



PROTOCOL FOR THE
RE-INTRODUCTION OF

GOLF IN NORTHERN IRELAND



**GOLFING UNION
OF IRELAND**



Introduction

The following Protocol for golf clubs and golfers has been prepared by the Irish Ladies Golf Union and the Golfing Union of Ireland following extensive consultation with the relevant government departments and arms-length bodies in Northern Ireland. It aims to ensure that golf can be played safely during the COVID-19 Pandemic where public health measures permit such activity.

As one of the first sports to be allowed to resume, there is a major responsibility on golf clubs and golfers to ensure that our sport is conducted in a safe and responsible manner. Full adherence to the provisions of this Protocol is absolutely essential.

It should be noted that the Northern Ireland Executive continues to monitor the situation closely and has not ruled out the re-introduction of restrictions which could see golf clubs closed once again if the Protocol is not followed.

It is essential that golf clubs take whatever steps to ensure they can implement this Protocol.

We are asking all clubs to demonstrate their determination to keep golf safe and open by signing up to support the measures prescribed. Club officials can sign up on their club's behalf using the link issued by email.

Public health measures are likely to be continually updated by the UK Government & Northern Ireland Executive. Even if golf continues to be allowed in such circumstances, the Protocol governing the safe playing of the game may be updated in line with any changes to public health measures.

For these reasons, we will continue to monitor developments very closely and will update our advice as required. It is essential, therefore, that golf clubs and golfers regularly check www.golfnet.ie for updates on these matters.

We are aware that there are several other unofficial guidelines in circulation. These documents have not been reviewed by the relevant government departments and arms-length bodies. Therefore, golf clubs and golfers must exclusively adhere to the Protocol below.



Some Issues Which Golf Clubs May Need to Consider

Coping with demand and expectations:

Demand for golf may be high as we progress through the phases, as golf is amongst a relatively small number of recreational activities available to people. It is essential that golf clubs put in place tee time restrictions in line with the Protocol below immediately to manage expectations. Clubs should also ensure that decision-making can be rapid and efficient to respond to issues as they arise. It might be worth considering deputising such decisions to a smaller group than the normal large club committee or council, in accordance with whatever provisions are contained in your club's constitution. In communicating with members, the following should be stressed:

- A) Members will need to be aware of the limited basis on which they have the opportunity to play in the initial months.
- B) The club should seek to ensure members understand the necessity of restrictions to minimise the risk of a re-introduction of lockdown measures. While everyone may have an opinion on what should be done, full compliance with the measures in place is essential.
- C) Members should be aware that these restrictions are not going to last forever, but must live within them and be patient while they are in place. We all want to get back to normal as soon as possible, but this will be a gradual process and will be reliant on golf clubs and golfers observing this Protocol.
- D) Returning to golf after a lengthy period in which courses have been closed, yet maintained, may create certain expectations among members about the quality of the course they will find when they return. While essential maintenance has continued, many golf clubs have done so with significant limitations in terms of staff and equipment usage. Expectations on quality, therefore, need to be tempered with this reality.

Capacity: The specific rules below on tee time intervals restrict the number of tee times that are available to members for casual play. It may be necessary, as we progress through the steps, for golf clubs to ask members to limit the number of times they book (e.g. a maximum of three per week). In times of peak demand, Golf Clubs should consider whether casual golf should be restricted to nine holes only, so as to ensure sufficient tee times are available for their members if golfers have the option of playing a front nine or back nine.



Rules for Golf Clubs in Step 1

This Protocol sets out the basis on which golf can be played in a safe manner, during Step 1 of the Northern Ireland Executive's Plan for moving out of Lockdown. These rules are subject to change and golf clubs are asked to check www.golfnet.ie regularly for updates.

Clubs wishing to open their courses for use **must** ensure that:

- Members with colds or any symptoms of COVID-19 stay away from the golf course/clubhouse.
- Physical distancing rules are observed by all members at all times in the car park, clubhouse and on the course.
- Play is restricted to:
 - members only
 - casual golf only (no club competitions or opens).
- 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 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 10, 12 or 14 minute intervals. Clubs may only choose one interval for each day. If clubs choose 10+ minute intervals, play is restricted to a single golfer per start time. If clubs choose 12+ minutes, up to 2 golfers may play per start time. If clubs choose 14+ minutes, up to 3 golfers may play per start time.

(Note: these measures will result in a maximum of 60 golfers occupying an 18-hole course at any given time, this is around 54% of full capacity in step 1).
- Bars/restaurants remain closed and off-limits as per the Executive's 5 step plan. Clubhouse access should be confined to use of toilet facilities (provided they can be kept clean) and initial retrieval of golf equipment from lockers.
- There are no social gatherings, of any size, at the facility.
- Members 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.
- 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).

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.
- 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.
- 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. Buggies must be sanitized thoroughly after each use.
- It is strongly recommended that all golf clubs have a policy of allowing juniors to play only if they are accompanied by an adult. In addition, wherever possible juniors should restrict themselves to playing with other members of their own household.
- 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 its new location.

Rules for Golfers in Step 1

This Protocol sets out the basis on which golf can be played in a safe manner, during Step 1 of the Northern Ireland Executive's Plan for moving out of Lockdown. Golfers are expected to observe the underlying public health guidance set out at: www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19. 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 your golf club. Under no circumstances should you arrive at the club without booking in advance.
- Ensure that your group size is no greater than what is allowed by your club (the maximum number your club can allow in any event is three).
- 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 club no more than 15 minutes prior to play.
- Travel to the golf course 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.
- Do not exchange or share equipment, food or drink with other players during your round.
- If your ball is lost, unplayable, or in a penalty area, don't take an option under the rules that involves doubling back on your position on the course. Instead, use an option that allows you to keep your position on the course.
- 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.

After your round:

- Return directly to your car, change your shoes, put your equipment in your car and leave. Do not store your equipment in your locker.
- Avoid entering the clubhouse. If you must use the toilet facilities, ensure you adhere to health and safety guidelines.

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 I: Golf – A Phased Return in Northern Ireland

Golf’s Protocol, in Step 1, is necessarily restrictive, however as we progress through the Northern Ireland Executive’s Plan for moving out of Lockdown, restrictions on golf will also be eased. Based on the current measures set out in the Executive’s plan, the table below sets out a gradual re-introduction of golf. It should be noted that 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.

As no dates have been published by the Northern Ireland Executive as to when each step will start, we reserve the right to change the advice given for any Step – to ensure you have the current version visit www.golfnet.ie. In addition, the rules set out in the table will be reviewed on an ongoing basis and are subject to amendment as we progress through the steps.

We are conscious that some clubs may wish to impose increased restrictions at their own facilities. For example, clubs may wish to only allow 2-balls in Step 1 or confine play to members 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.

The start date for each Step will be shown on www.golfnet.ie as confirmed with the Northern Ireland Executive.

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 13-minute intervals or Individual players at 10-Minute intervals	Either: 4-balls at 14-minute intervals, or 3-balls at 12-minute intervals or 2-balls at 10-minute intervals	Either: 4-balls at 13-minute intervals, or 3-balls at 11-minute intervals or 2-balls at 9-minute intervals	Either: 4-balls at 12-minute intervals, or 3-balls at 10-minute intervals or 2-balls at 8-minute intervals	Either: 4-balls at 12-minute intervals, or 3-balls at 10-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, open (subject to strict guidelines)	Pro-shop, toilet facilities, locker room, open (subject to strict guidelines)	Pro-shop, toilet facilities, locker room, club restaurant & bar may open (subject to strict guidelines)