

COVID-19 FAQs

Vaccinations

Can I insist that my coaches/ volunteers are vaccinated?

The key message is that legally we cannot require volunteers to be vaccinated as the government have not mandated it. Groups can however require any new volunteers to be vaccinated when they sign up to be a volunteer, but they should be aware this would currently exclude many people under 50. It is our recommendation that volunteers should not be asked whether they have been vaccinated as this is a private matter and currently this has no bearing on how sessions will be run as whether someone is vaccinated or not, they will still need to adhere to the same protocols.

Therefore, even if someone is vaccinated, they would still need to do a symptom check before they came to a group, practice good hand hygiene (washing, sanitisation), observe social distancing and wear a face covering where appropriate (if they had to breach social distancing to support a participant to access our sessions). They can wear a face covering at other times if they wish to do so.

In addition, where someone cannot get vaccinated due to medical reasons, that volunteer may feel more comfortable in undertaking tasks where at least the full 2 m social distancing can always be easily adhered to.

Groups can encourage people to be vaccinated to protect themselves - and the emerging evidence seems to suggest that it may reduce transmission and so could also protect others. Many of our volunteers do what they do as they want to help and support others and so we would hope that encouragement may be helpful in these cases.

Can I insist that participants are vaccinated?

We are not able to require participants to be vaccinated as there may be many people including many of our participants who are unable medically to be vaccinated. If we ask them if they are vaccinated and then refuse for them to take part in a session because of this then this would be discrimination on medical grounds or due to their disability. We therefore recommend you do not ask whether a participant is vaccinated.

Some participants may not want to come back yet as they do not feel confident enough if they are not vaccinated, which is perfectly fine and their choice.

Lateral Flow Tests

Do I need to get lateral flow tests for my participants/ volunteers/ coaches to use before coming to sessions?

We must undertake a symptom check of all people coming to an RDA session, whether they are a coach, volunteer, participant, carer or household member of a participant. If anyone has the COVID19 symptoms (a high temperature, a new, continuous cough, loss of sense of smell or taste or it has changed) they must not attend the session and self-isolate until they can get a PCR test. Many places are required to undertake lateral flow testing. This includes their use by pupils in secondary schools and colleges and their use by the households of nursery or primary school aged children. They are also being used in social care settings. There is also workplace testing but this is only

available in certain workplaces. It is therefore possible that many of your participants/ volunteers and staff are already being tested at these places.

If you are a coach or volunteer not getting tested elsewhere, we do recommend considering going for regular tests (if working full time at an RDA group it is recommended you get tested twice per week) at your local community testing centre or get home testing kits for individuals to use in their home.

We are clear that this is not mandatory but if a school or care home requires it of an RDA Group as part of the school's/ care home's risk assessments, then the group may need to make the requirement to have a lateral flow tests mandatory for their coaches and volunteers to prevent that school/ care home from not attending. For any other situation the decision about whether to require volunteers or coaches to get a lateral flow test should be at the discretion of the group and may depend on factors including whether volunteers and coaches are likely to come into closer proximity (offering greater levels of support or supporting participants that find social distancing harder), whether there is an expectation from participants, how the volunteers feel about it etc.

The reason we are not mandating tests is that lateral flow tests are not hugely accurate and so we always need to be aware that even if someone had had a negative test, they still could pass on COVID-19. There are also different approaches to accessing tests in the different home countries. We also consider there could be issues with people who have a negative lateral flow tests less likely to adhere to COVID-19 safe practices – not practising social distancing, good hand hygiene etc. The key message is that no matter what the outcome of a lateral flow test then good hand hygiene and social distancing still absolutely need to remain in place.

To find out about testing in your area please use the following links:

England - <https://www.gov.uk/find-covid-19-lateral-flow-test-site>

Scotland – <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested/pages/community-testing/>

Wales - <https://gov.wales/lateral-flow-testing-people-without-symptoms>

Risk Assessments

When do I have to do my COVID-19 risk assessment/ trustee checklists to get started?

If you are welcoming anyone back to your Group, you should undertake a risk assessment and complete the trustee checklist as much as you can and submit this to groupsupport@rda.org.uk for sign off.

