



STEP 3

PROTOCOL FOR THE
RE-INTRODUCTION OF

**GOLF IN
NORTHERN
IRELAND**



**GOLFING UNION
OF IRELAND**



Rules for Golf Clubs in Step 3

This Protocol sets out the basis on which golf can be played in a safe manner, during Step 3. These rules are subject to change and golf clubs are asked to check www.golfnet.ie regularly for updates. Clubs should appoint a **COVID-19 Officer** to ensure consistent compliance with the Protocol.

Clubs **must** ensure that:

- Members, visitors and staff with colds or any symptoms of COVID-19 stay away from the golf course/clubhouse.
- Physical distancing rules are observed by all members and visitors at all times in the car park, clubhouse and on the course.
- Play is open to members, members' guests & visitors only.
- Any competitions are played in accordance with the guidelines set out in Appendix 2.
- Personnel are on hand to monitor adherence with physical distancing rules and the rules for golfers set out in this document.
- Tee times are booked in advance online or over the telephone. Clubs must ensure that players names (including visitors and members' guests) are recorded on timesheets and timesheets must be kept for a period of at least 6 weeks to assist with contact tracing should the need arise.
- Daily timesheets are restricted to a minimum of 8, 9 or 10 minute intervals. Clubs may only choose one interval for each day. If clubs choose 8+ minute intervals, play is restricted to 2 golfers per start time. If clubs choose 9+ minutes, up to 3 golfers may play per start time. If clubs choose 10+ minutes, up to 4 golfers may play per start time.
- Players are instructed not to touch the flag or flagstick.
- Rakes are removed from the course. Players are requested to smooth bunkers using their feet or a club. (See Appendix 2 for measures which can be taken in qualifying competitions)
- Hire trolleys (electric and pull trolleys) must be sanitised prior to each use.
- Caddies are not permitted (exception: where the group of golfers and the caddies are from the same household and/or the golfer requires an aide as allowed under the modified rules of golf for players with disabilities).

In addition, the following guidelines should be observed:

- Signage should be erected to reinforce physical distancing rules.
- Holes/cups should be altered to facilitate easy retrieval of golf balls. (See Appendix 2 for measures which can be taken in qualifying competitions)
- Hand sanitisers should be made available.
- Regular cleaning of toilets, on course & in clubhouse if they are in use.
- Where possible ball washers, bins, sandbags, benches, divot boxes and non-essential furniture should be taken in off the course. Where such fixtures are permanent, they should be taken out of use. This measure will help ensure the safety and wellbeing of course workers even as the virus is in suppression. Golfers should be reminded continually to take their own rubbish with them for the time being.
- Where practice putting greens are open, the holes should be filled in or covered, otherwise the greens should be closed.
- Members of the same household should play together, rather than split into mixed groups.
- The use of golf buggies is discouraged. Where a golf buggy must be used, it should be used by one person only and cannot be exchanged between people during the round, however members of the same household may share a buggy. Buggies must be sanitized thoroughly after each use.
- Clubs will have to consider ways in which social distancing can be facilitated in practice facilities. If such facilities are open, golfers must warm up on their own. Holes must be filled in on the practice putting green(s).
- If necessary, defibrillators should be moved to an accessible area and members should be notified of their new location.

Rules for Golfers in Step 3

This Protocol sets out the basis on which golf can be played in a safe manner, during Step 3. Golfers are expected to observe the underlying public health guidance set out at:

www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19 and www.publichealth.hscni.net/.

These rules are subject to change and golfers are asked to check www.golfnet.ie regularly for updates.

To ensure that the game is played safely, golfers **must** observe the following rules:

In advance of play:

- If you are ill or have symptoms, stay at home.
- Schedule your tee-time in the manner prescribed by the club you are paying at. Under no circumstances should you arrive at the club without booking in advance.
- Ensure that your group size is no greater than that allowed by your club.
- Ensure that you have sufficient numbers of golf balls, markers, tees to avoid having to exchange equipment with others.
- Wash your hands and your golf equipment before you leave home.
- Aim to arrive at the practice area, if open at your club, no more than 15 minutes prior to play.
- Travel to the practice area, if open at your club, on your own or with members of your own household only.
- Park your car in such a way as to facilitate physical distancing.
- Observe physical distancing rules at all times following your arrival at the club.
- If necessary, retrieve your clubs, shoes and other equipment from your locker.
- Change your shoes in the car park.
- Warm-up alone. Observe physical distancing rules on practice range and on the practice putting green. If your club has taken the decision to close practice facilities, this must be strictly adhered to.
- Avoid holing out on practice putting green, putt to a tee-peg instead.

