



Let's Play Netball

Netball may look different this season and the priority is to let people play the game and reduce stress for administrators rather than a focus on traditional season formats, player eligibility rules and winning. We may have to adjust as we move through the season and ensure we stay flexible with the ways we offer netball to our community. The below has been written as a guideline for Centres to consider as they carve out what the 2022 netball might look like.

Key terms: Be flexible, adaptable, adjust as you go and let people play.

The below guidelines have been based on the assumptions that:

- Teams have less time to prepare for the upcoming season with players isolating and having Covid19 meaning they may not be as physically prepared for the game.
- Teams will have less available players during the season as they may have players isolating, those who have Covid19 and appropriately managing their return to play protocol.
- Teams will likely struggle to produce a consistent team meaning the standard of play may vary and grading at the very start of the season becomes less relevant.
- Player movement between teams may be high as players are pulled in to replace team members who are unavailable.

1. PLAYER WELL-BEING COMES FIRST

Netball New Zealand has created a resource called 'Covid-19 Care' which maps out players return to play after having Covid. It is important for well-being that players are not rushed or pressured to return to play before they are ready. Whilst that is for coaches/ parents/ schools/ clubs to manage directly, it is important for Centres to be aware that teams may often be short on players more than before which is good to keep in mind as you consider the below.

2. COMPETITION STRUCTURE

a. Grading. Grading is important to ensure that teams are positioned where they all have an equal chance to play and improve. However, grading results may become less relevant this year as teams may struggle to field their full team if you currently hold your grading at the start of the season.

- Centres, if your grading takes 4 weeks, could this be shortened to 2 weeks, weeknights, or shorter grading games e.g., 20mins?
- Centres, can you offer a format which allows team movement throughout the season?

b. Season and competition format. It's important that we stick within our regular season timeframes (winter, term 2- 3) however we can afford to be more flexible



with the competition format. Shorter competition formats and game times may be more appropriate.

- Centres, can you adjust your competition structure and or game times to allow for the reduced availability of players and the, potentially, reduced level of physical preparation?

3. PLAYER ELIGIBILITY

Most Centres have strict player eligibility to ensure players can play up a team twice before they are required to stay in the higher team. This year, player movement will likely be very high as players fill in for teams to ensure those teams can play the game.

- Centres, given the need for what could be last minute player needs and movement, can you offer a more relaxed rule around player eligibility?
- Can we reinforce guidelines to ensure we protect players loading and encourage them to play a maximum of two netball games per day?

4. COMMUNICATION

As much as we can prepare, we just don't know what will happen this season so communicating these changes clearly and in a timely manner will be very important this season. It may help to have a plan A, B and C in place with the appropriate communications already written and ready to go. Telling your members now with how these changes will be communicated and the priority of getting teams and games away this season could be great foundations for a more understanding response if you need to make changes.

- Can you have drafted communications ready to go for each of the possible scenarios or game format changes you may encounter?

5. ON THE DAY

It is possible that with very short notice, umpires, school coordinators, players, coaches, Centre staff and administrators, may be unable to physically be in attendance at the courts. It is possible that umpires may have to cover games, or schools and clubs may need to consider having a back-up umpire for each game.

- Centres, do you have a plan in place to ensure that there is a back-up for each key staff member in order to run netball?
- Centres, how can you help encourage schools and clubs to ensure they have a backup option in place (for umpires, coaches, managers and players) so that netball can still be played?

6. FAQs

It may help to draft your own FAQs to send to your clubs/ schools/ members about the 2022 format so they can think about what they can do in advance should they find themselves in any of these situations. See suggested FAQs below and feel free to add your own too.



Suggested FAQs

- It's game day and I have just found out my team can only field 5 players, are we still able to play?
Yes. You can play netball as long as you have a minimum of 5 players on the court.

- It's game day and I have just found out my team can only field 5 players. Can I pull someone up from the team below and have these rules changed for this year?
Yes, you can. We have typically enforced that players can play up for 2 games and the 3rd time they play, they must stay with that higher team. This year, we have extended this rule to 5 games. Please note, it is advised that players do not play more than 80 minutes (2 x 40-minute games) of netball in one day.

- My player has just had Covid-19 and has finished her isolation. Can she play now?
We strongly recommend you follow Netball New Zealand's Covid-19 Care return to play Guidelines. Players cannot simply return to playing a full game of netball the day they are allowed out of isolation.

- My coach is now unavailable for today's game. What should I do?
We recommend that all schools and clubs have a backup process in place to allow for the increased chance this will happen this season.

- My umpire is now unavailable for today's game. What should I do?
We recommend that all schools and clubs have a back-up process in place to allow for the increased chance this will happen this season. If the back-up doesn't work, you will have to source an umpire whether this is a coach, manager or player. There still needs to be one umpire from each team.

- I only have 4 players and no one else is available to play so we will have to forfeit to days game. Who should I tell about this?
We do understand this may happen. Please inform us as soon as you possibly can about this. We ask that you copy in both Centre staff (insert email) and your opposition coordinator who can hopefully inform the team before they get to the courts. Your school/ club coordinator will have a list of all other coordinator contacts.

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