the matter shall be referred to the Controlling Body to determine.