



# A Framework to guide progression towards a resumption of sport and physical recreation in Northern Ireland

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# A Framework to guide progression towards a resumption of sport and physical recreation in Northern Ireland

## 1.0 Introduction

On 12<sup>th</sup> May 2020 the NI Executive published ‘**Coronavirus our approach to decision-making**’. The document set out some indicative steps for the relaxation of restrictions when specific criteria are met. Following the publication of the Executive’s document Sport NI has produced this Framework to guide decision making within the sport and physical recreation sector regarding **how** a gradual resumption of sport and physical recreation might take place in Northern Ireland (NI). It is based upon consideration of information from a wide range of sources including consultations with Sports Governing Bodies, discussions with Sport Ireland and UK Sport and consideration of other international responses from proven sporting systems (e.g. Australia and New Zealand) and representative groups (e.g. European Network of Outdoor Sports).

The resumption of sport and physical recreation will be an important contributor to the return to normality within Northern Ireland. However decisions regarding **when** this can happen are a matter for the Executive following consultation with the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) and Public Health Authority (PHA). Any resumption can only take place when the Executive judges that conditions are suitable and the key criteria to inform this judgement are presented within the Executive’s document.

The resumption process will need to take place in a phased manner in line with incremental easing of lockdown measures. As the Executive will apply a risk based approach to determine how any easing of measures should proceed, the sector must understand that progress through a phased return to sport and physical recreation will be totally dependent on how the Executive assesses that Northern Ireland is doing in terms of managing the outbreak. As some second or third wave upsurges in terms of infection are predicted by the World Health Organisation, it would be important to view the phasing and steps within this Framework as a guide. The time spent in each step may vary and is likely to be a minimum of 3 weeks but **potentially significantly longer** (e.g. 6 or more weeks) if criteria are not met to permit the next transition. Caution will be important at each step but especially during the **AMBER** phase which encompasses **steps 1** and **step 2** of the Executive’s Pathway to recovery. Should any strong upsurge of infection take place, it may be necessary to step backwards for a period in order to reassess and control the upsurge before moving forward again. Stepping backwards would mean as a minimum returning to the restrictions associated with the previous step. Given the number of transitions people are likely to face, it is important to provide support to bolster their mental health and well-being throughout. This important aspect is addressed in section 4.0 of the Framework.

## Geographic Context

NI has a unique position within the sporting landscape, many sports align to the island of Ireland, others to the UK and a minority operate as NI only organisations. It is therefore important that sports operating within NI have all relevant information made available to them. Alignment of response in terms of resumption of sport (where safe and therefore possible) is viewed as ideal in sports that operate across the whole island of Ireland. However as the Chief Medical officer has indicated, there is the possibility of regional or cluster outbreaks to be considered. These may add further complications making alignment on issues extremely difficult. Northern Ireland is currently building capacity and capability in terms of testing, contact tracing and cluster management and this will continue over the coming weeks.

There is learning becoming available from countries that are further ahead in terms of their outbreak and also from work currently taking place within Ireland and the UK. Given the rapidly changing environment, this Framework will be continuously reviewed in order to incorporate best practice as it becomes available.

## **2.0 The Framework**

The purpose of this framework is to act as a **high level guide** for sports as they consider their specific plans for resumption. It is important to recognise from the outset that for some sports this may not mean a return to how they were operating before the outbreak, at least not in the medium term. Until a vaccine is developed and is widely available, sports may need to consider modifications to their competitions, training and events. Sport NI recognises that a number of sports have already drawn up staged plans, some with input from their International Federations. It is recommended that all sports in NI consider their plans against the appropriate category within the Framework presented here. This is to aid appropriate alignment between each sport plan and the Executive's pathway document. Those that have not yet developed a plan could consider using the Framework to guide their thinking. The aim is for each sport to develop a detailed operational plan under each of the 5 steps presented in the Framework. Sport NI will be able to give individual guidance to sports who need it. Initial focus will be on the shift from the current **RED** Phase (Lockdown) to an **AMBER** phase which contains **two steps (1 and 2)** when certain outdoor sports can start activity in small groups. In time and when the Covid-19 outbreak is contained sufficiently, focus will shift on to **step 3** which will be an extended **Yellow** Phase when both outdoor and indoor sport activity would take place in larger groups. The next progression would be to a **GREEN** phase which contains **two steps (4 and 5)**. This phase would lead to full training and competition across sports in line within general PHA guidelines that exist at the time, a re-opening of leisure centres and spectators able to attend live sporting events in restricted numbers. The Figure below shows the key **5 steps** outlined in the Executive's Pathway document and maps these to the three distinct phases in this Framework. The phases are distinct in terms of number of people interacting **AMBER** (2-10 people),

**YELLOW** (up to 30 people), **GREEN** (30+ people). Completion of each phase will represent a key milestone in the progression towards the resumption of sport and physical recreation in Northern Ireland.

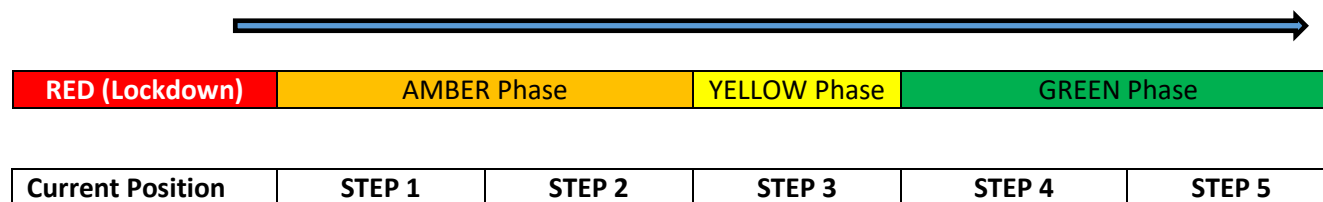


Figure 1 – Diagram to show phased approach to the resumption of sport and physical recreation aligned to the 5 steps in the Executive’s document

## 2.1 The range of sports

There is diversity within the range of sports that brings a layer of complexity to consideration of a Framework. Sport NI recognises that there are different categories that could be used to group sports. The categories used here are intended to cover the range in a manner that is useful and applicable within Northern Ireland.

