



# **RETURN TO RUGBY ACTIVITY**

**VERSION 2**

August 18, 2020

# INTRODUCTION

The BRFU's decision to suspend Rugby Union activity in March and subsequently the decision to end the 2019/20 season activity followed government and medical advice and was taken swiftly with the prime objective being to protect players, volunteers and clubs. Our sport has reacted brilliantly, not only closing down clubs quickly and efficiently but in the amazing community work that many have undertaken to support those in greatest need.

While a great deal of uncertainty still exists, the BRFU is now in a position to set out our roadmap of how we begin to think about returning to rugby activity. What still remains impossible is to set out specific timescales as to when this might happen. We will continue to be led on this by both government and medical advice. In doing this we will stay focused on what is right for rugby in Bermuda. We recognise that other sports may return quicker in Bermuda and that rugby may return earlier in other countries. We will continue to be informed by expert medical advice on the specific risk levels in our sport, primarily around the risks of Covid-19 transmission as a result of the following conditions:

- a) close and face-to-face contact between individuals
- b) direct contact with other individuals, the ball and other equipment
- c) government advice as to the risk levels in Bermuda and particularly measures around social distancing, group activity and social gatherings.

Progress along the roadmap is totally dependent on how the Covid-19 pandemic develops and government advice. We will only move from one stage to another when guidance and advice says that it is safe to do so. As we move from stage to stage, detailed guidance will be issued. It is also possible, should social distancing measures be strengthened at any time, that we reassess the situation and regress (for example, from Stage C to B).

# ROAD MAP

The roadmap consists of six stages. It may be necessary to remain in any one stage for a sustained period of time, with or without minor amendments. It may also be possible to jump a stage:

- A. Individual training with one other person
- B. Individual training in small groups
- C. Larger group training with limited face-to-face or close contact
- D. Whole team training with increased face-to-face or close contact
- E. Whole team training in preparation to play matches
- F. Return to matches against other teams

## Stage A

We moved to Stage A in May when it became permissible for sports and fitness clubs to be opened and individuals to meet together, while remaining at least two metres apart, and engage in individual fitness-based training. The opening of pitches is at the discretion of rugby clubs (or other pitch operators).

## Stage B

When the government moved Bermuda into Phase 3 in June, it was possible to move to stage B. In this scenario, ten individuals from different households were able to meet up and engage in individual training. The two-metre social distancing rule still applies and if a coach is involved, they are part of the group of ten. Equipment sharing (including balls) should be kept to a minimum and strong hand hygiene practice should be in place before and after. As physical contact with anyone outside of your house is currently not permitted, playing of any games (small sided or full) is also not permitted at this time. Parents/carers observing a session at a distance from a safeguarding perspective is permitted, without them being part of the participating group. While permissible for multiple small groups to be engaged in training at the same site, clubs must risk assess this properly and ensure that safe and adequate distancing between groups is strictly observed. This will be dependent on the activity being undertaken, however the BRFU's guidance would be that no more than one group should be active on each quarter of any pitch.

## Stage C

The most recent government announcements and guidance at Phase 4 permits Bermuda Rugby to move into Stage C, where we anticipate to remain for some time for a while with potential amendments coming within the stage to reflect any revised government position. This stage carries all of the guidelines and hygiene practices of Stage B, but with an enlargement of the number of people permitted.

Stage C begins to see larger groups being able to train together, such as forwards or backs or age grade groupings and would likely involve more interactive activity other than simply fitness and conditioning work. We anticipate that this stage will still be subject to some social distancing measures and the training activities permitted would likely reflect a need to limit the total amount of close or face-to-face contact between individuals.

#### Stage D

A move to stage D is likely to be triggered by a more significant relaxation of social distancing measures and when the risk element of typical rugby training activities that involve close and face-to-face contact and the typical physical contact of rugby training is deemed acceptable.

#### Stage E

Stage E allows for preparation for return to play and to matches (NB – there may still be some adaptations/ restrictions in place). A minimum of four weeks will be spent in stage E before any progression to stage F, to allow players to get match fit.

#### Stage F

Stage F allows for a return to matches between players from different clubs (NB – there may still be some adaptations/restrictions in place).

# IMPLICATIONS

There are many implications of a staged return to play. In relation to the 20/21 season these fall into three main areas:

## 1. The competitive programme

Depending on when it is possible for the season to commence there may need to be changes to the competitive programmes, including leagues, cup competitions and representative rugby. This may lead to a truncated league programme if the season does not start at its usual start point in early September. Two review groups are considering this in adult and age grade respectively and we anticipate being able to publish their recommendations at the end of August / early September.

## 2. Rugby activity in clubs

We recognise the importance of clubs being able to offer rugby activity – both to retain their players (particularly at a time when other sports may be able to commence earlier) and to protect their revenue streams. Should it be necessary to delay the return to normal rugby activity it will be important to have alternatives in place. We are working on options to support this and aim to publish these at the end of August / early September. This will include a range of things from alternative activity for men's and women's rugby players through to potential temporary law amendments to the game to enable some activity to happen.

## 3. Rugby activity in schools

Recognising the more significant amount of rugby played in education settings we recognise the importance of maintaining a rugby offer when these institutions begin to return to some degree of normality. We are working on options and suggestions for this and would seek to have these available for the start of the 20/21 term/season., subject to school guidelines.