On the course:

- Do not arrive at the first tee more than 5 minutes before your allotted tee time.
- Observe physical distancing at all times on the course.
- Following play of a hole, do not enter the next teeing ground until all members of the group in front have played their tee-shots and exited the teeing ground.
- If you must use a golf buggy, it must only be used by you and cannot be shared with or used by another player during the round.
- Do not exchange or share equipment, food or drink with other players during your round.
- Do not pick up another player's equipment or golf ball.
- Do not use on-course water fountains, ball cleaners etc.
- Do not use rakes in bunkers.
- Do not touch the flag or flagstick. Putt with the flagstick in and remove your own ball from the hole.

In addition, the following guidelines should be observed:

- Use the toilet facilities before you leave home.
- Bring your own hydration/food to the course.
- Bring your own hand sanitiser to the course & use regularly during the round.

Appendix 1: Golf – A Phased Return in Northern Ireland – Step 3

Golf's Protocol, in Step 3, has been relaxed to permit clubs to include visitors on their timesheets. Based on the current measures set out in the Government's Roadmap, the table below sets out a timeline for the gradual re-introduction of golf. It should be noted that changes will be made in accordance with the Executive's "Progression towards a Resumption of Sport & Physical Recreation in Northern Ireland". Any change to the over-arching plan may result in an amendment(s) to the below table and, thus, golf clubs must ensure that they are using the most up-to-date version of this table.

We are conscious that some clubs may wish to impose increased restrictions at their own facilities. For example, clubs may wish to only allow 3-balls in Step 3 or confine play to members + member guests only in Step 3. Such clubs are fully entitled to introduce increased restrictions if they so wish. The following table sets out the minimum required restrictions during the phased re-introduction of golf.

STEPS	STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4	STEP 5
Group sizes and tee-time intervals	Either: 3-balls at 14-minute intervals, or 2-balls at 12-minute intervals or Individual players at 10-minute intervals	Either: 4-balls at 12-minute intervals, or 3-balls at 11-minute intervals or 2-balls at 10-minute intervals	Either: 4-balls at 10-minute intervals, or 3-balls at 9-minute intervals or 2-balls at 8-minute intervals	Either: 4-balls at 10-minute intervals, or 3-balls at 9-minute intervals or 2-balls at 8-minute intervals	Either: 4-balls at 10-minute intervals, or 3-balls at 9-minute intervals or 2-balls at 8-minute intervals
Booking	In advance, online or by telephone	In advance, online or by telephone	In advance, online or by telephone	In advance, online or by telephone	In advance, online or by telephone
Type of Play	Casual golf only (no competitions)	Casual golf, closed club competitions	Casual golf & closed & open competitions	Casual golf & closed & open competitions	Casual golf & closed & open competitions
Who may play?	Members only, (under 18's must play with an adult)	Members & members guests, (under 18's must play with an adult)	Members, members guests & visitors	Members, members guests & visitors	Members, members guests & visitors
Clubhouse	Closed except for pro-shop (for check-in only), toilet facilities and locker room (for retrieval of golf equipment)	Closed except for pro-shop, toilet facilities and locker room (for retrieval of golf equipment)	Pro-shop, toilet facilities, locker room may open. Club Bar & Restaurant may open from 3 July (subject to strict guidelines)	Pro-shop, toilet facilities, locker room + Club bar & restaurant may open (subject to strict guidelines)	Pro-shop, toilet facilities, locker room + Club bar & restaurant may open (subject to strict guidelines)

For guidelines on re-opening of restaurants and cafes, from 3 July, see;

www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/coronavirus-working-safely-tourism-and-hospitality
or <https://covid19.tourismni.com/guidance/>

Appendix 2: Guidance for Clubs on Running Competitions

Competitions were allowed from Step 2 in Northern Ireland and Phase 3 in the Republic of Ireland. This includes competitions which are qualifying for handicapping purposes, as well as other competitions (such as match play club championships). All such competitions must be run in accordance with the Protocol for Step 3.

The following guidance incorporates the advice of the ILGU/GUI Joint Handicapping Committee on what is permissible in competitions that are qualifying for handicap purposes. This guidance also relates to what is allowed for the return of supplementary scores, and scores for the initial allocation of handicaps. The Qualifying Competitions Guidelines for Clubs on which this is based is available to view on www.golfnet.ie. It is strongly recommended that handicap Committees fully review this guidance to ensure they comply with these temporary measures.

Timesheets and Catering for demand

Given the necessarily restrictive nature of tee time intervals in Step 3, clubs should give consideration to the types of handicap-qualifying competitions that they may run, including:

- An 18-hole competition in which members have an option to play on one of two alternate days. A separate CSS must be calculated each day and members may only play once.
- 9-hole competitions which may be run on each of the club's nines. Should clubs exercise this option, the standard procedure outlined in the UHS (Clause 22) must be applied.

Entry and Score Return Points

The Committee must consider all ways in which close contact can be avoided in the process of entering competitions and paying entry fees. This must include examining ways to avoid groups of people gathering for the purpose of signing in, collecting scorecards or returning scores, and communal computer terminals used for sign-in and/or score entry should be disabled and removed from use.

