

Covid-19 Guidelines on Safe Return to Gaelic Games

Covid-19: Guidelines on Safe Return to Gaelic Games

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Introduction and Context

In 2020 the Covid-19 Advisory Group was tasked with preparing a guidance document and recommendations that would inform the safe resumption of activities within the Gaelic Games family. What follows is an updated version for the 2021 season.

The basis of the recommendations for a Safe Return were reached having studied the best advice available from the Governments and National Health agencies on the island of Ireland, as well as other sporting bodies. The advice in this document is specific to the island of Ireland.

The document outlines and defines a set of recommended minimum practices for the reintroduction of activities in a methodical manner with the aim of preserving player and community safety. The objective is to advise members and clubs on how a resumption of activities can best be achieved in a controlled and safe manner.

The priority at all times must be to protect the health and welfare of all those involved in Gaelic Games and to minimise the risk of transmission within the wider community.

The GAA, Ladies Gaelic Football and Camogie Associations are community based, and volunteer-led organisations for the promotion of Gaelic sports and culture. Participation is voluntary; players, mentors, match officials and club officers may choose to opt-in or opt-out from activity at any level at their discretion.

Until the vaccine programmes north and south of the border are completed, there will be remain a significant risk associated with COVID-19. Public Health guidelines may prevent the participation of vulnerable groups. We encourage all others, but particularly those who may consider themselves in a vulnerable category, to seek appropriate contemporary advice and perform a personal risk-benefit analysis before deciding whether to re-engage in their chosen activity.

The efforts of ordinary club members in 2020 in ensuring that the guidelines in this document were diligently followed was a key reason for the success of last season. A repeat of that extraordinary commitment will be equally important this year in ensuring a safe and enjoyable year for everyone involved in Gaelic Games regardless of level or ability.

Shay Bannon
Chairman, Covid Advisory Group
Aibreán 2021

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Section 1 – MEDICAL INFORMATION

1. Background Information

COVID-19 is a viral infection which is highly infectious and contagious. COVID-19 disease is caused by infection with a virus, technically named SARS-CoV-2 virus, is a newly identified (novel) virus and the seventh (7th) Coronavirus known to infect humans. The resulting viral illness is referred to as COVID-19 disease. This virus is in the same coronavirus family as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (SARS-CoV or SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV or MERS), which caused the two previous coronavirus epidemic outbreaks, and have similar physical and biochemical properties and comparable transmission routes as COVID-19.

Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience no symptoms or mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Those who are infected may be infectious for 48 hours before symptoms appear. Based on current knowledge, younger healthy people are less likely to develop severe symptoms. ***However, if infected, they may spread the disease to their families, friends, colleagues, and teammates.***

The first vaccine was approved by the European Medicines Agency in December 2020 and vaccination programmes are currently being rolled out North and South of the border. The vaccines are highly effective at preventing severe disease. For those individuals who have been fully vaccinated there is not change to the current infection prevention and control guidelines outlined below. There is no specific antiviral treatment for this infection.

2. Transmission of Virus

SARS CoV2 is spread from person to person through:

- droplets generated when an infected person coughs, sneezes or speaks.
- close contact with an infected person while they are infectious (in particular by spending more than 15 minutes of face-to-face contact within 2 metres of an infected person or living in the same house or shared accommodation)
- touching surfaces that are contaminated by droplets coughed or sneezed from an infected person and bringing your unwashed hands to your face

3. Symptoms

It can take up to 14 days for symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) to appear; however, most people develop symptoms between 5-6 days. Individuals may have no symptoms but have the virus and pass the infection to others. Virus shedding appears to be highest at the time of symptom onset and just before the onset of symptoms.

Common symptoms of coronavirus include:

- a fever (high temperature of 37.5° C (degrees Celsius or above)
- a cough - this can be any kind of cough, not just a dry cough
- shortness of breath or breathing difficulties
- loss of sense of smell (anosmia)
- loss of sense of taste (ageusia) or distortion of sense of taste (dysgeusia)

Less common symptoms of coronavirus include:

- diarrhoea
 - aches & pains
 - conjunctivitis
 - rash
 - chilblains on fingers/toes
-

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4. *Staying Safe - 6 Rules to Follow*

Safe return to contact sports is the personal responsibility of each player/backroom member.

