

CRICKET

Interim Works and Fit for Play Thursday 28th May 2020

Recreational and grassroots playing facilities will currently have many questions about the current and potential restrictions the Government may impose to reduce the transmission of Coronavirus with regards to playing surfaces, their ongoing maintenance and what works may be carried out to provide a fit for play surface when sport resumes.

This document sets out what may happen to playing surfaces and the soils beneath should they be left alone for lengthy periods, what can currently be done to maintain them and also what works can be carried out should play resume.

Please ensure you always follow government guidelines (www.gov.uk/coronavirus) should you be permitted to work outdoors either as lone workers or as part of a team.

Recreational and grassroots playing surfaces are typically maintained by the following category of people:

Professional managers and staff are advised to continue to actively consult and discuss working practices with their employers, who should ensure all employees are informed of and are following Government guidelines. Subject to Government policy, your employer should determine with you whether your continued work is necessary, essential, and/or safe.

Self-employed grounds staff or contractors are advised to follow the latest Government guidelines, formulate an agreed plan that includes your safe working procedure, and clearly communicate with clients in advance and agree safe working procedures. We advise regular review as Government guidelines develop. Ultimately it is your decision to suspend operations or, to continue to work. The emphasis though is to ensure safe working practices, as communicated by Government. Make plans now for the future and reschedule appointments where you can and keep reassessing this in order that when restrictions are lifted you are able then to return to projects that may have been suspended.

Volunteers should follow latest Government guidelines and not put themselves or others at risk. We advise that the volunteer network monitors the timings of any announcements of the various sports re opening for play, however realistically this will be dependent on how we are able to slow the virus down and return to normality.

The main question you may have is about mowing. Here are some suggestions for you to follow.

Mowing heights of cut (HoC) during non-play

CRICKET

	Suggested HoC	How much to remove	Frequency (where possible)	Comments
Cricket – Square	12 – 15 mm <i>(a typical normal cutting height for the season)</i>	Max 1/3rd of leaf height;	Once or twice per week, where possible	See Below
Cricket - Outfield	14 - 18mm <i>(a typical normal cutting height for the season)</i>	Max 1/3rd of leaf height;	Once or twice per week, where possible	See Below

RETURN TO ACTIVITY IN A CRICKET CLUB SETTING

Why I am beginning to reduce the height of cut?

We are now into the growing season, cutting the square is now required on a regular basis (if safe to do so), leaving the grass longer has the benefit of developing a deeper root system, but the disadvantage is that the plant will start to crown, which could result in the plant dying and leaving bare areas. the height of cut can now be lowered to the normal height for the playing season (12-15 mm). This should be done gradually reducing the height of cut by no more than one-third of the leaf height.

Following a change in the guidance regarding the possible use of outfields and netting facilities, in preparation for using the outfield, the height of cut can now be lowered to the normal height for the playing season (14-18mm). This should be done gradually reducing the height of cut by no more than one-third of the leaf height.

If it has not been possible to maintain a cut height of 20-25mm because of the availability to cut the grass. Where grass is longer it is really important to bring the cut heights down gradually, taking no more than one-third of the leaf length with each cut. Where possible grass clippings should be collected following longer cuts of the grass or if necessary dispersed by hand tools to prevent large accumulations affecting users or damaging the grass.

Other tasks you may be able to carry out:

1: Control or removal of thatch

Why should I do this if play is not taking place? Grass leaves and sheaths do die off on a regular basis and these will build-up at the base of the plant. To keep it healthy you will need to keep the base clean on a periodic basis, this can be carried out by verti-cutting and raking but not scarification that cuts into the soil.

A layer of thatch on a pitch can create uneven bounce as it is mechanically weak and will deform under ball impact. If you can rake pitches out from time to time or regularly verti-cut it will make bringing pitches in easier and faster once play resumes.

If I am cutting the grass longer will this have an effect? There may be a build-up of excess organic matter (thatch) – this can be managed by following the guidance above (verti-cutting). It is easier to rake a shorter sward and so we are now recommending a reduction in the cut height of the square (see above).

You may also get crowning in the ryegrasses and some lateral shooting which once you cut down for play and could leave bare patches. Regular verti-cutting and raking will help avoid this. Be cautious of verti-cutting when the weather is hot and dry as this can stress the grass plant and could lead to seed head production or reduced plant health.

If I am scarifying how 'deep' should I go? If play is possible later in the year **DO NOT SCARIFY** (put tines or blades into the soil). This will scar the surface and may affect play. As the soil dries it will shrink and you will end up with a loose, dusty surface. Stick to raking, brushing, and verti-cutting.