There are 6 **CATEGORIES** – some examples of sports are listed for illustration purposes, with a more comprehensive list presented in appendix 1.

- **Outdoor Recreation** e.g. hill walking, orienteering, mountain biking, angling
- **Water sports** e.g. canoeing, rowing, sailing, surfing, swimming
- **Non-Contact** e.g. golf, tennis, bowls, archery, cycling, athletics, equestrian, motorsports
- **Contact (lower risk)** e.g. football, Gaelic football, hockey, netball, basketball
- **Contact (higher risk)** e.g. rugby, boxing, wrestling
- **High Performance / Professional athletes**

## 2.2 Preparation to make the transition from **RED** (Lockdown) phase into **AMBER** Phase (STEP 1)

It is likely that following any announcements from the Executive, sports will have a short period of notice before any easing in public health measures to initiate **STEP 1**. Early preparation by completing the tasks identified below will position each sport to proceed when the Executive and health authorities deem that it is possible to do so.

1. Complete a **risk assessment** of the transition to be made.

This should include factors such as preparation of outdoor training environments (e.g. **Amber** phase STEP 1) and in later phases indoor and competition environments. Consideration of management of numbers involved, strategies to limit time and maintenance of social distancing to reduce person to person contact, cleaning of equipment and any shared facilities used (e.g. toilets), sanitation provision for participants and identification of a safe space for isolation of an individual should they become unwell, are among aspects to be considered.

2. Develop a detailed **protocol** to demonstrate how risks are managed and mitigated at an operational level in order for resumption to the level of activity permitted within the **AMBER** phase **STEP 1**
3. **Provide education to participants** in order to set expectations and promote the desirable behaviours that will need to be displayed to protect the integrity of the **AMBER** phase **STEP 1** and keep progression of the resumption on track.

**Sport NI will be able to provide guidance to individual sports in order to assist the completion of these important tasks.**

## 2.3 Future Transitions

Chief Medical Officer and Public Health Authority advice to the Executive will determine when it is possible to permit further easing of public health restrictions that may lead to additional transitions, **AMBER** Phase **STEP 1** to **STEP 2** then on to **YELLOW** phase (**STEP 3**) and in time **GREEN** phase **STEP 4** and finally **STEP 5**. At each transition, **sports will be expected to revisit the three tasks above** to ensure that appropriate adjustments can be made and progress maintained.

**Sport NI will continue to support sports on an individual basis and share best practice within the sport sector to assist with management of transitions.**

## **2.4 Important considerations associated with a return to increased training load following RED Phase (Lockdown)**

There is likely to be an increased risk of injury in some sports especially if individuals are significantly increasing their loading following a period of lockdown. The escalation of training at any accelerated rate, may also compromise the immune system in a higher risk environment as lockdown restrictions ease and contacts increase. For this reason, the advice to everyday people is not to do more than usual at this time. Non-high performance athletes, with limited medical support should take care managing their immune system health and follow correct periodisation approaches to both training and diet. A graduated approach to training is therefore recommended. Where available (e.g. through clubs) it would be wise to engage relevant support staff for advice on graduated return to training.

Individuals who have been infected by Covid-19 require careful management as they return to sport.

**Sport NI will be able to provide guidance regarding management of this latter scenario.**

## **2.5 Important considerations for Vulnerable Groups**

A range of groups may need special consideration within a sport's planning because they may be at increased risk at this time. Some para-athletes and others with underlying medical conditions (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/people-at-higher-risk-from-coronavirus/whos-at-higher-risk-from-coronavirus/>) that are concurrent with the Covid-19 threat may be in this category. If this is the case the individual's regular Physician should be consulted. There will however often be alternative training options possible and every reasonable effort should be made to find solutions that enable para-athletes and others with underlying medical conditions to participate at each transition stage.

**Sport NI will be able to provide guidance to individual sports in this regard.**

## 2.6 Transitions for each category of sport

The following section shows how a resumption to sport could take place in each of 5 categories of sports. Further examples of sports within these categories is found in appendix 1.

It is important to recognise that Executive decisions regarding any easing of restrictions will mean that groups of sports will likely move forward at different times. They may also remain within different phases for variable time periods.

For each however, the transitions are graduated and the sequence will be **RED** to **STEP 1 AMBER** to **STEP 2 AMBER** to **STEP 3 YELLOW** to **STEP 4 GREEN** and **STEP 5 GREEN**

The numbers used for people groupings within the next section are those identified within the Executive's document but it is reasonable to expect that future decisions may be taken that influence the **size of groupings and gatherings** that are permitted in Northern Ireland. In addition testing and contact tracing are likely to become more widespread as measures to help control the outbreak. In time these can be factored into the document where appropriate.

