

Stage 3 – Preparing for a return to league table tennis

At the time of this document being written we remain at stage 1 of the ready to return guidance and following the government announcement on the 9th July, we will move into stage 2 with limited club activity commencing on the 25th July. The below guidance is to help support leagues in their scenario planning and decision making for a return to competitive league table tennis. The guidance from Table Tennis England is that even when government advice allows table tennis to be played indoors, competitive table tennis does not resume straight away.

Many players will not have played any table tennis and exercised much less than before the outbreak, the ready to return player survey indicated that over 50% of Table Tennis England members had exercised less since the Coronavirus outbreak. Therefore, we are advising that there is a period of non-competitive play when indoor table tennis returns to take place before leagues and competitions are able to re-commence.

We have posed some scenarios/questions in this document that leagues and clubs may need to consider and some thoughts about how these could be overcome. There will never be a one size fits all approach for clubs and leagues, but the ideas below are pointers to help league committees think about the options available to them to enable league table tennis to resume if and when it is safe to do so. Close consultation with league clubs and members will be key for all leagues to enable a safe return to competitive table tennis.

1. How many venues does the league have that can hold approximately 10x5m match courts with seating outside the court? Are the number of venues available restricted as a result?

Areas to consider could include:

- a) Look into any shared facilities with other clubs on a short-term basis
- b) Consider the use of a central large venue
- c) Could clubs without their venues available to them play all of their matches away from home
- d) Look into running the league in two smaller half seasons to allow for clubs that are not able to re-start early on to re-join in a 'second half of the season' in January.
- e) Consider whether there are any leagues close by that could join together to form a new alternative league for a short period whilst numbers of venues and players may be lower.
- f) Explore a shorter format (e.g. two a side, individual league) option to allow the league to commence with lower numbers, reduce time spent in the hall, whilst still maximising the number of team entries.

2. Can you maintain social distancing if the league returns? Are venues large enough to host the tables required so that players can remain a suitable distance apart at all times?

Please look at our facility guidance documents, which can be found on the link below. Due to the larger court sizes required, some clubs may not be able to hold as many league matches as they normally are able to.

Leagues should consider that 68% of players from the ready to return survey indicated that they would be happy upon return to play in an alternative format league. Please see other advice in question number 1 with regards to options for shorter format leagues and running a season in two halves.

<https://tabletennisengland.co.uk/clubs/clubs-guidance/ready-to-return/>

3. How many members are from the more vulnerable groups and not able to, or feel more nervous about returning to play just yet?

1. Survey your current membership to review how many members are thinking about returning/not returning and when they may feel comfortable to do so. The results from the national survey indicates that approximately 40% of players will be nervous about returning straight away, you can see the full set of results at <https://tabletennisengland.co.uk/news/archived/ready-to-return-survey-what-we-are-doing-to-support-our-members/>.
2. Depending on the response from your members and clubs, consider the options presented in question number 1 above.

4. Have teams got the appropriate PPE/cleaning in place?

The league should look to have a written agreement from their league teams/clubs that they have put the appropriate procedures in place to manage social distancing and hygiene requirements. You can find up to date Table Tennis England guidance, resources template risk assessments, hygiene posters and more by visiting the ready to return section of the Table Tennis England website. <https://tabletennisengland.co.uk/clubs/clubs-guidance/ready-to-return/>.

Be TT funding is also available for clubs and leagues to a return to playing table tennis indoors, which can also include supporting the purchase of any cleaning and PPE equipment required for a club or league.

5. In matches can we use the same ball or should people use individual balls?

The previous guidance to use individual balls has changed and balls can be shared amongst players, but they should be washed or wiped on a regular basis. When league play can resume, leagues should strongly consider swapping balls for each individual match, this will reduce risk and make it easier to wash/wipe balls in between games.

6. If we are considering a shorter format league, are we able to manage this within the TT Leagues platform?

Yes, two a side leagues and many other league formats can be used. Please speak to Table Tennis England if you have any questions about setting up a different format within the TT Leagues platform.

7. League players have expressed concern about sweat transmitting the virus

The virus is not spread through perspiration, however it is still important to ensure equipment is cleaned on a regular basis, as outlined in the Table Tennis England guidance.