

MFA Return To Practice

Preamble

The federal and provincial governments have started to reopen the economy in a stepwise fashion. Sports play an important role in returning society back to a functioning economic and social life.

That said, however, sports Canada-wide also need to follow a stepwise progression in order to return to sport safely, with the health of people remaining at the top of the list of priorities.

Under the guidance of national sport organizations such as [Sport Canada](#) (SC) and [Own The Podium](#) (OTP), the Manitoba Fencing Association is working on an exit concept from the lockdown that is considerate of the health circumstances we are currently facing in order to protect our members, families, and communities. The concept is designed to gradually re-start our sport, all while respecting the rules issued by the Federal and Provincial Public Health authorities.

Simply put, regardless of any exit strategy, no fencing club should resume its activities except one that follows the current advice and recommendations of national, provincial, and local public health authorities.

Note that the described return to practice strategy is adaptable depending on the current rules and regulations issued by the local health authorities.

This return to practice strategy is a **guideline** that should be considered alongside the current [COVID-19 Risk Assessment Tool For Sports](#), as well as the [Own The Podium Club Risk Assessment and Mitigation Checklist Tool](#).

To avoid ambiguity, below are four recommendations, in order, that clubs are responsible for prior to returning to fencing.

- 1. Abide by regulations set out by national, provincial, and municipal public health authorities. The directives by these authorities will always take precedence. Review the [Risk Assessment and Mitigation Tool for Recreational Activities in Manitoba Operating During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)**
- 2. Complete the [Own The Podium Club Risk Assessment and Mitigation Checklist Tool \(Appendix B\)](#).**
- 3. Follow the 4 stage Return-To-Fencing Strategy outlined below.**

Risk Evaluation, Triage, and Hygiene

Throughout the 4 Stages, the following rules always remain in place:

- 1. Self-Assessment: before going to their training or competition session, each athlete & coach must complete a daily health self-assessment:**

Do I, or anyone in my household have any one of the following symptoms in the past 14 days?

- a) Symptoms of acute respiratory disease: Cough/Sore throat/Shortness of breath
- b) Fever or chills over 38 degrees
- c) Sudden loss of smell or taste
- d) Diarrhea/abdominal pain
- e) Unexplained headache/body ache/fatigue
- f) Pinkeye.

IF YES to any of the above symptoms: do not go to training/competition, follow the advice of local health authorities.

Each athlete must inform their coach if the answer to the question above is YES. Clubs are responsible for collecting and documenting this information, and informing any individual who is present at the same time as the athlete who answered yes to the above question.

Waivers or a health check via electronic means will be provided, and shall be submitted by the athlete or athlete's parent/guardian before athletes are admitted to class.

Consult [Manitoba Shared Health](#) for updated health information.

2. An athlete or coach may not go to training if they answer YES to the above question.

- a) If they have traveled outside of Canada in the past 14 days, this person must not return to the training facility until their self-isolation period is over, or have submitted proof of a negative result of a COVID19 test for the period in question.
- b) If they have been diagnosed with COVID-19, this person may not return to the training facility until 14 days from the onset of symptoms; if they still have symptoms at the end of the 14 days, the athlete may not return to training until they are clear of symptoms for 48 hours.
- c) If a household member is diagnosed with COVID-19, this person may not return to the training facility for 14 days after they were last in close contact with that family member. If the athlete is diagnosed with COVID-19 infection during that 14 days, they must follow the instructions outlined in a) above.

3. Tracking Presences: At each training session the club must keep track of: the **first name, last name, e-mail address, and phone number** of each person present at the training session and the date/time/duration of the training session ([Sample Sign-In Sheet](#)). In addition, each individual must declare that

- a) **They are not currently experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms by passing the Self Assessment outlined in #1**
- b) **Neither they nor their household contain anyone diagnosed with COVID-19.**
- c) **They have read and understood the “Daily Covid-19 Attestation and Agreement” document, and initialled in the “Declaration of Health” columns confirmation of this agreement**

These documents must be kept for at least **one year**. This allows clubs to keep track of individuals inside the facilities, and to expedite communication to members and provincial healthcare authorities should a positive case arise within the club. An individual responsible for this should be designated ahead of time to maintain record consistency. As participants or guardians must also initial in the Declaration of Health column, writing utensils must be sanitized after each use to minimize transmission.

