

Travel Guidance for Elite Sport – Sport NI Sports Institute: January 2021

1. Scope of Guidance

Travel in the time of coronavirus is constantly changing and can be filled with uncertainty. This document outlines the process for safe travelling and returning to training at the Sport Northern Ireland Sports Institute. It serves as a guide and will remain under regular review as circumstances change. If there are any concerns with any of the content of this document, please contact the Sports Medicine team at the Sports Institute for further information at medicaladmin@sportni.net.

2. General travel guidance – key considerations

At the time of writing (January 2021) travel both within and outside the UK and Ireland, is not recommended for all but essential purposes.

Travel into Northern Ireland requires proof of a negative COVID-19 test within 72 hours prior to arrival. This rule is universally applied and without exemption for elite sport.

A quarantine period of 10 days is in place for all travel into Northern Ireland. Exemptions to this rule are available for elite sport provided defined criteria are met. Certain countries have a high prevalence of newer COVID variants. These pose an additional risk and quarantine exemption may be unavoidable, even with elite sport status.

3. Considerations for Elite Sport Exemption

Elite sports participation, as recognised through the Sports' Governing Body, has been permitted as a reason to avoid quarantine restrictions that apply to the general public. The UK Government has produced specific guidance around elite sport and this has been adopted for use in NI with some minor adjustment. This information can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-phased-return-of-sport-and-recreation>

The adjustment relates to athletes eligible to qualify as an elite sports person within NI. Eligibility is defined within the Health Protection (Coronavirus, restrictions) Regulations Northern Ireland 2021, with a summary of this information available at the following link:

[Return to Sport FAQ's | Sport NI](#)

Training and competition in elite sport should observe stages one to four of the Elite Sports Guidance Framework as published by the UK Government. This details the required level of risk assessment and associated mitigations that should take place prior to any training or competition necessary for a team or athlete to qualify for elite sport exemption.

These regulations can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-phased-return-of-sport-and-recreation/elite-sport-return-to-cross-border-competition-guidance>

It is recommended to carry a letter from the Sport Governing Body as evidence of elite sporting

status. This should be presented to Border Control on entrance to the UK at the time of presentation of the passenger locator form.

4. Return to Sport NI Sports Institute Facilities and Services Post Travel

Reducing the risk of COVID-19 infection and transmission is a priority for the Sport NI Sports Institute. Any athlete who develops COVID-19 infection, while likely to make a full recovery, in the best-case scenario will still require approximately four weeks to return to full training. As athletes prepare for significant international competition in the coming months, four weeks of unnecessary missed preparation will have a detrimental effect on this preparation and is best avoided if at all possible.

To maintain the safety of the Sports Institute environment and to protect our athletes, the following needs to take place prior to, during, and following travel:

Step 1 - Perform Pre-Travel Risk Assessment:

A comprehensive travel risk assessment should be undertaken to consider issues prior to travel, during travel, during training camp or competition, during return travel, and post-travel. The subsequent risk mitigations required should be detailed through this risk assessment.

Step 2 – Submit Risk Assessment to Sport NI Return to Sport Group:

It is advised that this travel risk assessment is presented to the Return to Sport Group working on behalf of Sport NI and the Department of Communities. This group will review the risk assessment and advise on any measures that can be taken to strengthen this, and any changes that may be required prior to approval. It is anticipated this would be submitted well in advance to the travel to facilitate a timely review and time for any changes to be implemented.

The risk assessment should be submitted to the following email – returertosport@sportni.net.

Testing Considerations:

COVID-19 testing offers additional reassurance and is recommended. A *minimum* level of testing required is outlined. Additional testing may be utilised depending on duration of travel, exposure to additional sporting bubbles, competition and international requirements and financial constraints.

Reverse Transcriptase Polymerase chain reaction test for SARS COV-2 (RT-PCR) offers the highest sensitivity and specificity and should be used where possible. Rapid antigen tests can be used to support the testing process but are less reliable. The UK Government have a list of approved rapid tests with appropriate sensitivity levels that should be used where possible. The list of approved tests is available at - [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): testing for people travelling to England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-testing-for-people-travelling-to-england). Where travel to regions with a significant prevalence of new COVID-19 variants, rapid tests are not recommended.

Test 1 - 48-72 hours prior to travel (COVID RT-PCR test).

Test 2 - Further COVID RT-PCR test - 48-72 hours prior to return travel to the UK/Ireland.

Test 3 - An additional test would take place at day five post-travel. This can either be a RT-PCR-test

(arranged independently) or a rapid antigen test (Rapid Access Lateral Flow Test – if test 2 was a RT-PCR test) performed at the Sport Northern Ireland Sports Institute on day five post-travel.

A day five post-travel rapid antigen test can be booked through the Medical Administrator at the Sport NI Sports Institute via the following email address: medicaladmin@sportni.net.

Note - The athlete should limit their movements and self-isolate until the outcome of the test at day five. If negative, the athlete is free to resume training and competition. If this test is positive, a further confirmatory PCR test is required and should be booked through NHS Test and Trace.

This guidance is in alignment with the Home Country Sports Institutes and in alignment with current UK Government regulations.

All testing is funded at the expense of the sport with the exception of Test 3, were the SNISI can provide lateral flow testing on site at no charge.

5. Considerations in Preparation of a Travel Risk Assessment








It is anticipated that sports would present a travel risk assessment prior to travel and include details of when testing is likely to occur, details around training and the risk mitigations that would be in place. These would be a further extension of COVID-19 protocols which will already be in place in order to fulfil stages one to three of the Elite Sport Guidance Framework.



Travel Risk Assessment: The risk assessment should be comprehensive and address the following points:

Phase of Travel	Risk area/Mitigation
Pre-travel	Consider self-isolation period pre-gathering (7 days) COVID PCR test within 72 hours of travel Transport prior to departure Are any specific COVID requirements present in the destination country?
During travel	Mask use during travel Food provision at airport Seating plan on airplane/bus Travel from airport
Competition and training	Provision of pre-existing competition and training plans Travel to and from training Changing facilities Accommodation Room cleaning/laundry Dining Travel outside hotel Medical facilities Perform risk assessment of ALL facilities including gym, recovery area etc.
Post-travel	Travel to airport etc. Mitigations for homeward travel Transport to own home Isolation post travel PCR test 72 hours pre-travel Testing post travel (day 5)

6. Summary guidance

COVID-19 COVID-19 Travel Advice for Elite Athletes

- 1 Planning to Travel**
 -  Perform risk assessment
 -  Submit risk assessment to Return to Sport Group
- 2 <72 hours Pre Outbound Travel**
 -  COVID PCR test for all athletes and support staff
- 3 <72 hours Pre Homebound Travel**
 -  COVID PCR test for all athletes and support staff
- 4 Day 5 Post-Travel**
 -  Self isolate on arrival at home until day 5 test
 -  COVID PCR test or Lateral Flow Antigen test for all athletes and support staff
- 5 Return to Institute Training**
 -  If tests negative at step 3 & 4 - Immediate return to training at SNISI is permitted

7. Useful resources:

- Coronavirus NI travel regulations -

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-regulations-guidance-travel>

- Coronavirus regions requiring no quarantine period on travel to NI

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-countries-and-territories-exemptions>

- Elite Sport Stage 4 – Return to Cross Border Competition

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-phased-return-of-sport-and-recreation/elite-sport-return-to-cross-border-competition-guidance>

- Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance on the phased return of elite sport

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-phased-return-of-sport-and-recreation>