(1) Wash your hands frequently

Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water (for 20 seconds). Washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rub kills viruses that may be on your hands.

(2) Maintain social distancing

Observe social distancing guidelines and keep this distance between yourself and others, especially anyone who is coughing or sneezing. When someone coughs or sneezes, they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the droplets, including COVID-19 if the person coughing has the disease.

(3) Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth

Hands touch many surfaces and surface to hand transfer can spread the virus. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and can make you sick.

(4) Practice respiratory hygiene

Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. If using tissues, you should dispose of the used tissue immediately and wash your hands. By following good respiratory hygiene, you protect the people around you from all viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19.

(5) Face coverings and masks

The use of face coverings is required in certain prescribed settings as outlined by the HSE. These are predominantly indoor settings and busy outdoor spaces where a lot of people gather. All players and backroom personnel should familiarize themselves with these settings.

(6) If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical care early

CALL YOUR GP OR SPEAK TO YOUR TEAM DOCTOR. DO NOT VISIT THE DOCTOR'S SURGERY OR GAA FACILITY. Stay home if you feel unwell. Follow the directions of your GP and public health service. This will protect you and help prevent spread of viruses.

5. *Assessing Risk/Vulnerable Groups*

Current public health guidelines have identified groups who are vulnerable. An extensive list is contained as part of the more in-depth medical information available on the GAA website at

<https://www.gaa.ie/api/pdfs/image/upload/dbrquujnn6bwinpfl1u0.pdf>. The most common categories are:

- Age over 70 years (even if fit and well)
- Undergoing treatment for cancer
- Chronic lung disease
- Asthma (uncontrolled)
- Diabetes
- Cardiac disease
- High blood pressure
- Obesity

Members who have a concern regarding personal higher risk, or a family member / household contact with higher risk, should discuss the situation with their GP (or an appropriate medical professional) before making a decision on whether to return to activity or not.

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6. Health Questionnaire

Prior to each training session or game, and until further notice, players, parents/guardians and backroom personnel should complete the self-administered standard risk assessment health questionnaire which you can view [here](#) (A sample is also included as Appendix 1). Symptoms such as a high temperature, fever, cough, shortness of breath, and change in taste or smell will be identified.

The presence of symptoms, or temperature (over 37.5°C) precludes attendance at training or games. In such circumstances, the individual should telephone their GP for advice and management.

REMEMBER: Positive symptomatology or a high temperature (over 37.5°C) precludes attendance.

In such circumstances, **THE GP SHOULD BE TELEPHONED** - DO NOT ATTEND SURGERY OR GAA FACILITIES.

MORE INDEPTH MEDICAL INFORMATION ON COVID-19 IS AVAILABLE ON THE GAA WEBSITE AT THE FOLLOWING LINK: <https://www.gaa.ie/api/pdfs/image/upload/dbrquujnn6bwinpfl1u0.pdf>

Section 2 – PREPARING FOR A SAFE RETURN

The information below will help clubs to prepare for a return to activity:

1. Preparation of facilities

Dressing Rooms, Gyms and Social areas should remain closed until further notice.

(a) Signage

Appropriate signage in line with public health guidelines should be placed at the entrance of club facilities, in car parks, at the entrances of toilets and pitch side. These signs should be clearly visible and easy to understand. Signs should emphasize the government recommended social distancing rules (2m at present), hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, avoidance of personal contact, shaking hands and spitting etc.

(b) Hand gel dispensers

Hand dispensers should be provided in the car park, toilets, entrance to pitch and pitch side. Appropriate disposal bins for hazardous biological waste to be available and clearly marked.

(c) Toilets

Toilets must be regarded as potentially contaminated areas. Ventilation is important, doors and windows should remain open in so far as is reasonable and appropriate. Basic hygiene etiquette adapted to the circumstances should be promoted: for example, use of elbows to open doors, and using paper towels to turn taps on and off. On exit of toilet, use hand sanitizer. There should be a regular cleaning programme with daily deep disinfection in place.

(d) Pitch side

Signage regarding social distancing, personal contact, coughing, sneezing, spitting, hand sanitizing to be clearly visible. Only players and essential team personnel should gain access. Medical personnel (physios, doctors) should wear masks and other appropriate PPE. Facilities for disinfecting balls, sliotars, hurleys, helmets, gloves etc to be available and to be used regularly.