4. **Athlete Safety:** athletes and coaches, must be highly considerate in protecting the safety of themselves and those around them.
5. **Self-Isolation:** athletes and coaches must make the informed decision that [self-isolation](#) may need to be reinstated should an outbreak happen within their training group.
6. **Club hygiene behaviors:**
 - Club owners, coaches, staff, affiliates, athletes, and parents should all be encouraged to [wear a face-mask](#), (or a scarf covering mouth and nose) to and from training.
 - Club owners, coaches, staff, affiliates, and parents **must** wear a face-mask at training.
 - **Wearing a face-mask during training, where frequent adjustments are inevitable between water breaks and fencing mask usage, is at the discretion of the individual, and depends on the ability to maintain physical distance at all times.**
 - Proper [hand hygiene](#) must be performed **immediately before putting on** a mask, as well as **immediately after** removing the mask.
 - Any face-mask **adjustments** must be followed **immediately** by proper hand hygiene **without** cross-contamination to another surface (e.g. do *not* use the same hand to adjust the mask and open the bathroom door).
 - Face-masks **should be changed** if they become soiled or wet to maintain proper function. Reusable masks must be placed **immediately** in a sealable container to launder at home. Disposable masks must be **immediately** discarded directly into a **covered receptacle** after removal.
 - The club should remind members that the [mode of infection happens via droplet transmission through the eyes, nose, and mouth](#).
 - Clubs should be encouraged to [display posters promoting covering of mouth while sneezing, coughing, or heavy-breathing](#) as a strong reminder to reduce droplet-transmission to others.
 - Prior to the beginning of every class it is recommended the coach/instructor review the point 7. Personal Hygiene portion of this document.
 - Clubs should have the contact number for their [local public health officer](#) posted in the training space.
 - Clubs should, at minimum, clearly delineate an area within the training space designated to keep individual bags/equipment to facilitate physical distancing. If possible, clubs should encourage athletes to arrive with all equipment, so to minimize the need for bags.

- Where possible, clubs should also clearly display practice floor markers (tape) that outline proper physical distancing in hallways and other traffic areas.
- [Ventilation of the training space](#) will lessen spread of infection; if possible [open doors/windows of the facility to allow fresh air](#) to enter the training area. Consider doing training outdoors if possible.
- [Disinfect door-handles, light switches, bathroom doors, bathroom faucets](#) EVERY DAY before fencers arrive and after fencers leave. Frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned at minimum twice per day and when visibly dirty.
- Install a [hand-sanitizing station at every club entry and exit point](#). ALL who enter AND exit the club must sanitize their hands. No exceptions.
- [Bathrooms must be cleaned](#) and disinfected on a daily basis. They should be used by only one person at a time to facilitate physical distancing.
- In order to avoid the formation of lines of people and frequent contact with door handles, [open all doors](#) (with the exception of those which must be closed). Ensure that the push button automatic door opener is in working order.
- [No food or meals](#) to be eaten inside the fencing facility. Reducing the risk of touching the mouth and face while being outside of your home is of the utmost importance.
- Clubs should **NOT** share fencing-masks, gloves, jackets, weapons or any equipment for fencers to share. [Communal equipment should be discouraged. Clubs may choose to assign club equipment to a specific fencer for their own use until restrictions are lifted.](#) Every fencer should bring their own equipment.
- Clubs should not allow members to use communal water fountains. [Public water-fountains should be closed](#) with a clear sign and warning tape, until further notice. Sensor-activated fountains may be considered a better alternative where possible.
- Clubs should encourage everyone to [clean exercise equipment](#) such as exercise mats, medicine-balls, yoga-balls, and other equipment after every single use.
- Coaches and fencers should not leave their equipment in the club to dry off after sweating. [Equipment should be taken home and machine-washed after every single use.](#) Equipment includes (gloves, jackets, pants, socks, t-shirts, shorts). Equipment such as weapons and masks that cannot be machine-washed, should be disinfected with Lysol wipes or [similar alternatives](#) after every single use.