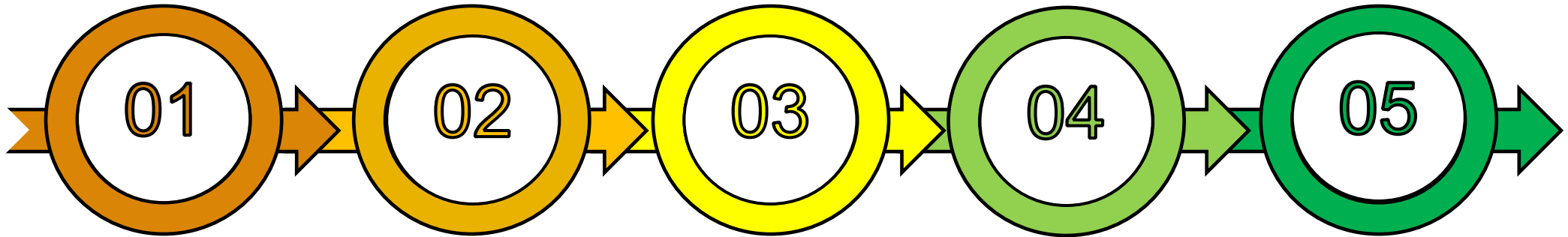
Each **STEP** contains a mix of general conditions and sport specific conditions to guide activity. Each subsequent **STEP** builds on those before.

**Sport NI will continue to review the information within this section in order to update and improve this document as more information becomes available.**



## 2.6.1

# The 5 key steps to resumption of Outdoor Recreation – also see continuation on next page



Car parks, mountain walks and trails open

Stay within any travel distance limitations that may apply. Do not travel with someone from outside your household unless social distancing can be maintained

Small groups of  $\leq 6$  people who do not share a household

Maintain social distancing at all times. Prevent congregations of people

Use systems to control numbers at known 'hot spots'

Individuals operate at low risk and within their capabilities

No organised events

As for STEP 1 and in addition:

Groups of  $\leq 10$  people who do not share a household

Outdoor Recreation team activities up to a maximum of 10 participants / staff

No mass gatherings / events

Mountain biking permitted on more challenging trails but individuals should avoid locations that bring unnecessary risk (e.g. remote / hazardous conditions)

As for STEP 2 and in addition:

Outdoor activities - groups of  $\leq 30$  people

Outdoor Recreation team activities up to a maximum of 30 participants / staff

Outdoor Recreation Centres open - Indoor activities possible with increased numbers up to a maximum of 30. Group size dependent on size of indoor space.

As for STEP 3 and in addition:

Outdoor activities for larger numbers  $>30$  where social distancing cannot be easily maintained and multiple short contacts likely.

Indoor activities for larger numbers  $>30$  where social distancing cannot be consistently maintained but contacts are limited or mitigated

Events can take place but with restrictions in total numbers of people involved.

Any NI conditions on gatherings will apply e.g. size

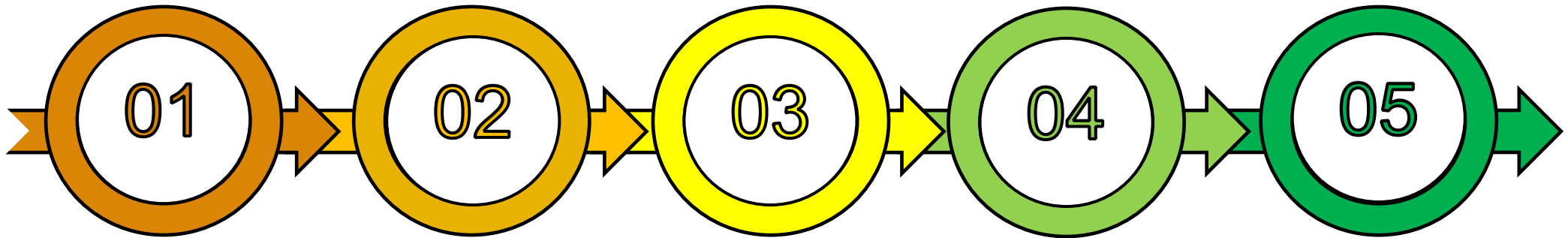
As for STEP 4 and in addition:

No restrictions on outdoor recreation activities outside of any general PHA guidelines in place at the time

Return to full use of outdoor recreation facilities

Spectators able to attend live events on a restricted basis.

## The 5 key steps to resumption of Outdoor Recreation – continued from previous page



Aim for no shared contact with hard surfaces e.g. equipment.  
If unavoidable disinfect surfaces between use by different participants / groups

Indoor facilities closed with the exception of restricted access to small shared facilities e.g. storage area / toilet/ throughways. These are disinfected regularly with sanitation products available

Avoid, running, cycling or riding in the slipstream of others

Mountain biking, including riding on easy, local mountain bike trails is allowed but organised events are not.

Angling permitted – tackle shops closed – may operate via deliveries / click and collect

Indoor activities  $\leq 4$  people who do not share a household

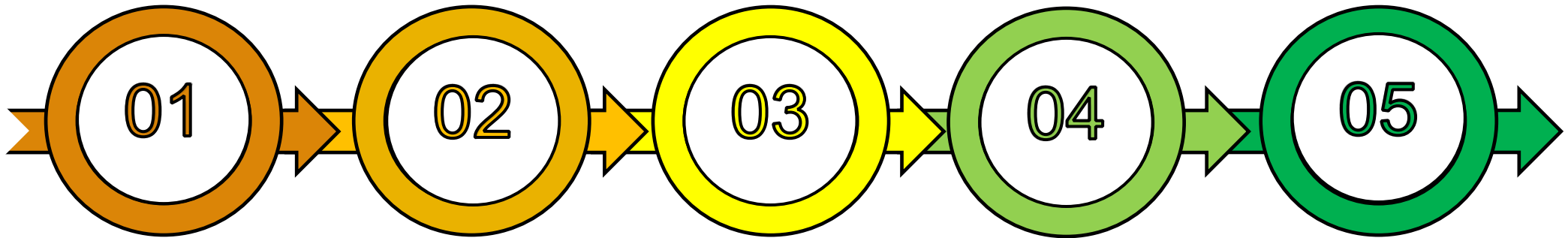
In all cases, maintain social distancing as far as possible - any contacts are brief

