

# INTERNATIONAL GUIDELINES ON PLAYER HEALTH

## UNDER THE “EMERGENCY INTERNATIONAL MATCH CALENDAR” – PERIOD 2020 TO 2023

Provided by



The following international guidelines are a part of the ongoing work of ECA and FIFPRO alongside all other football stakeholders to manage the impact of COVID-19 on the football industry and in particular on professional players, clubs, leagues and federations. These principles have been developed in parallel and shared with the football stakeholders within the FIFA Calendar Working Group. They serve as an additional tool for the football industry to safeguard player health and safety during this global pandemic, with a specific application to player workload and recovery during international and domestic competition schedules.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact the global population, health systems, economies and the football industry in drastic ways. The health crisis has led to significant disruptions to the match calendars of all football competitions around the world. The rescheduling of matches “lost” during the shut-down periods – or the required amendments to competition formats – create significant challenges when it comes to the protection of the health and performance of players. This situation is expected to last until the conclusion of the 2022/2023 season (the “Emergency Period”).

In addition, the fact that professional football is a global sport and competitions often involve intense international travel, significantly increases the exposure of football players to specific risks related to COVID-19. The dynamic development of the global pandemic means that players might travel to, through and within destinations with a high risk classification as defined by public authorities.

Considering the above-referenced health and safety concerns, these international guidelines on player health were developed to help:

- **Facilitate** players, clubs, leagues and federations to better coordinate the protection of players’ health and wellbeing during the Emergency Period.
- **Engage** in open and constructive dialogue in order to find consensual solutions in the organisation and scheduling of professional football competitions.
- **Provide** stakeholders with a set of principles for the protection of players’ health and wellbeing and to allow for informed decisions to manage their work-load.
- **Guide** a constructive dialogue and provide adequate solutions that are necessary to protect players’ health and wellbeing.

The guidelines and principles require ongoing dialogue amongst all stakeholders and demand continuous work to manage the dynamic impact of COVID-19 on the football industry.

Area	Principles
1. Health & safety	<p>Should justifiable health or safety risks exist in a country or region, a player shall not be required to travel to (or through) such destination for club or national team activities (indications may include, for example, travel warnings or restrictions declared by a government or international institution).</p> <p>Should travel to a country pose a risk on the player’s ability to immediately resume club activities upon return (e.g. due to quarantine requirements or</p>

	<p>other parts of local health &amp; safety protocols) such travel may also not be mandated.<sup>1</sup></p>
2. Off-season break	<p>The player shall have the right to enjoy the holidays/rest period to which he is entitled under the applicable rules.</p> <p>Any other obligation such as participation in club or national team activities shall not restrict the above entitlement. Any derogation or alternative measures to fulfil the holiday entitlements are only possible (i) if permitted by the applicable rules or (ii) with the consent of the player or by means of a collective agreement among social partners.</p>
3. Retraining/ Injury prevention	<p>In addition, directly following the off-season break/holiday period, a minimum acceptable period of time for training and preparation before participation in any competitive matches shall be guaranteed to every player. The optimal duration of such a retraining period depends on different factors including the physical status of the player and the duration of the break itself. It is considered that such a period should last approximately as long as the off-season break itself during the Emergency Period for players with a shortened off-season break and, in any event, cannot be shorter than 2 weeks.</p> <p>Any other obligation such as participation in club or national team activities shall not restrict the above entitlement.</p>
4. In-season break	<p>Whilst acknowledging the difficulties caused by the compressed sporting calendars during the Emergency Period, parties shall discuss in good faith possible solutions that allow players to enjoy any additional holidays that they might be entitled to under applicable rules (including in-season breaks) or that are considered appropriate or necessary for the protection of players' health.</p>
5. Non-competitive matches	<p>The participation in friendly matches – for club or country – shall not interfere with the guidelines in this document or other existing standards for the health &amp; safety protection of players.</p> <p>For national team friendly matches during the Emergency Period, National Associations should (i) strive to call-up players who have been less burdened over the season (thereby using those matches as opportunities to develop and showcase younger players, whilst preserving the well-being of those athletes who have been more exposed to competition); and (ii) use the release period for rest and recovery for players with a high workload during playing periods with a particular and specific match density during the Emergency Period and in any case, respect any reasonable request of a player not to be called-up and instead use the release period for rest and recovery.</p>

<sup>1</sup> The detailed health and safety standards for international cross-border competitions as well as guidelines on the release of players are addressed by applicable International Match Protocols and relevant competition regulations.

6. Load-mangement	Given the overall density of match calendars in the Emergency Period, individual load management of players is essential to prevent injuries and maintain performance ability. This includes individualized resting of players during particular dense periods of matches (e.g. national team release dates and club football matches shortly before and after), providing rest after long-distance travel, mitigating fatigue, optimal medical standards and cooperation between medical and technical staff of club and national team. <sup>2</sup>
7. Calendar collisions & club protection	<p>All possible steps shall be taken to avoid the collision or overlapping of match obligations for players between club and national team.</p> <p>In addition, in defining their sporting calendars, competition organisers shall take due account of these Guidelines and the respective player protection provisions, so as not to force clubs to be deprived of their players for official club competitions.</p>
8. Future standards	<p>A working process shall be initiated with the football stakeholders to develop, pursuant to latest available scientific and medical evidence, guidance/standards/best practice for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• off-season breaks;</li> <li>• in-season breaks;</li> <li>• pre-season retraining periods;</li> <li>• player load management (e.g. minimum rest periods between matches, maximum games per a given period, player care standards to optimize recovery)</li> </ul>

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<sup>2</sup> The detailed operational standards for international cross-border competitions including travel, accommodation and other important factors for the recovery and performance of players are addressed by applicable International Match Protocols and relevant competition regulations.