7. **Personal hygiene behaviors:**

- Everyone is strongly encouraged to [wear a face-mask to and from training](#) to reduce the risk of droplet transmission while respiring.
- [Cough, and sneeze into your elbow!](#) Remember transmission occurs via droplet which means through sneezing, coughing or spitting while talking.

- Every fencer and coach should [bring their own face towel](#) to prevent wiping sweat off their face with their hands. The towel should be cleaned every day.
- Every fencer should [bring their own water bottles](#). Absolutely no sharing bottles. Water bottles should be cleaned after every fencing practice.
- Every fencer should [bring their own hand-sanitizer](#).
- [Change into your sports attire at home](#), prior to arriving to the club. When possible, bring a set of clean clothes in a bag to change into before leaving the club.
- Do not breathe heavily next to someone, even if they are 2 meters away in proximity.
- Keep a minimum distance of 2 meters between individuals in all directions [for less strenuous activities](#).
- For strenuous activities, a distance of 100 square feet per person (or 9 square meters per person) should be maintained between individuals.
- [Disinfect your fencing bag](#) and handles prior to returning home.
- [Disinfect your phones](#) frequently. Consider keeping your phone inside a sealable bag while at practice to keep it clean.
- [Wash your hands](#) with soap and water or disinfect with alcohol-based sanitizers, regularly
- Keep your belongings close by your bag. Only bring the equipment you require for practice/competition into the facility. Leave other belongings at home or in your car.
- Keep your bag/equipment in designated club areas only to maintain physical distancing.
- Do not leave your equipment in the club after training to dry off your sweat. [Equipment should be taken home and machine-washed after every single use](#). Equipment includes (gloves, jacket, pants, socks, t-shirts, shorts). Equipment such as weapons and masks which cannot be washed should be disinfected with Lysol wipes or [similar alternatives](#) after each session.
- Para athletes utilizing wheelchairs should disinfect their wheelchairs prior and after training.

8. **Fencing hygiene behaviors:**

- Reels clips and last part of the cable should be disinfected with Lysol wipes or [similar alternatives](#) after each match (**matches only allowed in stages 3-4)
- Opt to use a personal score-keeping device (like a phone app) instead of a remote while refereeing. If a remote is used it should be wiped down before and after each change in referee.
- Push the buttons on the fencing machine with your glove-hand.
- Machine-wash your gloves, and fencing equipment after EVERY use.
- Do not shake hands with your opponent or the referee after a fencing match or fencing lesson. Use salute instead.

- If you start to feel unwell while you are fencing, you should stop training immediately and leave the facility. Let your coach know that you are feeling unwell.

9. Parental hygiene behaviors:

- Remind your kids about good hygiene etiquette.
- Encourage and remind your kids to clean and disinfect their fencing equipment after each use. Equipment such as masks and weapons can be wiped down with disinfectant wipes, or spray.
- Give your kids a clean, reusable water bottle so they avoid using public water fountains.
- If possible, drive them to their club and back instead of allowing them to take public transportation.
- Refrain from entering the club unless absolutely necessary, or unless your child is a minor and/or needs assistance. Adhere to proper PPE wear and physical distancing measures at all times.

10. General hygiene behaviors:

- Coaches, parents, family members over 60 years old or those with chronic health issues (including but not limited to) immunosuppression, lung disease, hypertension, heart disease, diabetes) should consider staying at home until further guidance by public health officials.
- Do not hug, shake hands, high-five or touch those around you. Remember to maintain 2-meter physical distancing at all times.

11. Typical fencing training:

- Bouts in stages 1 and 2 are **NOT ALLOWED** due to the inability to maintain the physical distance (2-meter). Footwork training, strength and conditioning training and collective work are preferred during the first 2 stages of return to practice. (see below plan for more details)
- **Maintain 100 square feet (or 9 square meters per person) distance between each athlete during strenuous parts of the practice. Heavy breathing from exercise requires an increase in physical distance.**
- Depending on the current stage, no fleche's or corps a corps actions should be allowed during a match. To enforce this rule, matches should be refereed to ensure the bouts are stopped when athletes get too close (within 1 meter).

