

# Reopening activity: An inclusive response

Considerations for community sport  
and leisure providers on including disabled  
people and people with long-term  
health conditions.



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# Introduction

It is crucial, as opportunities to be active increase, that we focus on inclusion. Counting for one in five of our population, disabled people including those with long-term health conditions, are a significant audience to engage. But as the least active group in society<sup>1</sup>, the health and well-being benefits of activity are particularly important. Despite disabled people facing additional barriers in accessing sport and physical activity<sup>2</sup>, we know many want to be more active.

Activity Alliance has worked with our members and partners to identify ways to make sure that disabled people can be included as activities and venues start to reopen. We encourage community sport and leisure providers to use this guidance to enable welcoming, and more accessible activity environments. We know that inequalities in participation levels<sup>3</sup> have widened during the Covid-19 period. We are determined that this is not compounded by a failure to place inclusion at the heart of England’s ‘return to play’ preparations.



You should read and apply this document with Sport England’s coronavirus (Covid-19) information<sup>4</sup> and the latest government guidance<sup>5</sup> which clearly states:

“ It is important, as more sports and activities restart, that absolutely everyone is able to access these opportunities. This includes disabled people, for whom the health and well-being benefits of activity can be particularly important. ”

**DCMS, June 2020**

## References

- 1 Sport England Active Lives surveys
- 2 Activity Alliance Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2019-20
- 3 Sport England Covid-19 Insight Briefing
- 4 Sport England coronavirus (Covid-19) information
- 5 Coronavirus (Covid-19): guidance on the phased return of sport and recreation



Showing understanding in this current situation will help people to get back into activity. Below you will find solutions and advice on a number of areas. These will enable you to think and act more inclusively.



## Information and communication

### Effective engagement and communication

- Make sure you engage disabled people and people with health conditions in the development of solutions. Use existing or create inclusive advisory groups. Partnerships with local disability organisations may also be useful. This can be helpful in guiding your organisation's decision making, with disabled people's lived experiences. Co-produced ideas are more effective. [Read Activity Alliance's factsheet on effective engagement.](#)
- For support on inclusive practice, Activity Alliance has a range of resources. These are developed from our research and insight with disabled people and people with health conditions. [Read more on our research.](#)
- Our engagement and communication resources will help in working within your local community to build rapport and encourage participation. [Read more on our engagement page](#) and [access our communications support here.](#)
- We developed a set of principles with disabled people. These principles help guide providers to deliver more appealing and inclusive opportunities. [Learn more about the ten principles here.](#) A great example of a programme using the ten principles in action is [Get Out Get Active.](#)

### Reassuring returning and potential participants

- It is important to communicate new safety measures, cleaning processes, and routes into, out of and through your venue in relation to Covid-19. Highlight how you have ensured these are inclusive and accessible.
- Don't impose additional or conditional barriers on disabled people or people with health conditions to take part.
- To reach a wider audience and boost the confidence of existing and new participants, embed reassuring messages through varied communication channels. This is both on and offline channels, including your website, social media, word of mouth and direct mail.
- In your information and promotion, consider the images and language you are using, and how positive and welcoming these are. Avoid labelling terms like 'vulnerable'. Not all disabled people or people with health conditions will relate to or identify with these terms. Remember that not every impairment or health condition is visible. [Read Activity Alliance's factsheet on language.](#)

- Social isolation will affect many of your participants. Returning to or starting up new activities may cause anxiety. Some people may require more support to return to activity or to get active. Some recommendations include:
  - Personalised messages via text, email or phone.
  - Motivational catchups with instructors/ coaches.
  - Opportunities to interact with other participants.
  - Video tours of facilities to show changes or activities on offer.
  - Meet and greeters.
- Where possible, ask if people have access or support needs ahead of attending or taking part. This helps you to plan so everyone has a welcoming experience.
- In some cases, people will have specific queries in relation to their needs. Providing a designated role or named contact/s to respond to queries is one solution.

