

Helping people back to sport and activities



As outdoor sport reopens next week, we've prepared some advice and ideas based on the tracking and monitoring we've been doing with people around their attitudes, intentions and feelings about getting back out there.

Sport England's most recent research shows that activity levels are significantly lower than they were before the pandemic and on top of that people are feeling nervous about their abilities and their conditioning – some 30% of people report a decline in their strength abilities for example. That said, people are looking ahead to the future positively with the changing weather and the vaccine roll-out both likely to play a significant role in encouraging people to get out there, play sport and be active.

Here's what people have told us will help them to #ReturnToPlay

Showcase your safety measures

The issue: While the vaccine rollout has created a sense of optimism and some people are feeling less worried about being close to others, there are more cautious people who do not see the vaccine as a silver bullet. Many told us they are still conscious about influencing transmission rates in the community or catching it themselves.

How you can help: People expect providers to overtly convey and enforce Covid-19 safety measures including managing any limitations on numbers, especially indoors, enforcing social-distancing measures, cleaning and using signage that encourages positive behaviour. For team sports, you should make the guidelines under which you're operating very clear from the off.

Mental Health matters – but show the benefits, don't tell

The issue: The pandemic and dreary weather has taken its toll on people's mental health and motivation. People tell us that they already know that staying active is a positive way to alleviate this but that when they're experiencing a lack of motivation, having it pointed out to them can make them feel guilty, so that it has the opposite effect.

How you can help: You don't need to tell people that physical activity and sport is good for their mental health – they already know this. People are responding better to compassion. Messaging should centre around making small lifestyle changes and building up gradually to increase physical capability as well as confidence. Encourage people to share their own stories, be kind to themselves and celebrate the daily victories.

Emphasise the enjoyment factor

The issue: Nearly two thirds of people (58%) told us that they miss the activities they were able to do before the outbreak. They want to think of exercise as something enjoyable to look forward to, and it plays different roles in people's lives.

How you can help: Make sure your provision in the coming months is highly enjoyable and fun. Give people something to look forward to. Tailor your messages to emphasise what your activity will bring people – fun, confidence, 'me time', a social element, wellbeing and fresh air.

Ease people back in

The issue: Even some of the most active say their fitness levels have been affected by the pandemic. Deconditioning and loss of strength is likely to present a real challenge to people's confidence and motivation.

How you can help: Work with your coaches and providers to ensure they understand the need to 'go easy'. Encourage people to make small, manageable changes to everyday habits to increase strength and stamina, as well as confidence. Take it slow and celebrate small wins. Encourage people not to give themselves a hard time on days they do not meet their own expectations or goals.

Keep it cheap or free

The issue: Since the start of the pandemic, employment levels for those aged 16 – 24 and 65+ have fallen by 6% creating extra financial burden. Women, younger adults, people with disabilities and people from Black and Asian ethnic backgrounds are most likely to have been disproportionately affected financially.

Many people told us they would rather not commit financially to long term memberships or subscriptions at the moment.

How you can help: Consider offering low cost, flexible options or hybrid options that help people build up to fuller payments.