Contactless payment/billing should be used wherever possible. Online booking of tee times to be used for taking payment for competition entry, wherever possible.

Using Scorecards

If scorecards are to be used, it will not be necessary for cards to be exchanged or for the person who is the 'marker' to touch the player's scorecard. Instead, the player can mark his/her own scores and ask his/her marker to verbally certify the scores. The player can then write the name of the marker on the scorecard and return it to the Committee.

If the Committee choose this option, due care and attention is needed regarding the location in which scorecards are to be collected by players. All surfaces must be regularly sanitised and hand-washing/sanitisation facilities should be provided. The Club must take all necessary steps to avoid the potential for gatherings in such an area. The Committee should request that the player fills out all the relevant details (name and date of competition in addition to the player's name and handicap).

Where possible, the Committee should avoid having players physically return scorecards. As an alternative, the Committee can accept a photograph of the card by text, email, WhatsApp, etc. Should the Committee require the physical return of scorecards, similar care is required with such an area as that in which scorecards were to be collected (see above). Additionally, the Committee member in charge of checking the cards should not handle the cards for at least 24 hours following the submission of the last card. This will inevitably result in delays in results being finalised, which members should be made aware of.

Alternatives to using scorecards (e.g. electronic scoring)

The Committee can, as an alternative to physical scorecards, use some other suitable scoring mechanism (e.g. a mobile scoring solution that integrates with the club's handicapping software and which complies with the Qualifying Competitions Guidelines for Clubs published on www.golfnet.ie).

Such a solution must record the hole-by-hole scores of the player. The Handicap Committee must have the ability to readily access the scores, and whatever scoring option is used, the Committee should make clear by what date scores for a particular competition can be accepted.

Flagsticks

Flagsticks modified by the club for the purpose of player safety can be used in qualifying competitions as a temporary provision, even if they do not meet the specifications in Part 8 of the Equipment Rules. In addition, Committees can require the flagstick to remain in the hole at all times (a penalty can be prescribed by the Committee as a Code of Conduct or Local Rule). Alternatively, Committees can proceed without having any flagsticks at all.

Committees also have the option to modify the depth of the hole to allow players to remove the ball without touching the flagstick. In this case the ball is holed when at rest with **any** part of it below the surface of the putting green, even if not lodged against the flagstick.

Bunkers

As the removal of all rakes has been recommended in this Protocol, Committees can request players to smooth bunkers using either their foot or a club **after** playing their stroke. Additionally, Committees can – temporarily – use the following local rule for bunkers:

“When a player’s ball lies in a bunker, the player may prefer the lie within six inches. (See Model Local Rule E-3 for details of how this must be done.)”







Please note that smoothing the sand before placing the ball is **not allowed**.

In exceptional circumstances where the condition of bunkers is so poor that it interferes with the proper playing of the game, committees may declare all bunkers to be Ground Under Repair. A combination of bunkers out of play and preferred lies is not permitted.

Player responsibilities

Players competing in handicap qualifying competitions are still required to play by the rules of golf and must apply all temporary measures provided, along with the club’s local rules. Players must also be made aware of their responsibilities with regard to filling in and returning scores as set out above – whether physical scorecards or a suitable electronic alternative are used.

Competition Checklist

	Provide an online or contactless option for entering and paying for competitions
	Eliminate areas where groups might congregate either in signing in or returning their scores through the use of the options recommended
	Consider running competitions over more than one day, or nine-hole qualifying competitions, as ways to cater for increased demand
	Assess and implement one of the methods of scoring recommended to help reduce the risk of infections
	Ensure the necessary provisions are in place on the course (with regard to the flagstick and bunkers, etc) so that competitions can be run fairly and safely
	Ensure that players are aware of all of their responsibilities under the guidance issued, including the alternatives regarding the marking and verification of scorecards if this option is used

Appendix 3: Junior Activity

It is reassuring to note from the guidance provided by industry experts in Ireland that while the evidence is limited, it appears that children are not substantially contributing to the spread of COVID-19 in their household or in schools. One study suggests that while there is high transmission of COVID-19 among adults aged 25 years or older, transmission is lower in younger people particularly in those under 14 years of age.

While the above is reassuring it is imperative that Golf Clubs take the necessary measures to continue to reduce the risk of Covid-19. This guidance document is based on the protocols outlined by the GUI/ILGU and guidance from the NI Executive, it should be noted that this guidance is subject to change.

Risk Assessment

Whether it be varied formats on course, or off course activity an up to date risk assessment should be conducted to determine the risk level for Covid-19 transmission related to the particular activity and what additional measures are needed to reduce this risk.

