

Travel Guidance for Elite Sport – Sport NI Sports Institute: June 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. This advice is applicable to the Sport Institute athletes but general guidance should be first sought from the sport governing bodies as well as the Return to Sport group (returntosport@sportni.net) and the specific government travel web-pages (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-travel-advice>) as per the athletes' travel plans.

2. General travel guidance – key considerations

At the time of writing (June 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 is required when travelling to amber and red countries from the UK/NI and this should be checked prior to travel. Exemptions to this rule may be 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.

Travel within the UK or a green country, will not usually require COVID-19 testing but this should be discussed with the Sport Medicine department at SINI prior to gaining entry to sport institute premises.

3. Considerations for Elite Sport Exemption

Elite sports participation, as recognised through the Sports' Governing Body, may be 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 sportsperson 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 (see Figure 1):

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 – returntosport@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](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-testing-for-people-travelling-to-england)

(www.gov.uk). Where travel to regions with a significant prevalence of new COVID-19 variants, rapid tests are generally not recommended, with PCR tests being preferred.

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.

Individual testing requirements may vary – if in doubt, please discuss with Sports Medicine, SNISI.

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.

For UK travel only, 2 negative rapid antigen tests on arrival home, would allow the athlete to gain entry to Sport Institute facilities immediately and a 5 day quarantine period is not required.

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 (for general guidance, please see Figure 2):

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) may be required (see above guidance)

7. Figure 1



8. Figure 2




Travel Checklist for Elite Athletes

Pre-Travel - Plan Ahead



- ☒ Know the local public health rules of the destination
- ☒ Carry evidence of 'Elite Status' from your sport governing body
- ☐ Plan for a potential positive test during travel. Is appropriate medical insurance etc. available?
- ☒ Know the type of test required (RT-PCR or rapid antigen test)
- ☒ Obtain a COVID-19 test within pre-travel time frame of destination (even if vaccinated)
- ☐ NO travel if any COVID symptoms in the past 10 days; discuss with medical lead
- ☐ NO travel if you are self-isolating (Due to symptoms or you are a close contact)

During Travel - Hands, Face, Space



- ☒ Check in online where possible
- ☒ Maintain social distancing (2m) including from team mates
- ☒ Wear face covering at all time and Wash hands regularly (20 seconds). Avoid touching face.
- ☒ Have a checklist of recommended PPE to carry personally for plane, bus, hotel etc.
- ☒ Remain seated as much as possible during the flight
- ☒ Handle your own luggage
- ☒ Ventilate well during onward travel (bus, car, taxi) with open windows
- ☒ Consider testing of bus/car transport drivers

Return from Travel - Reduce Risk



- ☒ Carry evidence of a negative COVID test taken within specified time frame of home destination
- ☒ Complete Passenger Locator Form within 48 hours of arrival (if required)
- ☒ Train alone at home or outside, self-isolating until a negative post-travel test
- ☒ Be aware of current additional test and isolation requirements from destination of travel

Throughout Travel Observe:




HANDS



FACE



SPACE

9. 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

10. 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>