



Sports issue warning over indoor facilities

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Table Tennis England is helping to lead a campaign putting pressure on the Government to ensure sports halls are used for indoor sports as the country continues to emerge from lockdown.

We have joined with Badminton England, England Netball, Basketball England and Volleyball England to raise awareness of the difficulties our sports' members are having in securing places to play.

Indoor sports have seen their playing spaces almost entirely disappear as leisure facilities prioritise sports halls to accommodate gyms and group exercise while maintaining social distancing. The majority of other regular venues, such as schools or universities, also remain closed.

If these practices continue it is expected that two in three indoor facilities will remain unusable into the autumn for the 2.4 million people who regularly play indoor sports.

Indoor facilities are vital to sports, such as table tennis, which reach into every community irrespective of physical ability, age, gender or ethnicity. These sports provide inclusive environments for a great many, particularly those who cannot get involved in other forms of physical activity due to ability or access.

The governing bodies have done all they can to restart their respective sports, including guidance to create Covid-secure playing environments, and believe a crisis is looming because of the lack of facilities available.

They are therefore collectively calling for the Government to incentivise the reopening of indoor facilities to ensure leisure operators, schools and other venues are able to make the right choices to support the health and wellbeing of the nation and get participants back into community sport.

Table Tennis England Chief Executive Sara Sutcliffe said: "Only around 45% of our clubs have been able to return to play or have a confirmed date for doing so and, of those which haven't, two-thirds have given venue closure or venues not allowing external hirers as the reason.

"Those which have returned are reporting the positives of social interaction and physical activity and, just as

importantly in the current landscape, good compliance with regulations.

“The fact that players and volunteers are keen to return and to behave responsibly, but are struggling with venues, illustrates the importance of leisure centres to grassroots sport – we really need them to open their doors to clubs.”

It is a similar picture with other sports – Volleyball England report only 6% of teams saying they will be able to book an indoor venue before September 1.

Badminton England’s Chief Executive Adrian Christy said only 20% of Badminton facilities had been open to players since the green light was given to indoor sports on July 25.

He added: “It is vital that Government and leisure facility operators wake up and see the crisis that is heading our way if we continue to see indoor multi-purpose sports halls repurposed in favour of gym operations. More than 2.4 million members of local communities are at risk of seeing their indoor sports facilities disappear from use.

“We need leisure operators to make the right choices by the health and wellbeing of the nation and for the Government to remove any financial pressures which are influencing their current decisions.”

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