(e) Medical isolation room

In the unlikely event that a player becomes unwell during a training session, facilities will be in place for immediate isolation in a designated medical room (this could be a dressing room as they will not be in general use) containing the appropriate personal protective equipment. There will be a clearly defined protocol for linking up with the appropriate medical service - for example, local accident and emergency department (in the event of an injury), general practitioner or out of hours GP service.

2. Covid Supervisors for Gaelic Games

Each Club Secretary and Chairperson (or their nominees) must have completed the online module at some point in the last 12 months so that each Club understands both the Role and the purpose of Covid Supervisors.

Every team in the club must have someone nominated with responsibility for Covid Supervision present at each training session or game. These nominees must complete the online module which outlines their exact role.. Covid Supervisors will be on duty and will be clearly identifiable (for example, standardized bib) at all times while facilities are open until further notice. [Click here to access the online education module.](#)

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Broadly speaking the main duties of the Covid Supervisor for a team will include:

- a) Ensuring players and backroom personnel complete the Health Questionnaire before each game and training session.
- b) Ensuring sanitising of facilities is completed before and after each training session or game (e.g. Toilets, door handles, equipment etc.)
- c) Maintaining records of attendees (if players are completing the online Questionnaire, this will occur automatically the system)

The Health Questionnaire: Prior to commencing training players and support staff will complete a standard risk assessment health questionnaire before their initial return to training (“Health Questionnaire” - see Appendix I). The online version of this can be accessed [here](#). In the case of underage players, the questionnaire should be completed (or signed) by a parent or guardian.

Temperature checking It is the responsibility of the individual to monitor their own temperature. The presence of symptoms such as a high temperature (above 37.5c), cough, sore throat, general weakness, shortness of breath and change or absence in taste or smell prevents attendance at training with a recommendation that the player contacts their general practitioner.

Sanitising of facilities At the end of each training session, the Covid Supervisor should ensure all door handles, playing equipment (e.g. balls, hurleys, sliotars etc.), the medical room and the Toilet(s) are sanitised before use by the next team or training group.

Attendance records/data management

The Covid Supervisor will ensure that the record of everybody attending each training session will be available in the event that contact tracing or other intervention is required. Data management will be consistent with GDPR guidelines.

3. Scheduling of activities

Timesheets should be used to clearly show what teams are using club facilities at what times. The principle of “get in, train and get out” will apply. There should be a time interval between teams departing having completed training and the next team arriving. Attendance will be limited to essential personnel. Compliance will be necessary to ensure efficiency and harmony.

All facilities should have appropriate dispersion measures in place at all entrances and exits and parents/guardians should be advised that there should be no congregation on or outside club grounds.

4. Education of club members

Covid Supervisors will have a role in conveying and explaining policy decisions and guidelines from the Gaelic Games Governing Bodies. As Government regulations change, the Gaelic Games Covid Advisory Group will issue communications detailing the consequences of any changes for our games or training sessions. It is important that each Club ensure these communications are shared as widely as possible within their Clubs.

5. Protocol for Participation

Players and team personnel should be provided with this document and have completed the Gaelic Games online education module within the last 12 months prior to participation. Participants are also required to change at home, travel separately (except family members), shower at home and where possible use toilet facilities at home. Strapping should be applied at home where possible. All players should use their own individual and clearly labelled water bottles.

Section 3 – INFORMATION FOR PLAYERS AND TEAM PERSONNEL

(1) Key Control Measures for players, coaches and backroom personnel

Changes to the team environment for all Gaelic Games activities will continue in line with best available public health guidance measures. These measures are aimed at minimising the risk of Covid-19 transmission, and every person involved on a Gaelic games team, both club and county, has a responsibility to adhere to them at all times.

Personal hygiene, self-isolation if experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, social distancing, restricting group numbers and limiting travel are the most effective means of prevention of the spread of the virus. In the team environment, both in training and games, undertaking even more careful measures to avoid exposure and spread will be paramount.