Indoor facilities used must have public health measures in place

Prevent congregations of people indoors

## 2.6.2

## The 5 key steps to resumption of Water-sports – also see continuation on next page



Outdoor activities - small groups of  $\leq 6$  people who do not share a household

Do not travel with someone from outside your household unless social distancing can be maintained

Maintain social distancing with all outside of your household. Training combinations / pairs / crews must comply with this.

Prevent congregations of people, manage flow

Use systems to control numbers at known 'hot spots'

Individuals operate at low risk and within their capabilities. Higher risk water-based activities discouraged as they may lead to increased pressure on emergency services

As for STEP 1 and in addition:

Outdoor water based activities - groups of  $\leq 10$  people who do not share a household

Water-sport team squad training allowed up to a maximum of 10 athletes / staff

Water Sports Centre Indoor activities restricted to  $\leq 4$  people who do not share a household

In all cases, maintain social distancing as far as possible - any contacts are brief

Indoor facilities used must have public health measures in place

Prevent congregations of people indoors

As for STEP 2 and in addition:

Outdoor water based activities - groups of  $\leq 30$  people

Water sport team sport training allowed up to a maximum of 30 athletes / staff

Indoor activities possible with increased numbers up to a maximum of 30. Group size dependent on size of indoor space.

In all cases, maintain social distancing as far as possible - any contacts are brief

As for STEP 3 and in addition:

Outdoor activities for larger numbers  $>30$  where social distancing cannot be easily maintained and multiple short contacts likely.

Indoor activities for larger numbers  $>30$  where social distancing cannot be consistently maintained but contacts are limited or mitigated

Events can take place but with restrictions in total numbers of people involved. Any NI conditions on gatherings will apply e.g. size

Full training in water-sports

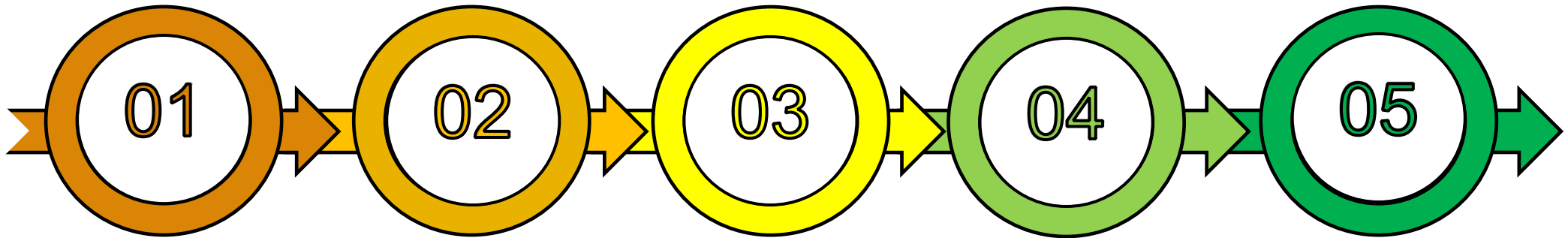
As for STEP 4 and in addition:

No restrictions on water-sports activities outside of any general PHA guidelines in place at the time

Return to full use of sporting facilities

Spectators able to attend live events on a restricted basis.

## The 5 key steps to resumption of Water-sports – continued from previous page



Aim for no shared contact with hard surfaces e.g. equipment. If unavoidable disinfect surfaces between use by different participants / groups

Swim in open water. Outdoor pools remain closed.

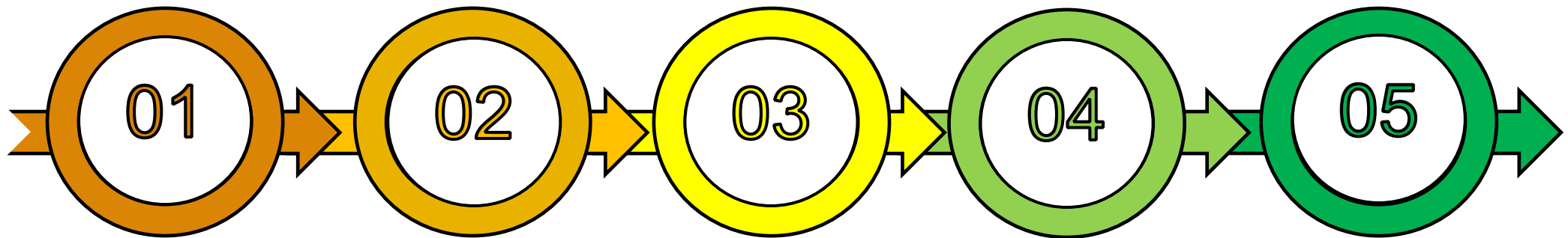
All forms of water-sports practised on open waterways are allowed – sailing, wind surfing, canoeing, rowing, kayaking, surfing, paddle-boarding and the use of motorised craft (in line with navigation authority guidance)

Indoor facilities closed with the exception of restricted access to small shared facilities e.g. storage area / toilet / through-ways. These are disinfected regularly with sanitation products available

Leisure Centres and Public Aquatic Centres open – may initially be on restricted hours