### Alternative information formats

- Ensure inclusion and accessibility for all your communications and activities. [Activity Alliance's inclusive communications guide and film](#) are a useful starting point. Audit and test your communications with disabled people and people with health conditions.
- Remember to provide alternative formats for welcome packs, guidance, and health and safety information. This could include large print, audio, easy read and British Sign Language videos made to high quality with voice-overs and captions. These need to be made available on your website and promoted within your wider marketing.
- Not everyone has or can access the internet. You need to consider people who are not online or need to access information in other ways. Examples may include information shared at GP surgeries and pharmacies, or through community volunteer services. Local Authorities may have specific SEND teams or may be able to share through their housing units.
- For public announcements, ensure you provide audio and visual cues for people who cannot see or hear the information. For example, producing signs or videos using British Sign Language.
- Protective screens and/ or wearing face coverings or masks may impact clear communication, for example for people who lip-read or have a visual impairment. Be aware and ensure you have other formats available to support communication. Consider solutions such as using accessible face masks, prepared printed information or pre-recorded films and a notepad to write down notes.



## Workforce (including paid staff and volunteers)

### Supporting your workforce

- Disabled people and people with health conditions may be part of your paid and volunteer workforce. Many may need to feel confident in returning to their roles at the right time. Keep in touch to provide information on changing guidelines.
- Provide reassurance and information about the measures you have put in place to protect your workforce and participants.
- Having fewer volunteers to support participants or the workforce may have an impact on what can be offered. It's important to communicate this to participants who might be affected. [Read NCVO advice](#) on involving and managing volunteers during the coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak.
- Your paid and volunteer workforce may be returning to work after a long absence period. Therefore, it may be important to ease and support them back in. Many people will experience difficult feelings at this time. You should:
  - Use return to work interviews to find out what their barriers are and tailor what support can be offered.
  - Understand any reasonable adjustments they may require (e.g. changes in working hours due to childcare or carer responsibilities, phased return to work, temporary reallocation of some tasks, remote working).
  - Understand their personal position e.g. household members who were/ are isolating and implications or actions needed to support this situation.
  - Communicate the support available to them (e.g. line managers/ supervisors, Employee Assistance Programme, staff handbooks).
  - [Read government guidance on working safely during the coronavirus.](#)

### Training and development

- Ensure that you refer to and raise awareness of the National Governing Body return to play guidance for specific sports.
- Brief your workforce before they return on the changes you have made, why and how this may impact their role and duties.
- Everyone in your workforce needs to understand how any assistive technology or equipment works and be able to demonstrate its use.
- Does your workforce need a refresh on disability and inclusion training? If so, refer to [Activity Alliance's training pages](#) for more information. Or take a look at [Mind's mental health awareness training.](#)



## Session planning

- Follow your National Governing Body return to play guidance for specific sports.
- Consider the flexibility of your sessions, classes and activities. Many disabled people or people with health conditions may be concerned about their fitness level or mobility reduction. A wider range of intensity level sessions can help.
- Consider boosting confidence through welcome back sessions. Give advice about active lifestyles and nutrition.
- Consider communication and access needs of those who are participating in the session.
- Ensure you consider access needs when planning opportunities which help to reunite and connect people.
- The STEP tool is one of the most effective ways to include everyone in activities. STEP stands for Space, Task, Equipment and People. [Find out more about STEP.](#)
- Someone's journey in boosting their confidence is likely to start at home. Remember accessible virtual sessions might still be needed. These may be particularly useful to engage new audiences, as well as existing participants.
- Clearly communicate safety measures and changes to the session. Allow time beforehand to address any participant concerns, ideally through one-to-one private consultation. It may also be helpful to have follow ups with participants to ensure their needs have been met.
- Some participants may prefer to get to your session earlier to minimise stress due to the extra precautions in place. More time may be needed for access to changing and toilet facilities (when allowed to reopen).
- If you are limiting the amount of equipment available, you need to ensure that inclusive products remain available.
- Provide time and cleaning stations for individuals, their personal equipment and adaptive sports equipment.



## Personal assistants and supporters

- Be aware that some people may require additional support to take part in activity. This may be through a personal assistant (or household member) or through staff/volunteer interactions.
- Talk to the person concerned about how best to support them. Find solutions to enable them to participate, while providing appropriate protection for your workforce. This could include sanitising equipment, use of gloves or face protection.



## Bookings and payments

- When taking bookings, it is an ideal time to ask about the person's access and support needs. This helps you to plan and may provide valuable learning or new ideas.
- Not everyone can access online booking systems. Provide various ways to book with online and offline methods such as telephone or text service.
- You may need to offer alternative payment methods for people unable to use contactless or mobile payments.
- Ensure flexibility for memberships, payments and concessions. Some people may be isolating or be anxious to return. Consequently, there may be concerns about restarting payments or their ability to pay.
- Remember, if available, to advertise concessions, membership payment restart dates and special offers.
- It will also be important to promote policies such as those for personal assistants or assistance animals.