Until medical advice permits otherwise, the Key Control Measures for players, coaches and backroom personnel to prevent transmission of COVID-19 and allow for safe resumption of Gaelic games are:

A. Education & Awareness:

- Completion of the [Gaelic Games online education module](#) through the GAA eLearning platform
- Continued awareness of safety protocols relating to your role as a player, coach or mentor.

B. **Pre-Attendance Screening** – all players and personnel will be required to comply with the following requirements if they are going to attend training or games **until further notice**:

- Complete the health questionnaire before each training session or game – this can be completed online [HERE](#). This will require you to identify if you have any symptom(s) - the presence of symptoms such as a high temperature (above 37.5c), cough, shortness of breath and change or absence in taste or smell prevents attendance with a recommendation that the player contacts their general practitioner. The form can be completed on line preferably but can also be completed in hard copy, in which case it should be presented to the Covid Supervisor on entry to the facility.
- If a player/member develops symptoms of COVID-19 (Coronavirus), the player should not attend a training session, skills practice session or game, and will need to self-isolate immediately and phone their GP for medical advice. The player should not attend the medical practice or surgery of their doctor, or pharmacy, healthcare clinic or hospital.

The doctor will evaluate the symptoms over the telephone and provide the necessary medical advice

C. Adhere to hygiene best practice.

- Frequent hand washing, sanitising, and regular cleaning and washing of gear and equipment.
- Avoid the following: spitting, sharing water bottles, touching high contact surfaces (e.g. door handles)
- Use of face masks where applicable

D. **Observe Government advised social distance guidelines (currently 2m) until further notice.**

E. Avoid or Reduce body contact to a minimum.

- Shaking hands, clapping hands, 'high fives' and embracing should be completely avoided
 - Until measures are reduced, physical contact should be reduced where possible on field. Off field, players should observe government social distancing guidelines at all times.
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F. Ensure sessions take place outdoors:

- All Players and Teams must conduct their training sessions outdoors; dressing rooms, showers, clubhouses and other club buildings should remain closed until further notice.
- Toilets will be available on a controlled basis.

G. Travel to and from training – follow Government social distancing advice in relation to all forms of transport to training and play.

- If possible, walk or cycle to the venue.
- If travelling by private vehicle, such as a car, only travel with members of the same household.
- Avoid the use of public transport where possible (if it is the only option, follow Government guidelines)

H. Refrain from events such as team meetings – eliminate all non-essential gatherings and put robust control measures in place for essential interaction.

- Team meetings can only be held outdoors or in spaces that allow for compliance with Government social distancing guidelines (currently 2 metres)
- All other meetings should be held online

I. Avoid Congregating before or after sessions

- All facilities should have appropriate dispersion measures in place at all entrances and exits and parents/guardians should be advised that there should be no congregation on or outside club grounds

If you have any questions, ask for clarification from a Covid Supervisor.

(2) EDUCATION

All players (parents or guardians in the case of underage players) should ensure they have completed the Gaelic Games online education module in the last 12 months. It can be viewed [HERE](#).

Education materials – posters etc – will be visible throughout GAA facilities as per section 3 of this document.

Before every training session or game, players (parents or guardians in the case of underage players) and personnel must complete the Health Questionnaire (sample included as Appendix 1 – online link [HERE](#)) indicating that they understand the risks involved in participation, that they are participating on a voluntary basis and that all participants may opt-out at the start or at any time before or after resumption of activities.