## 2.6.3

# The 5 key steps to resumption of non-contact sports – also see continuation on next page



Outdoor activities - Small groups of  $\leq 6$  people who do not share a household

Do not travel with someone from outside your household unless social distancing can be maintained

Maintain social distancing at all times. Prevent congregations of people, manage flow

Aim for no shared contact with hard surfaces e.g. equipment. If unavoidable disinfect surfaces between use by different participants / groups

Use systems to control numbers on greens, ranges, courts, courses, riding out routes, nets and circuits

Individuals operate at low risk and within their capabilities

As for STEP 1 and in addition:

Outdoor activities - groups of  $\leq 10$  people who do not share a household

Team sport training allowed up to a maximum of 10 athletes / staff

Indoor activities  $\leq 4$  people who do not share a household

In all cases, maintain social distancing as far as possible - any contacts are brief

Indoor facilities used must have public health measures in place

Prevent congregations of people indoors

As for STEP 2 and in addition:

Outdoor activities - groups of  $\leq 30$  people

Team sport training allowed up to a maximum of 30 athletes / staff

Indoor activities possible with increased numbers up to a maximum of 30. Group size dependent on size of indoor space.

In all cases, maintain social distancing as far as possible - any contacts are brief

As for STEP 3 and in addition:

Outdoor activities for larger numbers  $>30$  where social distancing cannot be easily maintained and multiple short contacts likely.

Indoor activities for larger numbers  $>30$  where social distancing cannot be consistently maintained but contacts are limited or mitigated

Any NI conditions on gatherings will apply e.g. size

Leisure Centres and indoor leisure facilities open – may initially be on restricted hours

Full training in non-contact sports

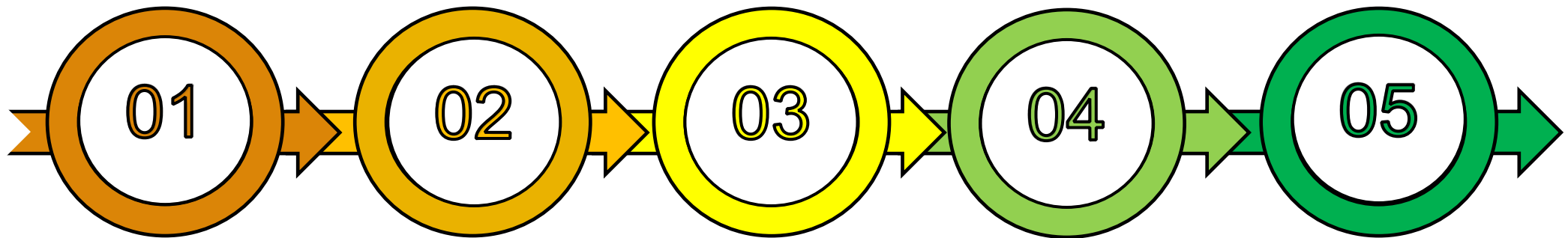
As for STEP 4 and in addition:

No restrictions on non-contact activities outside of any general PHA guidelines in place at the time

Return to full use of sporting facilities

Spectators able to attend live events on a restricted basis.

## The 5 key steps to resumption of non-contact sports – continued from previous page



Indoor facilities closed with the exception of restricted access to small shared facilities e.g. storage area / toilet/ throughways. These are disinfected regularly with sanitation products available

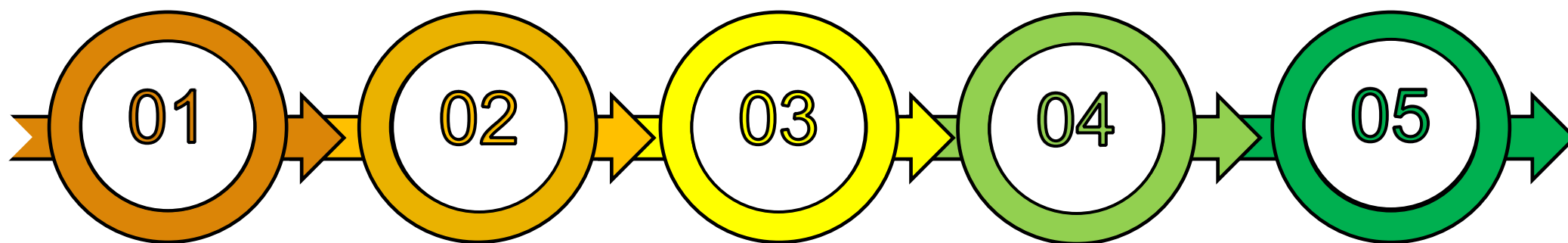
Avoid, running or cycling in the slipstream of others

Individuals arrive, train/ practice and leave

Competitive sport can take place but with restrictions in total numbers of people involved – athletes / coaches / staff / officials and spectators

Some events may take place 'behind closed doors'

## 2.6.4 The 5 key steps to resumption of Contact sports (lower risk) – also see continuation on next page



Outdoor activities - small groups of  $\leq 6$  people who do not share a household

Do not travel with someone from outside your household unless social distancing can be maintained

Maintain social distancing at all times

Aim for no shared contact with hard surfaces e.g. equipment including balls, mats, cones, weights and disinfect surfaces regularly between use by different participants / groups

Prevent congregations of people

No organised contact sport team training

As for STEP 1 and in addition:

Team sport training allowed up to a maximum of 10 athletes / staff

Skill drills and tactical drills with no close contact

Indoor activities  $\leq 4$  people who do not share a household

In all cases, maintain social distancing as far as possible - any contacts are brief

Indoor facilities used must have public health measures in place

Prevent congregations of people indoors

Retain records of people attending

As for STEP 2 and in addition:

Outdoor activities - groups of  $\leq 30$  people

Team sport training allowed up to a maximum of 30 athletes / staff

Indoor activities possible with increased numbers up to a maximum of 30. Group size dependent on size of indoor space.

