# COVIDSafeReturn to Play Plan(updated 13 August 2020)Queensland Gridiron Officials Association

## Rationale

The Queensland Gridiron Officials Association provides its members to officiate at gridiron games conducted under the auspices of Gridiron Queensland, with games across the whole State of Queensland.

As required by the Queensland Government “Return to Play” guidelines, QGOA has prepared this mandatory COVIDSafe plan for implementation and adherence to by all QGOA members and any casual club provided officials temporarily working games for the QGOA as club officials.

## Updates

This plan will be updated as required. During the 2020 Gridiron Queensland season, the plan will be reviewed each Thursday, incorporating feedback from the previous weekend’s games and any changes to the Queensland guidelines, and reissued if required on Fridays.

The QGOA COVIDSafe officer is Mark Looi (mark.looi@qgoa.org.au)

## COVID Training

Prior to participating in any QGOA in-person activities, QGOA members and nominated club-affiliated officials must:

* acknowledge having received, read and understood a copy of this plan, either electronically or in a written statement
* complete the COVID-19 Infection Control Training module available at <https://covid-19training.gov.au>

## Game Venues and Facilities

QGOA shall seek assurances from GQ that all venues that games are scheduled for have a venue specific COVIDSafe plan developed and implemented. Where such assurances are not available, QGOA shall not supply officials to games at that venue.

At the majority of venues, officials changing rooms do not meet the minimum requirements for physical distancing. Therefore, officials changing rooms shall not be used (exception: bathroom facilities, where needed), and officials are to turn up to games already dressed in uniform, or be able to change in their vehicle.

## Game Management

QGOA shall abide by the COVIDSafe provisions established by GQ in regards to game management. Specifically, this shall refer to the numbers of spectators permitted, the ability to be present at a venue (or any requirement to arrive/depart at prescribed times) particularly in the case of venues hosting multiple games.

## Rules Changes

A number of rules have been modified by GQ. QGOA shall abide by these modifications. A weekly reminder of the current set of modifications will be issued to each official by email during the season. At present, the modifications that have been adopted are:

* Handshakes and other physical contact will not occur between captains at the coin toss. Verbal acknowledgement by the captains, or an “elbow bump” is acceptable.
* Handshakes will not occur at the end of the game.
* Only one captain from each team will be present at the coin toss.
* Whilst permissible, teams are requested to be mindful of the length of time spent in huddles, and to minimise this where possible.
* The coaches’ box and team areas are to be amended by being pushed back a further 6 feet, and widened by 10 yards on each end. The coaches’ box will now begin 12’ from the sideline and the players area 18’ from the sideline, and run from the 15 yard line to the 15 yard line.
* At the Referee’s discretion, additional water breaks will be taken to enable players and officials to retrieve their own personal water bottle for rehydration. The length of these water breaks are to be adequate for the purpose of rehydration.

## Unwell Officials

Officials who feel unwell, show any symptoms of a respiratory illness, or have a fever, within 24 hours of kickoff, must not attend the game and will not be assigned until obtaining a negative COVID test or a medical clearance. Officials are to advise the QGOA game assignor as soon as possible in such an eventuality. Prior to the start of each game, the temperature of all officials shall be checked.

QGOA will purchase and make available at each venue, a non-contact digital thermometer. The crew chief is responsible for checking the temperatures of each official upon the arrival of the official for their first game of the day in accordance with operating instructions to be provided separately. The thermometer is to be sanitized before and after each use. Readings are to be made in a shaded area, away from the sun and wind. For readings of:

* 37.5C and lower: the official is cleared to participate
* 37.6C and above: the official is to rest in a shaded area without performing any physical activity or consuming any food or drink, and then repeat the test after ten minutes
* 37.6C and above at the second test: the official is to advise the game assignor immediately and return home, and must obtain medical clearance before resuming participation

The completion of the temperature check of each official shall be noted in the match report.

If an official is working multiple games, it is not necessary to re-check the temperature for subsequent games.

## Officiating Equipment

Officials are not to share any personal equipment during the season. Each official, including club-affiliated officials, must have their own personal equipment including whistles, caps, flags, and bean bags.

Where possible, reporting of penalties and game information shall take place using Zello as a radio communications platform instead of face-to-face. Officials are encouraged to set up Zello on their personal mobile devices and obtain their own headsets. QGOA will have a limited number of mobile devices configured for Zello, however, officials are still required to have their own headsets.

If at all possible, Referees should be wired in to the ground PA system for game announcements, so that the announcements can be delivered in a normal speaking voice, instead of using a loud voice. If a loud voice is necessary, the Referee should ensure that there are no other participants within 4 metres in front of the Referee during the announcement. Referee radio microphones are to be sanitized before being attached, and after being removed from the Referee.