Measures to reduce the risk of Covid-19

Whether the junior activity is on or off course, clubs should ensure the following:

- No person (PGA Professional, parent, leaders/supervisors or juniors) should attend junior activities if unwell or any members of their household are unwell with symptoms consistent with Covid-19
- Households should bring their own household members to the junior activity and not share transport to and from the Golf Club.
- If the parent/guardian is staying at the Golf Club while the junior activity takes place, they should not congregate
- Limit the risk of juniors congregating with one another prior to junior activity by having staggered arrival and drop off times for junior activity
- If locker rooms are open the use of the locker room should also be staggered to avoid juniors congregating and to allow for locker rooms to be appropriately cleaned in-between
- All juniors should be encouraged to wash their hands before eating and should not share food or drinks
- Ensure all participants have enough equipment throughout the session such as golf balls and tees as these must not be shared.
- Golf clubs must also not be shared during the session. If clubs have been provided by the club for the session, they must be sanitised before being re-used.
- Social distancing and hand hygiene should be observed by all

In addition, clubs may carry out a self-assessment of well being of each junior prior to the commencement of junior activity to ensure the well-being of juniors, PGA Professionals, leaders/supervisors and parents.

Juniors with disabilities

Juniors with disabilities should also be able to return to golf once they are able to adhere to the risk minimisation measures. If there are any concerns regarding a child's susceptibility to COVID-19 due to an underlying illness, parents should discuss this with their medical practitioner.

On Course Play

It is recommended that for Step Three juniors can play together on the course without the requirement of adult supervision. At all times juniors should adhere to the protocols put in place by their club.

Formats

From Step Three juniors can play together and we appreciate that a number of clubs have a number of formats available for juniors to ensure that all development needs are met, some formats may be more difficult to achieve through the phases due to additional time pressures on timesheets, the need for social distancing and not being able to share equipment/golf balls.

Things that need to be considered:

- Can tee times be allocated for juniors to play formats such as scrambles and shorter courses (e.g from 150, 100yards)
- Do you have adequate supervision and do supervisors and clubs have the necessary safeguarding practices in place (contact fiona@cgigolf.org if you are not sure)
- How will you ensure social distancing is maintained in a scramble format e.g you could get the juniors to place their ball in line 2 meters apart vs at the one spot as usual.

Off Course Activity

Continuing on from Step Two, group training can take place in groups of 10 inc Coach and helper, if appropriate, where social distancing can be maintained.

Groups

Juniors should be organised into small groups with designated supervisors/leaders e.g two supervisors/leaders for every eight juniors that remain together and work through stations, rather than switching or mixing groups. That way juniors will only have contact with one portion of the juniors in attendance (exceptions will need to be made for the PGA Professional who will be on a station with the juniors rotating to them.

Contact Tracing Measures

- A log of all Juniors, supervisors/leaders and PGA Professional attending every session, with contact information for contact tracing purposes must be recorded to enable contact tracing, should it be required.
- This log should be electronic and should be completed in advance where possible.
- Someone should be given the responsibility that ensures that the information recorded in advance on the log is accurate each day.
- There should be a system in place where this log is updated in real time for any necessary changes, for example if a child's parent/guardian is unable to accompany them at short notice and they are accompanied by a different person, this should be updated on the online log in real time.
- This log should be readily and quickly accessible for contact tracing purposes.

Communication with parents/guardians and children

- Communicate all new measures and rules which will need to be implemented related to COVID-19 with parents in advance of resumption of any activities. Ensure that parents and children understand what measures are obligatory.
- Ensure that parents and children are fully aware of all symptoms of COVID-19. The most common signs and symptoms of COVID-19 are available on the NI Direct website.
- Ensure all parents understand the need to immediately self-isolate for 14 days and to phone their doctor in the event of onset of any COVID-19 signs or symptoms or to restrict their movement if they have had recent close contact with a suspect or confirmed COVID-19 case. Further information on when and how to self-isolate and restrict movement are also available on the following website: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-staying-home-and-self-isolation>

How to manage a junior, supervisor/leader or PGA Professional with Covid-19 symptoms

- Immediately separate any junior or other person displaying or complaining of COVID-19 related symptoms from others
- Ask this person to wear a face covering if possible or if available provide them with a facemask.
- The designated person managing the situation should try to maintain at least 2 metres from the person with symptoms and should wear a face covering and wash their hands regularly.
- Provide the ill person with tissues and hand sanitizer and ensure that all tissues are disposed of in a waste bag that can be tied and marked as separate from other waste.
- If they are well enough to go home, arrange for them to be transported home by a family member, as soon as possible and advise them to inform their general practitioner by phone of their symptoms.
- If they are too unwell to go home or advice is required, contact 999 or 112 and inform them that the sick person is a COVID-19 suspect.
- All persons who have been in close contact with the suspect case will need to be informed to restrict their movement for 14 days or until further information is available (i.e. a negative test result of the suspect case).