In all cases, maintain social distancing as far as possible - any contacts are brief

As for STEP 3 and in addition:

Outdoor activities for larger numbers  $>30$  where social distancing cannot be easily maintained and multiple short contacts likely.

Indoor activities for larger numbers  $>30$  where social distancing cannot be consistently maintained but contacts are limited or mitigated

Any NI conditions on gatherings will apply e.g. size

Leisure Centres and indoor leisure facilities open – may initially be on restricted hours

Full training in lower risk contact sports

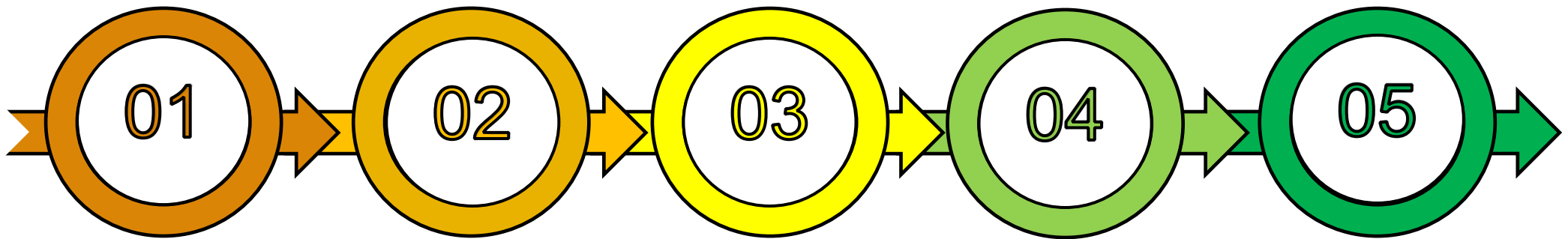
As for STEP 4 and in addition:

No restrictions on lower risk contact sport activities outside of any general PHA guidelines in place at the time

Return to full use of sporting facilities

Spectators able to attend live events on a restricted basis.

The 5 key steps to resumption of Contact sports (lower risk) – continued from previous page



Individuals arrive, train/ practice and leave

Avoid, running in the slipstream of others

Indoor facilities closed with the exception of restricted access to small shared facilities e.g. storage area / toilet/ throughways. These are disinfected regularly with sanitation products

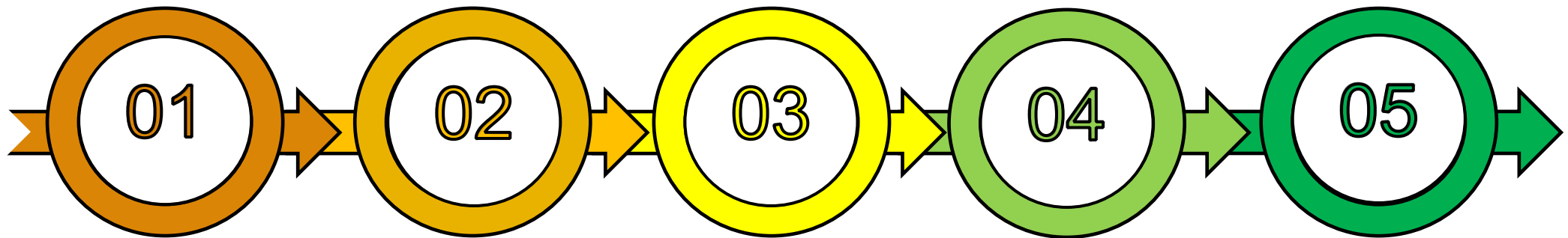
Competitive sport can take place but with restrictions in total numbers of people involved – athletes / coaches / staff/ officials and spectators

Some events may take place 'behind closed doors'



## 2.6.5

# The 5 key steps to resumption of Contact sports (higher risk) – also see continuation on



Outdoor activities - small groups of  $\leq 6$  people who do not share a household

Do not travel with someone from outside your household unless social distancing can be maintained

Maintain social distancing at all times

Aim for no shared contact with hard surfaces e.g. equipment including balls, mats, cones, weights and disinfect surfaces regularly between use by different participants / groups

Prevent congregations of people

No organised contact sport team training

As for STEP 1 and in addition:

Team sport training allowed up to a maximum of 10 athletes / staff

Skill drills and tactical drills with no close contact - e.g. no tackling, wrestling, rucks, mauls, lineouts, scrums or contact sparring

Technical drills with e.g. bags, pads, paddles, shields  
Shadow sparring permitted

Indoor activities  $\leq 4$  people who do not share a household

In all cases, maintain social distancing as far as possible - any contacts are brief

As for STEP 2 and in addition:

Outdoor activities - groups of  $\leq 30$  people

Team sport training allowed up to a maximum of 30 athletes / staff

Indoor activities possible with increased numbers up to a maximum of 30. Group size dependent on size of indoor space.

In all cases, maintain social distancing as far as possible - any contacts are brief

As for STEP 3 and in addition:

Outdoor activities for larger numbers  $>30$  where social distancing cannot be easily maintained and multiple short contacts likely.