For example, you may need to bring volunteers back to train the horses before sessions can start. You should ensure you have completed your risk assessment making it clear which activities you plan to do and where you are able to, complete the trustee checklist. If you cannot say yes to all the questions on this checklist, please detail the reasons why in the box provided on the form (and additional sheets if needed). It may be that you cannot tick yes for all the questions related to equines if you are bringing volunteers back to train equines.

Delaying restart

When can we restart without having to fill in all the paperwork?

We are aware of some groups delaying restart as there is a perception that there will be a point in time this year where all restrictions are removed, and they will not be required to complete the RDA Road to Restart paperwork.

In England, government have indicated that legal restrictions will be removed no earlier than 21 June 2021. Other governments have not put a date on this yet. What government in England have actually said is *'By Step 4 which will take place no earlier than 21 June, the government hopes to be in a position to remove all legal limits on social contact.'*

We must not forget that there are no legal limits on social distancing, the limits are on the size of gatherings in different settings and closure of businesses to prevent the spread of COVID-19. They have also indicated that: *we must all remember that COVID-19 remains a part of our lives. We are going to have to keep living our lives differently to keep ourselves and others safe. We must carry on with 'hands, face, space'.* This indicates that some mitigation measures might remain beyond this time.

As an organisation, we also have a duty of care to protect our participants, volunteers and staff and so even if the legal limits on numbers are removed at this time, it is likely we will continue to put measures in place, including risk assessments to protect people. We should also be aware that some of the paperwork (e.g. equine assessments, consent forms) are vital in ensuring our equines are safe and prepared when coming back to sessions after a long break and our participants and volunteers consent to returning to sessions. So even if COVID-19 restrictions are significantly relaxed there still will be essential paperwork to complete as groups have been closed some considerable time. This paperwork has not been developed to provide a barrier to getting started. It is there to help you think about all the elements to come back to safe and successful sessions. We therefore would encourage you not to delay restarting activities because you think there may be less paperwork to complete in the future.

Welcoming participants back

It is recommended to undertake a phased return of participants, starting with those where the risk can be minimised first, and also starting with smaller numbers until your ways of working within your COVID-19 risk assessment actions is well established. We appreciate this may disappoint some participants as they will have to wait longer, but this is to protect the health of our coaches, volunteers and participants. You can decide how you phase your participants back, but we would recommend considering the following (in no particular order):

- Participants who require less support. This would enable participants to come back where social distancing can be maintained at all times.
- Those participants that only need small amounts of support to minimise the number of volunteers required to breach social distancing (if required) when mounting/ dismounting or loading/ unloading from carriage where this is permitted.
- Those participants that can easily be matched to the equines you have (height, weight, ability). It is recognised that this may have changed over the past 12 months.

- Those participants that have members of their families/ household bubble (or teachers/ teaching assistants in the same bubble able to support) that are able to sidewalk or can be trained to sidewalk.
- Those participants who can be welcomed back to meet the equines prior to sessions starting. As participants have been away from some time, it may be beneficial for them to get used to being around equines first and to re-establish communication between the coach and the participant before they start riding or driving.

There may be some participants which cannot be welcomed back to sessions yet due to the level of support that they need and your set up/ risk assessment/ equine etc but we would recommend you speak to them, or their parents, guardians, or carers about what can be provided instead, whether this is any face-to-face activity or activity they can do at home.

We have provided the following statement for you to use:

RDA Groups are being encouraged to have a phased approach to welcoming both participants and volunteers back to make sure operating under COVID-19 restrictions can be tested and trialled slowly. We have had to consider an approach that works for our Group, the way we can run our sessions with current restrictions and ensuring we continue to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of all those involved: our participants, volunteers, coaches and of course our horses and ponies. It is for these reasons that what we can offer to you may be different from what you were able to do pre-COVID, it may be at different times, on different days, for a different length of time or we may be unable to welcome you back just yet. We will be in touch shortly to let you know what we are able to do and hope to have all our participants back as soon as we are able.

Too Soon

I don't feel comfortable coaching/ volunteering/ participating as it feels too soon, what can I do?

If you do not feel comfortable coming back to sessions now, that is fine but please notify your group of your situation so they can plan.

I don't feel comfortable coaching/ volunteering/ participating until I have had both my vaccinations, what can I do?

If you do not feel comfortable coming back to sessions now, that is fine but please notify your group of your situation so they can plan.