(3) RESPONSIBILITY

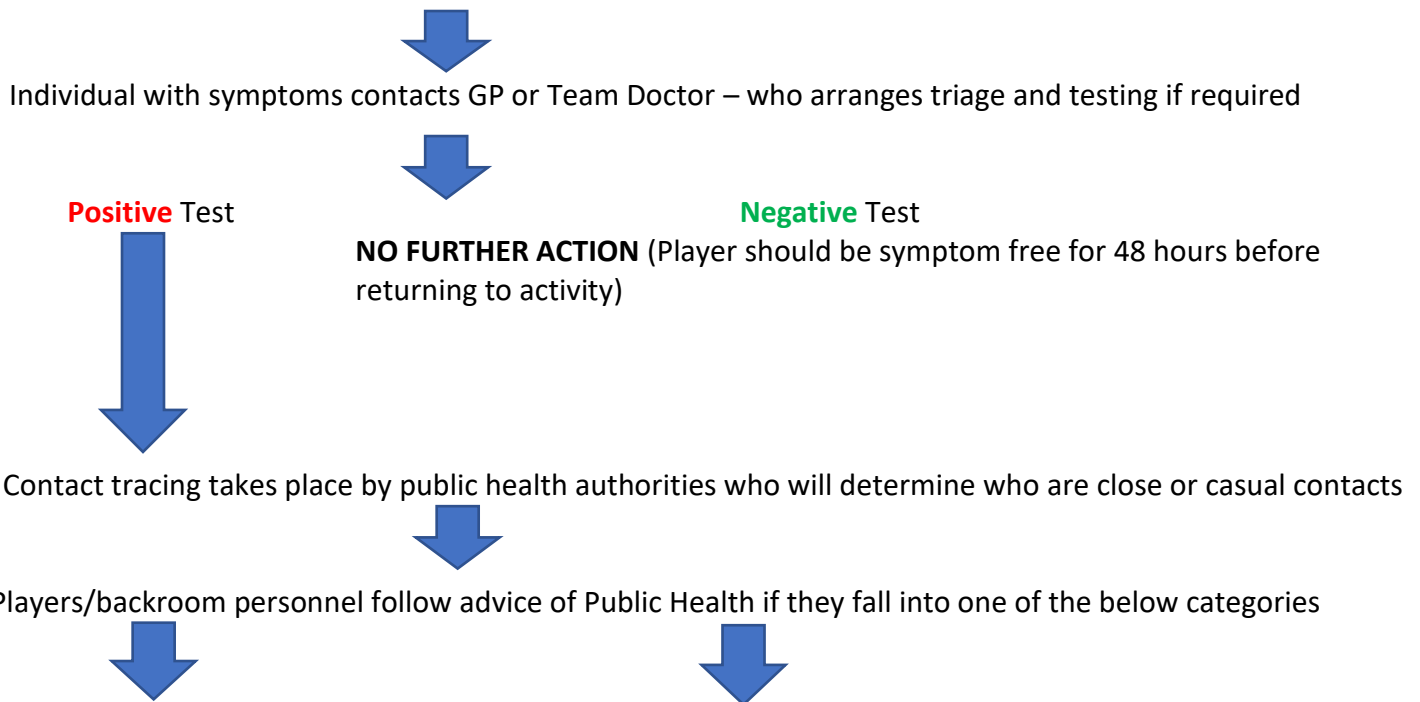
It is essential that everyone in the club works together to ensure compliance with these guidelines.

- Each 'Club Executive' will be responsible for ensuring that a Covid Supervisor is assigned to each team, and will ensure the full cooperation of participating officials, coaches, mentors, players, medical and sports science and allied support personnel and parents.
 - Each Covid Supervisor will be responsible for ensuring COVID-19 protocols, including completion of health questionnaires, and cleaning and sanitising of facilities are followed.
 - Each Team Manager will be responsible for overseeing player and support personnel compliance.
 - Each Mentor and Player shall ensure compliance with COVID-19 guidelines within their own area and for the health and safety of their colleagues.
 - Parents/Guardians will be responsible for dropping underage players to, and collecting underage players from, training sessions or games until further notice.
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Section 4 – Dealing with Positive Symptomatology

If a player, match or team official displays positive symptoms he/she should refrain from further activities until the following steps have been undertaken:



Close Contact	Casual Contact
<p>Will be Tested</p> <p>Will undergo active follow up from Public Health</p> <p>You also need to restrict your movements (stay at home) for 14 days.</p> <p>You can stop restricting your movements when both apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You have a negative test (COVID-19 not detected) 10 days after you were last in contact with the person who tested positive. You do not have any symptoms of COVID-19. <p>Gaelic Games Involvement – None until medical assessment and clearance to return</p>	<p>You may have been in contact with someone with COVID-19, but you do not meet the definition to be a close contact.</p> <p>If you are a casual contact, you do not need to restrict your movements. Continue to follow the advice on how to protect yourself and others.</p> <p>If you are a casual contact, you do not need to be tested</p> <p>Gaelic Games Involvement – As normal as long as symptom free</p>

Further information on Close and Casual Contacts can be accessed on the HSE website [HERE](#)

