

Cricket

Interim Works and Fit for Play

Wednesday 1st April 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

Sport	Suggested HoC	How much to remove	Frequency (where possible)	Comments
Cricket – Square	18 - 22mm <i>(a typical winter height will be fine for the current situation)</i>	Max 1/3rd of leaf height;	Once or twice per week, where possible	Encourage a thicker sward and roots
Cricket - Outfield	20 – 25mm	Max 1/3rd of leaf height;	Once or twice per week	

Why am I leaving the grass longer than usual? Grass is usually cut at much shorter lengths to help ball roll or bounce in cricket. Increasing the height of cut can help to reduce plant stress because it will encourage greater root growth which means more access to water and nutrients in the soil and more leaf means more food produced by photosynthesis.

Longer grass will increase root length which will improve structural development in the soil and help to hold together any layers within the profile. It will also result in more uniform and predictable drying of the pitch when it is prepared which should make pitch performance more uniform as well.

What may happen if I do not cut the grass at all? Cutting grass frequently helps encourage tillering and good sward density (number of plants per square metre) which helps the wear resistance and performance of a grass surface. If it is left to grow very tall; the grass plant will become 'leggy' and 'clump like' and sward density reduces as plants out compete each other. The plant will also try to set seed and weeds will be allowed to establish. It will be hard to get the surface back into a suitable playing condition when we are allowed to start playing sport again because the grass may be too tall for the mowers available and sward density will be lost as the height of cut is reduced back to a playing condition. It can also be difficult to manage the excess clippings which if left in large quantities on the surface can damage the grass beneath. This is particularly important on cricket squares.

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 not scarification.

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).

You may 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.

If I am scarifying how 'deep' should I go? Because play could be possible later in the year **DO NOT SCARIFY** 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.

Be cautious of scarifying or verti-cutting when the weather is hot and dry.

2: Aeration

Should I do this at all if no play is taking place? On the square, do not carry out any aeration on the square below 20mm, this will affect any play (if possible) later in the year. Sarrel-roll aeration is ideal.

On the outfield you may aerate but only if ground conditions are suitable. If it becomes too dry, then the tines won't go into the soil very well so it would be best to wait until the ground has softened some more. Don't aerate when it is too wet.

If I can do this, how will it help the soil? On the outfield it will help infiltration; roots will be able to explore more of the soil profile and this will help produce a surface which can better withstand wear and tear when play starts up again. On the square, holes will not close and you may end up with variable bounce.

When should I decide to not aerate? For the outfield, the soil at aeration depth needs to be dry enough to crumble easily in your hand. If it smears or you can roll it into a ball it is too wet – wait until it dries further. You may need to spike at a shallower depth initially and then deeper as the soil dries.

3: Fertilising

Should I do this if no play is taking place? Be warned, fertilising will encourage growth. Fertilisation may still be necessary, dependent on the surface in order to maintain the sort of relatively dense and resilient turf needed for cricket. Nutrients will cycle naturally in soils however so there is little need to fertilise other than to keep things ticking over (keeping the grass plant alive) or if there are signs of nutrient deficiency.

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? It is beneficial to pre-season roll whilst there is moisture in the square, so it is recommended to complete pre-season rolling if safe to do so, but heavy roller pitch preparation rolling is not required. If the weather varies between heavy rain and sunshine the soil will shrink and swell as it wets and dries. This will offset any pre-season rolling you have already done. That said also take into consideration that it may be viable (at some levels) to begin pitch preparation 10 days ahead of a game your pitch preparation rolling will compensate for missing pre-season rolling so don't worry about it if you cannot do it. Do not extend your pre-season rolling if it is dry as you risk over-rolling.

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 for the potential of future cracking of the surface.

However, do not over irrigate. Too much water will affect the turfgrass growth and may also affect the soil conditions to the extent that compaction occurs with subsequent maintenance operations.

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.

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.

8: Non turf pitches (NTP)

NTP pitches should be brushed, weeds and moss removed and rolled if needed (dynamic based pitches – wetting them well beforehand).

When play recommences; I have been given the go ahead to get back on the playing surface. How can I get it back in to shape within 2 weeks and how will I know it is ready and safe for use?
Carry out some rolling (water if necessary), fertiliser application, mow the square and outfield to your normal height of cut and carry out your normal pitch preparation (following the guidance above).

Closing statement

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.