



SPORT
NEW ZEALAND
IHI AOTEAROA

Balance is Better

National Sport

Season Transition

Guidelines

May 2020

Introduction

These national guidelines have been developed as a direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of their development, it is anticipated that the winter sport season will be significantly shortened. This will present scheduling challenges for both winter and summer codes, secondary schools and local authorities around demands on participants, ground allocations and season overlaps.

Due to the pressure many codes will feel as a result of COVID-19, there is a real risk that in rushing to restructure the winter season the welfare and best interests of the participants will be lost in the process. The challenge for the sport sector is to work together in a spirit of collaboration to prevent this happening and to share any pain equitably.

The best solutions to these challenges will be co-constructed at a regional level by a range of stakeholders including Regional Sport Organisations, Regional Sports Trusts, Territorial Authorities, College Sport Organisations and funders. This work is already underway in most regions and each Regional Sports Trust has an important leadership role in bringing together these groups and facilitating this process.

The purpose of this document is to provide some high-level national guidelines to assist these regional groups in their process. In developing these guidelines, the starting point has been the Balance is Better philosophy already adopted by many National Sport Organisations and the following Balance is Better principles:

- Ensure all young people can receive a quality sport experience, irrespective of the level at which they are involved.
- Provide leadership to support changes to competition structures, participation, and athlete development opportunities.
- Support young people to participate in a range of activities and play multiple sports.
- Work collaboratively to encourage the widest possible change for the wellbeing and sport participation of young New Zealanders.
- Ensure all New Zealanders having the right to participate in sport in an inclusive, fair and safe environment.

Process

The following national guidelines have been developed by Sport New Zealand in consultation with a wide range of National Sport Organisations. It is recognised that these are guidelines rather than rules and that at a regional level they will need to be interpreted and applied based on local context.

Short Term Focus

These national guidelines have been developed specifically in response to COVID-19 in order to inform the 2020 winter to summer season transition. However, it is noted that the sport season transition issue is a long standing one in New Zealand Community Sport and that these guidelines and the process used to develop them will become a benchmark that can be adapted and improved in the future.

Additional Special Interest Groups Guidelines

Due to wide range of codes involved, and the short time frame available for development, these guidelines are necessarily high-level. They do however allow for the development of more detailed guidelines by sub-groups with closely aligned interests such as aquatic sports and grass field sports for example. These more specialised guidelines will be shared with the regional network as they are made available.

National Guidelines

Sharing the pain of COVID-19

At least two months of Community Sport have been lost and the likelihood is that considerably more time will be compromised. The hardship and disruption caused by this will affect different sports in different ways. All National Sport Organisations encourage their Regional Sport Organisations to collaborate with other codes at a regional level and, in consultation with their Local Councils, to explore options around scheduling and competition structures that will share the disruption in equitable fashion.

Regional solutions supported nationally

The nature of Community Sport means that regional solutions will be required where Regional Sport Organisations, Regional Sports Trusts, Local Territorial Authorities, College Sport Organisations and other relevant organisations come together to determine what is ideal and practical within that region. Regional Sports Trusts have a key role to play in leading this process in each region and National Sport Organisations will support this work by sharing and promoting these guidelines with their Regional Sport Organisations.

Participant focus

With the loss of revenue from lost playing time there could be a tendency for Regional Sport Organisations to try and push extra content into a smaller window, or to run past traditional dates. In keeping with Balance is Better principles it is important that the participant needs are placed ahead of the organisational needs when assessing different options, and every effort is made to manage participant workload appropriately and avoid clashes between codes.

Recommencing sport under Level 2

The key message is don't rush and get it right. The increased safety and hygiene requirements under Level 2 highlight the importance and complexity of the practical issues involved in recommencing Community Sport. It will also be important to allow participants time to train and prepare properly to minimize the risk of injury. All sports acknowledge that starting dates and scheduling should recognise this and allow sufficient time for the necessary systems and processes to be put in place at a local level.

Core season length

There is already clear evidence that lengthy competition and training requirements in many codes cause workload issues and scheduling clashes that have a negative impact on participant well-being. All codes agree to review their core season length with a view to shortening the traditional season length and allowing more room for breaks between seasons and participation in multiple sports.

Review of traditional summer / winter seasons

With changing weather patterns over the last 20 years a case can be made for pushing back the traditional starting dates for the summer and winter sporting seasons. While such a change would require careful consideration across multiple stakeholders, including term dates for schools, the current situation does offer the opportunity for codes and regions to prototype such an approach should they wish. A possible approach would be for a summer code to start later than normal to allow a winter code a more meaningful season, and then the winter code to start later in 2021 in return.

National competition scheduling

It is recognised that the scheduling of national competitions in each sport drives a lot of flow down scheduling issues. Due to COVID-19 safety requirements it is agreed that the focus of Community Sport should be local and regional and that national competitions should be deferred or postponed where possible. Where end of season national competitions are still held, they should be scheduled within the core season of the sport involved.

Grass based sports preparation windows

The importance of quality playing surfaces and facilities is often highlighted in participant feedback, especially in grass based sports. All sports that share facilities agree to promote the establishment of appropriate preparation windows, in consultation with Local Councils and facility owners.

Pre-season training guidelines

All sports require a pre-season training window of some description before competition starts and this should be factored into scheduling to help prevent injury. However, care should be taken to limit the impact of this period on player workload and to allow participants' core season commitments in one sport to take priority over pre-season training in another sport should the participant so wish (participant choice rather than compulsion).

Private coaching and academies

The well-being dangers of inappropriate and excessive private coaching and academies are well established. Codes can not necessarily control the provision of these by private providers but Regional Sport Organisations can set the tone through their own off-season training programmes and communicating best practice to players and parents.

Endorsements

These national guidelines have been endorsed by the following National Sport Organisations:

- Athletics New Zealand
- Badminton NZ
- Basketball New Zealand
- Bowls New Zealand
- Gymnastics New Zealand
- Hockey NZ
- Netball NZ
- New Zealand Football
- New Zealand Rugby League
- New Zealand Water Polo Association
- NZ Cricket
- NZ Golf
- NZ Rugby
- Rowing New Zealand
- School Sport New Zealand
- Softball New Zealand
- Special Olympics New Zealand
- Squash New Zealand
- Surf Life Saving New Zealand
- Swimming New Zealand
- Tennis NZ
- Touch New Zealand
- Triathlon New Zealand
- Volleyball New Zealand
- Waka Ama New Zealand
- Yachting New Zealand

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<https://balanceisbetter.org.nz/>