## Hygiene Measures

Officials are instructed to avoid touching their face during games. Signal [S26] will be modified so that the palm is placed close to the Referee’s cheek without touching it.

QGOA will provide a bottle of hand sanitizer at each venue for the officials. Officials are encouraged to use the hand sanitizer after the end of each half. QGOA will also provide each official with a small pocket-sized (may be clipped to belt) personal bottle of hand sanitizer to be used on-field at the officials discretion (typically after contact with any player).

Officials should avoid any physical contact with other participants wherever possible and not try to separate players during pushing and shoving or fights. An official who comes in direct contact with a player’s bodily fluids (e.g. sweat if there is physical contact with a player) during a game should use the hand sanitiser at the first available opportunity.

If digging in the pile to determine the status of a contested ball is necessary, only the covering official should unpile. All other officials should, verbally and using hand gestures, keep other players clear.

If a discussion with a coach or captain occurs, officials should maintain the 1.5 m separation and conduct the discussion in a normal speaking manner. If a coach starts to get heated or shout, officials should step back and request the coach to calm down in order to continue the discussion. Officlals may opt to wear a face mask during discussions.

The current use of hand-held, in-mouth whistles is not permitted, as blowing the whistle causes a spray of droplets from the officials to enter the air, plus the fact that officials also regularly handle the football.

Officials are to use either

* a hand-operated electronic whistle; or
* a “squeeze-bulb” whistle

QGOA will provide each official with an electronic whistle.

## Officiating Mechanics Changes

QGOA will adopt in entirety the mechanics changes established by AGOA. These are:

* An Umpire will not be used in any sized crew. The Umpire will be replaced by a Centre Judge
* For all crew sizes, the Referee and Centre Judge will escort one captain only to the coin toss
* Spotting the ball will be performed by players, under the direction of the Line Judge
* Timing and player counting responsibilities are modified as per the AGOA document
* The Centre Judge will march off all penalties, with a player spotting the ball under the direction of the Centre Judge
* Measurements are to be avoided where possible. When essential, the chain crew will retain possession of the chains, with the back stake placed under the direction of Head Linesman, and the front stake stretched under the direction of the Referee. All other officials are to keep clear

## Training

Officiating training will continue using online video conferencing platforms.

## Travelling To/From Games

Officials who carpool are advised that a passenger who does not live in the same house must be in the left back seat (diagonally across from the driver), therefore limiting a carpool to two officials per vehicle. Masks are to be worn during any carpool trip.

## Pre-Game Conferences

Pre-game conferences shall take place outdoors, with officials maintaining a 1,5m physical separation.

## Match Reports

It is encouraged that the Back Judge take responsibility for recording all fouls called. If not, the official completing the match report shall take digital photographs of the crews’ game record cards instead of taking the physical cards, for the purposes of compiling the match report.

## Vulnerable Members

Certain categories of people are more susceptible to serious or life-threatening illnesses if they contract COVID. For a full list, refer to <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/advice-for-people-at-risk-of-coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-people-with-chronic-health-conditions>.

Such people include those with:

* chronic conditions, such as kidney failure, heart disease, cardiac failure, chronic lung disorders, diabetes, high blood pressure
* immune system conditions, such as leukemia, lymphomas, post-transplant medications, immunodeficiency, or are receiving chemotherapy or radiotherapy
* a current treatment regime involving particular medications (see linked website above for full list), primarily anti-arthritis drugs

People over the age of 65 are also particularly vulnerable.

Any member who identifies as being in a vulnerable group should seek independent advice as to whether participation carries a heightened or unacceptable risk. If the risk is considered to be heightened, it is the responsibility of the member to discuss options with the QGOA game assignors. If the risk is considered to be unacceptable and cannot be mitigated via preventative or protective measures, members should not participate in the current season. If participating, modification options to be considered may include assigning such members to on-field positions with reduced player contact, for example, deep officials.

## Reporting

Any member who has come in physical proximity to other members of the QGOA, and develops symptoms of respiratory issues or a fever, or subsequently tests positive for COVID-19, is required to immediately inform the QGOA upon receipt of test results. In such an event, QGOA shall seek advice from Queensland Health and proceed with action based on that advice, which may include requiring all contacts to be tested, or requiring that those members isolate from games for the next 14 days.

## Contact Tracing

A register of all assigned officials, whether members or club-affiliated officials, including contact email addresses and phone numbers, shall be maintained by the QGOA on a per-game basis and made available to Queensland Health on request.

The QGOA highly recommends that all members download and run the COVIDSafe app onto their personal mobile devices that are being used to run Zello, and have those devices active and on their person at all times during the game.