Indoor activities for larger numbers  $>30$  where social distancing cannot be consistently maintained but contacts are limited or mitigated

Any NI conditions on gatherings will apply e.g. size

Leisure Centres and indoor leisure facilities open – may initially be on restricted hours

Modified training in higher risk contact sports

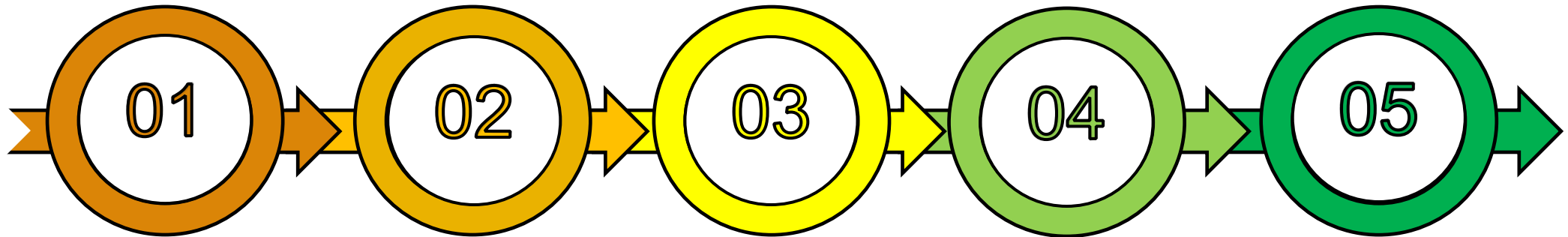
As for STEP 4 and in addition:

Close physical contact sports resume full training and full competition (without modification)

Return to full use of sporting facilities

Spectators able to attend live events on a restricted basis.

## The 5 key steps to resumption of Contact sports (higher risk) – continued from previous page



Individuals arrive, train/  
practice and leave

Avoid, running in the  
slipstream of others

Indoor facilities closed with the  
exception of restricted access  
to small shared facilities e.g.  
storage area / toilet/ through-  
ways. These are disinfected  
regularly with sanitation  
products

Indoor facilities used must  
have public health measures in  
place

Prevent congregations of  
people indoors

Retain records of people  
attending

Modifications (removal of  
close physical contact in a  
temporary capacity) may allow  
a form of competition to take  
place in some sports

Any competition to take place  
with restrictions in total  
numbers of people involved –  
athletes / coaches / staff /  
officials and spectators

Some events may take place  
'behind closed doors'

## 2.6.6 Category: High Performance / Professional athletes (HP/PA)

Within the UK a working group of leaders, senior Medical Officers and partner organisation representatives including institutes, athlete representative bodies and sport venue hosts across Olympic, Paralympic and Professional sports have been considering the five steps suggested as necessary for a full unrestricted resumption of High Performance / Elite sport competition. This has also been considered by Sport Ireland and Professional sports within Ireland. There is broad agreement in terms of the five steps in this specific context and their sequence.

**Step 1.** Individual outdoor field-based or in-door gym conditioning

In HP/PA context this step represents AMBER Phase with small numbers

**Step 2.** Team training

In HP/PA context this step represents YELLOW Phase with larger squad numbers

**Step 3.** Domestic competition - no spectators

**Step 4.** Cross border - no spectators

**Step 5.** No restrictions - spectators present



Step One of return to training can be described as a return to a level of organised individual programme training in a defined performance facility while adhering to the government social distancing advice. This might be individual training or groups of individual athletes training in the same facility/space but adhering to social distancing and other steps to minimise the spread of COVID-19. Under step one, travel to training venues is also permitted.

**It represents the transition from RED to AMBER** for high performance / professional athletes. These are **treated in this framework as a separate category** as these athletes are full-time and **the transition effectively represents a ‘return to work’**.

**This would require a level of dispensation from The Executive to do so.** This has already taken place in several European Countries e.g. Germany, The Netherlands and Sweden. This dispensation would require the Executive to grant permission for high performance / professional athletes to start individual training as outlined in step 1 of return to training (see previous page). Permission would be subject to all sports endorsing and agreeing to follow the **Elite sport return to training guidance** produced by the working group.

The **Elite sport return to training guidance** for step 1 has been consulted on and was published on 13 May 2020 by The Department for Digital, Media, Culture and Sport (DCMS). The **Guidance** defines a minimum practice set of standards relating to return to training and is available at the following link:

[Elite sport return to training guidance: Step One - GOV.UK](#)

The guidance applies to all athletes, players and the staff who support them to protect not only their health and wellbeing but also that of the wider community and healthcare workers during any resumption of training. There will be an **'opt-in'** option for any athletes, players or staff with potential to be involved.

The **Elite sport return to training guidance** has sections that provide guidelines for

- (a) Sports, Professional Clubs and service provision partners e.g. Sports Institutes.
- (b) Venue hosts / operators (recognising that not all sites are the full responsibility of either a sport or a Sports Institute)

The guidelines within **both** sections of the **Elite sport return to training guidance** would need to be met in order to be confident that the approach taken to returning to organised training could be considered healthy, safe and in line with current guidance and best practice.

The recommendation from Sport NI is that if sporting organisations are seeking special dispensation to recommence activity with their High Performance / Professional athletes, they are required to demonstrate to the Executive, Department of Health and the Public Health Authorities that they meet the guidelines within the **Elite sport return to training guidance** and are also taking additional measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Sport NI will make the **Elite sport return to training guidance** available to sports once it is published.

It is critical that all sports must maintain awareness of the evolving COVID-19 environment and align current practices with informed decisions for athletes/other personnel safety.

Note that any resumption of organised high performance sport training should not in any way detract from the hosts/operator's ability to support ongoing usage of the facility for supporting the NHS or key workers requirements. Any resumption should also not use resources if the demand for those same resources from the NHS remains unmet.