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Section 5 – SAFE RETURN SUMMARY AND CHECKLIST

In order to ensure your club is ready for a Safe Return, you need to ensure the following:

1. This document has been circulated to all players and team personnel intending to return
 2. You have familiarised yourself with the basic Medical Information in Section 1 of this Document
 3. You have completed the actions outlined in Section 2 of this document for preparation of Facilities
 4. The Secretary and Chairperson of the Club – or their nominees – have completed the online Gaelic Games education module in the last 12 months
 5. Each team returning to training has a nominated Covid Supervisor who has completed the Gaelic Games online education module in the last 12 months
 6. A timetable system is in place so that individual teams in each club are aware of their allocated training times
 7. All participants are familiar with the procedures and protocols outlined in the Gaelic Games online education module
 8. A system is in place for completion of player health questionnaires
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APPENDIX 1 – SAMPLE HEALTH QUESTIONNAIRE FORM FOR GAELIC GAMES

NAME: _____

CLUB: _____

TEAM: _____

1. Do you believe that you may currently have COVID-19?

Yes _____

No _____

2. Have you had any of the following symptoms of COVID-19 in the past 14 days?

<p>High temperature (i.e. over 37.5°C) Yes _____ No _____</p> <p>New unexplained shortness of breath Yes _____ No _____</p>	<p>A new continuous cough Yes _____ No _____</p> <p>Loss of sense of smell, of taste or distortion of taste Yes _____ No _____</p>
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If you have answered **YES** to any of these questions you should stay at home and contact your GP by phone for further advice.

If you have answered **NO** to all of the above questions you may train or play with your team.

Please sign this form to confirm that the details above are true to the best of your knowledge, that you or your guardian have completed the Gaelic Games online Covid-19 Education Module and to confirm that you understand the risks involved in participation, are participating on a voluntary basis and that you may opt-out at any time.

The Questionnaire will need to be completed once before the initial Return to Training. It will be the responsibility of the individual to inform the team's Covid Supervisor of any change in circumstance before subsequent sessions.

SIGNED:* _____

**(For underage players, this document should be signed by a Parent or Guardian)*

DATE: _____

**Your information will be stored securely on the GAA's Games Management System*

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Data Protection Notice

Your personal data is being collected on this form in order to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in GAA facilities. Your personal data is being processed in accordance with Article 9(2)(i) of the General Data Protection Regulation, and Section 53 of the Data Protection Act 2018. The information you provide on this form will not be used for any other purpose, and will be strictly confidential. The relevant Gaelic Games Association and your Club are Joint Data Controllers for the information on this form. Your information will be stored securely on the Games Management System provided by our Data Processor, Dawson Andrews, who we have a contract with to ensure the security of your data. This form will be accessible only by the designated COVID Supervisors in your Club, and designated employees of the Gaelic Games Associations. Your personal data will be retained for 3 weeks.

If you have any queries in relation to this, you can contact your Club Secretary, or our Data Protection Officer by email at dataprotection@gaa.ie, or by phone at (01) 865 8637.

If you wish to raise a concern or report a breach in relation to your personal data, you can do so via the applicable webforms on the Data Protection Commission's website at www.dataprotection.ie.

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APPENDIX 2 – Gaelic Games Covid-19 Advisory Group

The members of the Covid-19 Advisory Group in 2021 are:

Shay Bannon (Chairman)

Professor Mary Horgan, (U.C.C. and President of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland)

Dr Pat O Neill (Dublin)

Dr Kevin Moran (Donegal)

Dr Sean Moffatt (Chair of Gaelic Athletic Medics Association and Mayo team doctor)

Dick Clerkin (Monaghan)

Ciaran Barr (Gaelic Players Association)

Stephen Mc Geehan (Head of Operations, Ulster GAA)

Tony Mc Guinness (Events and Safety Manager, Croke Park)

Sinéad Mc Nulty (CEO, Cumann Camogaíochta na nGael)

Helen O Rourke (CEO, Ladies Gaelic Football Association)

Larry Mc Carthy (Uachtarán CLG)

Tom Ryan (Ard Stiúrthóir CLG)

Feargal Mc Gill (Director of Player, Club and Games Administration CLG)