Transportation to and from Training

Athletes and coaches are encouraged to go to training by walking, or cycling, or driving. The intention is to minimize prolonged exposure in potentially overcrowded situations such as public transport as much as possible. Those who need to use public transport, should try to avoid peak hours to avoid overcrowding.

4-Stage Return to Fencing Strategy

The return to practice strategy for fencing training is designed to be deployed in 4 Stages. **The MFA will update what stage clubs are able to move to on a regular basis, based on provincial regulations as well as recommendation of the local public health authorities.**

A single-page version of the table below can be downloaded [here](#).

For Stages 1-4:

The MFA reminds all clubs and members that they must, at all times, adhere to the [Quarantine Act \(Canada\)](#), [Provincial Restoring Safe Services](#) stage regulations (Manitoba) as well as municipal bylaws and facility rules

Gathering Sizes:

The maximum number of individuals inside the club at any given time is dependent on the maximum gathering size in your region. This includes athletes, coaches, staff, and parents.

In addition to the gathering size limitation, consider 100 square feet per person (or 9 square meters per person). In other words, approximately 3 individuals per regulation sized piste. For smaller training spaces, this may mean that the maximum number of individuals inside the facility at any given time is less than the gathering size maximum.

The maximum number of classes differs between stages (refer to the table below). Classes must be scheduled to allow for proper cleaning and sanitation of high-contact surfaces and equipment, as well as for designated training groups to enter/exit without overlapping at any given time.

If, at any point, a new individual or individuals are introduced into an existing designated group (athlete or coach), the entire group must all return to **stage 1** to allow for the incubation time of 14 days to pass, at a minimum (even if the additional members share the same coach as the existing group members). This may very well be the case once gathering restrictions are modified so that designated group sizes can increase. It may be possible to expedite through stages 2+ after the initial 14-day period, depending on circumstances.

Designated Training Groups:

Designated training groups should be set up for all athletes and coaches, with each athlete (and where possible, each coach) assigned to **one** training group only.

- Each designated training group should include at least one coach, and the remaining numbers be made up of athletes.
- Athletes from different training groups should **not** mix in stages 1-4 to avoid cross contagion. **This includes private lessons.**
- Athletes and coaches should only be associated with one (1) club, to avoid cross-contamination between clubs.

In cases where a coach is designated to multiple training groups, class schedules should be set up so that each coach leads as few classes as possible per day in stages 1 and 2, to minimize any transmission between designated training groups.

Positive Case:

If, at any point, an individual in a training group is diagnosed with COVID-19, the MFA or clubs will:

- Inform the entire training group. Also, include the athlete's club coaches, club president and MFA Executive Director.
- Contact the appropriate authorities so they may begin contact tracing (clubs should have the contact number for their local public health officer posted in the training space to facilitate this process).
- Inform the full group to enter self-isolation for 14 days.

Should this group include a coach who is also designated to another training group, every member in those additional training groups must also be informed and enter self-isolation for 14 days.

Coaches who live together in the same household are considered as a single unit. This means that, should one coach or an athlete from one group be infected, all athletes that both coaches work with must return to self-isolation.

To protect personal health information, communication to the full, designated group should only indicate that an incident has occurred, that individuals should self-isolate for 14 days, and to contact health authorities should they experience any unusual symptoms. Those without symptoms within those 14 days may return to training following authorization from their healthcare provider.

Even with the abundance of caution outlined with this document, return to fencing is not without risk of outbreak. Limiting designated training group sizes reduces the number of individuals that must be isolated, and allows for the remaining club members to continue training after the club has followed all sanitation guidelines. This is why it is imperative that athletes in different training groups should not mix.