A resumption of the normal training environment will enable High Performance / Professional athletes to regain conditioning, gather focus and prepare for future competition (Olympic, Paralympic, World and European) without conceding ground to other international competitors. In NI this is a relatively small group who are supported by professional science and medicine staff. Strict access to facilities, reporting and monitoring can all be put in place while training numbers can be managed to respect social distancing. The challenge to satisfy all the guidelines within the **Elite sport return to training guidance** may be easier when the sport owns and operates the facility. Sports / Sports Institutes that operate on hosted sites would depend on the host being able to make a full commitment to deliver on the guidance.

### **3.0 Guidance regarding larger sporting events**

In time as sports progress through the steps, there will be the need for further guidance on staging events either outdoor or indoor. While these could be initially 'behind closed doors' there will eventually be a desire to include spectators initially in restricted numbers. Sports Grounds Safety Authority (SGSA) have previously provided guidance to sports grounds operators which is available at <https://sgsa.org.uk/covid-19-coronavirus-guidance-updated/> . There are many developments currently happening in sport around the world (including UK and Ireland) to consider challenges associated with staging larger sporting events. This is a fast developing area and as the learning is assimilated it will be possible to provide further guidance to the sport sector in Northern Ireland.

**Sport NI will continue to monitor emerging practice and engage with SGSA about future supports that could be provided to the sector in NI to help facilitate a return to venue led sport.**

#### 4.0 Covid-19 Healthy adjustment and transition

The psycho-social impact of lockdown and the phases of return are complex. Struggling to adjust to further changes in circumstances is normal and Sport NI has developed a number of resources to support those who are struggling and need a helping hand. Main focus areas in this period will be assisting people with the decision to access the emerging sporting opportunities in step 1 and affirming how they will have to operate to both enjoy the sport but also prioritise self-care for all. In time as the steps progress, focus will be on reconnecting those relationships that may have suffered during the lockdown. Sport NI has been working with Inspire Wellbeing to develop an **online resource hub around Mental Health and Wellbeing for the sports sector**. The hub went live towards the end of April 2020, has lots of excellent features and has generated excellent feedback to date. The hub is particularly strong in providing clear signposting to PHA services within every geographical area in NI. Sport NI is committed to further enhance and develop the content but decided to launch the hub ahead of schedule to make this support available immediately to all people throughout the sporting community irrespective of ability, age and role they play within their sporting club. The hub can be accessed at [www.inspiresupporthub.org/sports](http://www.inspiresupporthub.org/sports).

As the steps progress it is vital that sports support their athletes and staff to ensure that they feel psychologically safe during the phased return to training and competition. Sport NI is currently providing mental health and well-being support to sports governing bodies that have identified a specific need in this area.

Sport NI will continue to develop the Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub and other resources for the sports sector in order to reach out to as many people as possible, encouraging people to engage with the hub, use the resources and when necessary link directly to the support services available to help them.

#### 5.0 Building on this Framework

Within this document reference has been made to factors that indicate the need to keep it under regular review. Countries are managing their outbreak in different ways and trialling approaches to reintroduce sport and physical recreation in a safe fashion. Learning is emerging from these experiences that will prove useful to those countries who are a little further behind in their outbreak response. The phased transition model shown in this framework for how sport and physical recreation could be resumed may require further modification, but in the format shown here acts as a tool to help sports think about and prepare for the challenges ahead. It encourages the development of sport specific protocols that can sit under this Framework providing further guidance to

sport participants. **It is designed to help the implementation of the Executive's 5 Step Pathway within the sport sector.** Through responsible actions within each phase and at each of the **5 steps**, all sport participants can play their part in gradually transitioning NI towards a new type of normality.

## 6.0 Appendix 1 - Examples of sports matched to their likely category

Note that it is a **decision for sports to match themselves to one of the categories shown** and be satisfied that the protocols that they develop are compliant with the Executive recommendations at any of the five steps. This position will be based on the medical and scientific advice provided by the Department of Health and Public Health Authority. It the majority of cases sports are easily assigned to the categories used within this Framework. However some sports may wish to consider (in relation to transmission of Covid-19), whether they view themselves as Contact sports (lower risk) or Contact sports (higher risk –due to the nature of the close physical contact). In the table below SNI has identified the category that seems the most appropriate but sports should select a different category if they do not agree with the category shown here. The Board and Accounting Officer within each sport are responsible for the actions taken to plot a safe resumption of their sport applying the 5 steps as outlined by the Executive and presented in this Framework.

*The table below is for illustration and does not show an exhaustive list of sports. Also note \* that running and cycling are approved activities even under lockdown.*

Outdoor Recreation	Water-sports	Non-contact Sports		Contact Sport (Lower risk)	Contact Sport (Higher risk)
Mountaineering	Canoeing	Archery	Handball (Gaelic Games)	Camogie	American Football
Mountain-biking (*discipline of cycling)	Sailing	Athletics * see note above table	Volleyball	Football	Boxing
Angling	Rowing	Badminton	Weightlifting	Gaelic Football	Judo
Orienteering	Sub-aqua	Boccia	Goalball	Hurling	Karate
	Surfing	Bowls		Hockey	Rugby (all codes)
	Swimming	Cricket		Ice Hockey	Wrestling
	Water-skiing	Cycling * see note above table		Netball	Taekwondo
		Darts		Basketball	Wheelchair Rugby
		Equestrian		Wheelchair Basketball	
		Fencing			
		Golf			
		Gymnastics			
		Motor sports			
		Shooting			
		Skateboarding			
		Snooker			
		Squash			
		Table Tennis			
		Tennis			
		Triathlon			