2: Aeration

Should I do this at all if no play is taking place? It is strongly advised to **NOT** spike or Sarrel roll your square during summer months because there is a risk that the pitch profile can be damaged as the soil dries and shrinks – spike holes will stay open and you may end up with variable bounce.

3: Fertilising

Should I do this if no play is taking place? Fertilisation may still be necessary in order to maintain the sort of relatively dense and resilient turf needed for cricket now that cutting is more frequent and clippings are being removed. Apply nutrients as required based on signs of nutrient deficiency using lower nitrogen fertilisers (less than 10% N content) to limit excess growth. Be warned, fertilising will encourage growth, if for any reason you cannot cut once-twice weekly, then consider fertiliser type and application rate very carefully.

Remember best practice is to collect and remove clippings when cutting on squares – therefore in this period of grass growth nutrient will need to be replaced – keep an eye out for yellowing/reddening leaves, red thread disease and other indicators of nutrient stress and apply fertiliser as necessary. Always apply fertilisers in accordance with the product label.

4: Weeds

At the grass roots level, we have to readily accept that weeds are part of everyday life on the playing surface. Ideally these should be kept to a minimum.

What could be the potential outcome if I just do the minimum of work and how can I overcome this? The soil contains many viable weed and grass seeds, and some will germinate. Normally they need space to do this in so if you can minimise bare patches and brush off worm casts quickly weed invasion will be slowed down. Weeds can have an effect on how the ball behaves from the pitch. Most weeds can be cut out on the square and the hole plugged with loam and a little seed. The outfield may require weed control when restrictions are lifted.

Should all work to playing surfaces be prohibited how can I reduce weed content once works commence to improve the playing surface? Weed control may be needed when restrictions are lifted and should be carried out by qualified operators only.

5: Rolling?

Should I continue to roll my cricket surface in preparation for play? Effective rolling requires an initially moist soil across the square. Following recent dry weather and with increasing summer temperatures rolling across the square will become much less effective and you will be wasting your time.

Keep this under review - if there is a period of continued rainfall to wet the soil then conditions might become more suitable.

Remember that you can smooth individual pitches for play using hand watering and a roller as part of normal pitch preparation when needed for play.

6: Irrigation

Should I do this if no play is taking place? Water plays a major part in ensuring grass growth especially during the establishment phase of development following repairs or renovation. Irrigation should be carried out as and when needed as indicated by weather conditions for the health of the grass plant.

Consideration should also be given to irrigation to help prevent or limit cracking of the square in dry weather, particularly if you have a newly constructed square.

If your ability to irrigate is limited focus on those areas with the weakest turfgrass growth or newly sown grass.

7: Local repairs to playing surfaces

Where possible, and where resources permit, take time to repair those areas that have always caused issues. This would typically be light renovations by hand forking (or machine if a large area), a light fertiliser application, over seeding and light top-dressing of thin areas, followed up with regular watering to aid germination and establishment.

8: How can I get my playing surface back to a 'fit for play' condition should a ban on play be lifted?

It is important that some form of reduced but regular maintenance work has been carried out during this period so that a gradual reduction in mowing height over say a 2-week period can be achieved.

A gradual increase in other maintenance activities including a fertiliser application will help to produce a suitable playing surface quickly. The actual length of time needed to become fully playable and to what standard will also depend on the condition of the surface in the first place.

Concentrate on gradually reducing grass length, raking out moss, removing worm casts and reducing thatch and treating weeds. Rolling as part of pitch preparation will deal with compaction.

9: Non turf pitches (NTP)

Do not neglect Non-Turf Pitches. Maintain in accordance with the supplier/installer maintenance guidelines (brushed, weeds and moss removed and rolled where recommended).

CLOSING STATEMENT

RETURN TO ACTIVITY IN A CRICKET CLUB SETTING?

Following a change in the Government guidance it is now possible to use netting facilities in accordance with guidance issued by the ECB available [here](#).

The preparation of nets if safe to do so can now begin following your normal practice pitch preparation or non-turf nets. The safe and effective installation of netting is typically a task for two or three people. This is not work that is suitable for lone working and so a careful set-up plan is required that is compatible with the requirements of social distancing.

For further information regarding changes in cricket operations guidance, review news updates on the ECB website www.ecb.co.uk. This guidance will be updated and is likely to change in response to Government policy and other best practice guidance.

Please always ensure you adhere to up to date government guidelines (www.gov.uk/coronavirus) regarding the current situation.

The main message to cricket ground staff / volunteers is to ideally continue with all, or most, of the typical good maintenance practices but at a reduced intensity to meet the needs of your particular facility.

An ongoing dialogue with your club and leagues will be necessary to ensure sufficient lead in time to get the surface safe and match ready.