	Duration	Premise	General practice	Specific Activities	
Stage 1	Min 2-3 Weeks	Limit 3 classes per day (total), each class only consist of members from one single training group	<u>Group training:</u> -No combat training -No private combat lesson -Group footwork	<u>Physical Preparation:</u> -Strength -Plyometric -Conditioning -Stretching	<u>Technical work</u> -Individual skills -Target training -Footwork -Individual Games
Stage 2	Min 2 weeks	Limit 3 classes per day (total), each class only consist of members from one single training group	<u>Group training:</u> -No combat training -Private lesson permitted -Group footwork	<u>Physical Preparation:</u> -Strength -Plyometric -Conditioning -Stretching	<u>Technical work</u> -Individual skills -Target training -Footwork -Individual Games
Stage 3	Min 2 weeks	Limit 4 classes per day (total), each class must consist of members from one single training group	<u>Group training:</u> -Combat training permitted -Private lesson permitted -Group footwork	<u>Physical Preparation:</u> -Strength -Plyometric -Conditioning -Stretching	<u>Technical work</u> -Individual skills -Target training -Footwork -Group Games
Stage 4	Min 2 weeks	TBD	<u>Group training:</u> -Combat training permitted -Private lesson permitted -Group footwork -Competition TBD	<u>Physical Preparation:</u> -Strength -Plyometric -Conditioning -Stretching	<u>Technical work</u> -Individual skills -Target training -Footwork -Group Games

Contact Persons and Responsibilities

Each athlete, coach, parent, and club administrator are expected to take responsibility in practicing their role in implementing this concept, and ensure the health and safety of all those involved.

Each club is further responsible for nominating one person in charge of each training session (generally coach or team manager), who will have the duty of completing the list of athletes present, supervising the sessions, and further complying to the special constraints dictated by each stage.

Communication of the Concept

Though the MFA is communicating this return to practice concept to its affiliated members and clubs, each club must consider their own responsibility in ensuring a safe return to practice. This concept is a minimal recommendation. Should you find the need for more strict measures, please don't hesitate to do so! The responsibility lies on the club. Additionally, each club is then responsible for communicating to all of its members, and for ensuring the good understanding and implementation of this return to practice strategy regarding their own activities.

FAQs – COVID19 RTP Protocol

This section provides some of the commonly asked questions

1. **When does Stage 1 start?**

Stage 1 starts when the first class of athletes start training in the club. This will likely vary between clubs based on location, resource gathering, and feasibility.

2. **How do we move from stage to stage?**

Clubs can decide, after meeting the minimum time frame per stage, to move to the next stage. The duration of each stage is to provide members time to adjust to the new training setup, in addition to allowing observation time to prevent any community spread. If the MFA updates this document, it will be sent out and communicated to each MFA club.

3. **Is everyone supposed to sign in?**

Yes. Every person who enters and exits the facility must sign in/out. This allows clubs to keep track of individuals inside the facilities, and to expedite communication to members and provincial healthcare authorities In the case that a positive case arises within the club.

There should be a designated individual recording all relevant information outlined in **Section 3** of the Protocol, to both maintain record consistency, as well as avoiding passing writing utensils back and forth between individuals.

4. **Is there a limit to the total number in the club?**

This is dependent on the limit to gatherings in facilities set by you provincial government. Please keep in mind that government regulation is highest level of authority that we should follow at any given time.

5. **What is the purpose of the “designated group” and is it important?**

The designated group is very important! The purpose of the designated group is to control infection outbreaks, as well to protect your club from closing down. Suppose the possibility of an outbreak in one of the groups, then effectively, only this group and their associated coach has to self-isolate, instead of the whole club! This allows for three benefits:

- a) Control the community outbreak
- b) Self-isolate only the affected group, and not the whole club
- c) Allows for easy tracing of infection outbreak

6. **Can a coach give a private lesson that doesn't involve combat training (during stage 1)?**

Yes, as long as the coach remains 3 metres away from their athlete, it's acceptable to give private lessons **without combat** during stage 1.

7. **Can my club have communal equipment to offer athletes in beginner classes?**

No, equipment should not be shared! However, clubs can assign equipment to individual athletes to avoid sharing. For the duration that the athlete uses the equipment, there is no sharing with another athlete, and the athlete must wash and clean the equipment between classes, every day.