## Travel and transport

- If you are considering limiting car park bays, make sure accessible bays remain available. Drop-off and pick-up points should remain in convenient locations. Communicate any changes to parking capacity or payment methods before people arrive.



- Local active travel plans are encouraging residents to consider cycling or walking. Temporary road, lane or pathways should follow inclusion and accessibility guidelines. You may wish to consider providing more accessible bike parking/ storage and charging stations for powerchairs and mobility scooters.
- Make people aware of public transport routes and local accessible taxis.
- For more advice, read [Activity Alliance's Access For All guide](#).

## Access routes

- All routes to, from and during activities, including any new or alternative routes should be accessible and have:
  - Firm and level access where possible or ramps with accessible gradients and handrails.
  - Sufficient lighting.
  - Clear and wide enough space, free from obstructions and hazards.
  - Adequate directions throughout, using clear and accessible signage, tactile or bright coloured tape.
- For social distancing:
  - Allow enough space for social distancing. This includes wheelchair users, mobility scooter users, people with walking aids, and people with assistance dogs.
  - Think about the positioning, colour contrast and size of your distance markers. Consider the use of tactile tape.
  - Some individuals will require lift access and may require priority access.
- Additional support:
  - If possible, provide shorter routes for people who can only manage short distances.
  - Have rest, seating, or quiet areas for people to take time out.
  - Have workforce in areas where people may require extra support.
  - Some people will be affected by a change in layout and will need to familiarise themselves with the new routes. Consider offering a tour and provide adequate information on your website.
- For more advice, read [Activity Alliance's Access For All guide](#).



## Queue management

- Be flexible in your approach for queuing based on individual need. Consider having a steward present to offer advice, guidance and give reassurance.
- Be aware not all people will be able to see, hear or understand your instructions. For example, an assistance dog supporting a visually impaired person will not currently be trained in social distancing and queuing - they will head straight for the entrance without knowing to join the queue.
- In queues, allow seating at the front for people who cannot stand for long periods. Or allow priority access. For open areas, ensure adequate seating is available.



## Cleaning and hygiene

- Many participants may be anxious about cleanliness and hygiene. Speak to individuals about their concerns and what can be done to overcome these.
- Your updated hygiene guidelines should include all accessibility features. Use signing forms to communicate which and when facilities have been cleaned. For example, pay close attention to:
  - Tactile signage.
  - Door touch-points and their push-pad access buttons.
  - Lifts, including the control buttons and handrails.
  - High and low levels of reception desks.
  - Accessible toilets and changing rooms (when allowed to reopen), including grab rails, pull cords and handbasin sides.
  - Refilling of hand sanitiser and hand wash.
  - Provide hand-washing posters in pictorial format.
  - Hand drying facilities in accessible toilets and changing rooms (when allowed to reopen).
  - Specialist equipment e.g. hoists and portable assistive listening devices.
- Ensure any assistive technology or specialist equipment (e.g. pool hoist) is working, re-serviced where needed upon reopening and thoroughly cleaned before and after use.



## Toilets and changing areas

- Ensure you give access to accessible toilets, changing rooms and accessible lockers (when allowed to reopen). This includes **Changing Places**, ambulant accessible and accessible options.
- Some facilities may require a Radar key. In your pre-visit information, advise guests to bring their own Radar key if they have one. But ensure your facility keys are regularly cleaned thoroughly between uses.



## Food and drink

- In refreshment areas (when allowed to reopen), ensure access to tables and seating for those who require them. Remember some people may require support for items to be delivered to their table.

### Useful links for impairment specific advice

- **British Blind Sport**
- **Cerebral Palsy Sport**
- **Dwarf Sports Association UK**
- **LimbPower**
- **Mencap**
- **Mind**
- **Special Olympics GB**
- **UK Deaf Sport**
- **WheelPower**

### Acknowledgements and thanks

We have produced this guidance with input from our member organisations and key stakeholders for specific impairment and sector advice. Activity Alliance thanks everyone for their valuable contributions.

**Disclaimer:** This document is for general information and guidance purposes only and should not be solely relied upon to make any business/ legal decision. It reflects our opinions and provides general principles of better practice based on our existing knowledge and expertise.



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This document is also available in Word format.  
Please contact us if you need more support.

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