

GETTING STARTED GUIDANCE NOTES



Introduction

There will be a lot of people who have missed their time at RDA and just want to get back; however any return to the group, needs careful consideration.

Before “opening for business” groups will need to ensure they have considered the SAFETY of all involved.

The risks of COVID-19 remain, so any activity will need to meet latest UK and devolved regulations. Even as restrictions are lifted, we anticipate that social distancing will be required for an extended period and this will have a significant impact on what groups will be able to do. Indeed, because of this some groups will not be able to contemplate returning for several months yet, most notably Carriage Driving and Vaulting Groups, along with some groups delivering school groups only.

On the MyRDA website there are a number of videos that have been kindly sent to us by Karen Thompson and her team at Kesteven Group. These videos show the thought process this group went through around social distancing with mounting, leading and dismounting. They clearly highlight the challenges that will be faced by most. Can your group operate with social distancing rules? Groups will undoubtedly need to adapt how they work, so take time to consider what it would mean to yours.

There will be volunteers/staff and participants who are excited about getting back to RDA, but there will also be many others who are worried and scared about facing a changed environment and the risks that remain, and there will be some who want to return but who cannot for their own safety. Now may be the time to consider who can be involved – will you have any participants who can return and if so will the group have enough staff / volunteers willing and able to support them?

In addition, the groups will need to prepare the venue by providing the essentials around hygiene in the current situation; sanitisers, zoning and new protocols will all need to be in place. If based at a riding establishment the group will need to check their establishment has met the requirements of their relevant member body e.g. BHS/ABRS/BC.

Last, but not least, there will be a need to prepare the equines - this task will vary between groups depending on who owns and looks after them, but it is important to ensure they are fit and ready to start work.

There is a lot to think about, take time to consider what is needed and do it in a way that suits your group and everyone involved. In everything we do we must consider SAFETY FIRST – Safety for Volunteers and Staff, Safety for Participants, Safety for Equines. If in doubt – don't do it.

What do groups need to do?

It's important, when deciding whether to get started or not, for each group to consider its own circumstances. Groups should decide when it's safe and right for them to open – some groups will want to get started as soon as possible; some will use the current time to prepare; some will want to be more cautious in their approach and take months to get restarted; some will wait until much later in 2020 or even into 2021.

We recommend even those groups who do not wish to open in the short-term look at this and consider what actions they may want to take, or at least understand what will be needed, to facilitate a speedier return once the time is right for them.

Before starting, RDA Groups will need to send a signed **“Getting Started TRUSTEE CHECKLIST”** and a completed **Covid-19 Risk Assessment** to RDA National Office to confirm all measures have been taken to mitigate the risks of COVID-19. **The Group need to wait for confirmation they are signed off to start before having their first session or activity.**

To facilitate this all groups will need to go through the questions on **“Getting Started ARE YOU READY?”** and complete the **“COVID-19 Risk Assessment”**; taking any actions required. Some groups may be able to do this quickly – others may take weeks to complete. By following this process your group will be able to demonstrate that you have taken the correct steps to mitigate the risks of COVID-19, and so will be covered within your RDA insurance.

In addition, to support with the preparation work required, we have provided the following resources:-

- ✓ Equine Assessment and Induction Form
- ✓ Volunteer Availability Tool
- ✓ Participant Assessment Tool
- ✓ List of suitable products and suppliers
- ✓ Volunteer, Staff and Participant Consent Forms
- ✓ Glossary of Terms
- ✓ Example Resources and Posters

When considering if groups are in a position to get started, once allowed, the following points are given to support the decision making process:-

Equines

- Equines definitely cannot become infected with COVID-19 and therefore their breath or respiratory secretions are not infective to humans. They can act like a fomite though, much like any surface (stable door, saddle, teacup etc) – if an infected person coughs on the equine, then a second person touches the equine and then their face. Washing hands and not touching the face would be the most obvious solution. Antiseptic washes, such as hibiscrub or malaseb, may reduce potential risk but not recommended as it may have harmful effects on the equine's skin – some get a contact dermatitis and its regular use may affect the normal skin microflora.

- Feet would be an important thing to consider, especially if shoes have been removed during lockdown. If the equine is normally shod when in work but is now barefoot, shoes will probably need to go back on ahead of a return to work. Some hooves may have cracked and others may have gone slightly footsore, and this may take a few weeks to settle down once reshod.
- Fitness is going to be important but will be hugely variable depending if equines have been exercised or just turned away, and it's quite tricky to assess. The expected work load and type of exercise will have an impact as well. Changes in weight assessment may be helpful and possibly response to, and recovery from, exercise e.g. – how fast does the horse's respiratory rate return to normal following exercise. It can take several weeks to build up fitness if the equines haven't been doing any regular exercise (very much like us sadly!).
- Dentistry – equines only grow or erupt 2-3mm of tooth per year so if the annual rasp has been missed during lockdown, it is unlikely that this should present a big problem that would prevent returning to work. An equine having difficulty eating or dropping food is different though and should be seen by an EDT or vet prior to putting a bit in.
- Vaccinations – The tetanus component of vaccines lasts for 2-3 years so is probably okay for most equines. The influenza protection will start to diminish sooner than that – protection maybe 14-15 months. If the equines aren't leaving the yard to go to competitions etc there should be minimal risk of catching influenza if the yearly boosters have lapsed. There has only been one confirmed case of equine influenza in the UK in 2020. There does not appear to be much circulating influenza this year – probably in part to the 'herd immunity' brought about after the increase in vaccinations last year. A lot of vets are now doing vaccinations, but some still are not. Follow the individual yard's vet's advice – they are best placed to assess the risk/benefit. The veterinary governing bodies are due to re-evaluate their guidance in another week.
- PPE and Sanitisation – Even though PPE will not be used as standard there will undoubtedly be individual volunteers, staff or riders who will choose to wear these and all equines need to be prepared. It is essential that equines are acclimatised to the new environment before any RDA riders take part; this includes them getting used to the smell of sanitisers used, feeling people wearing disposable gloves and seeing people wearing masks.
- All equines will need to be re-assessed, following this enforced "rest"; the impact of this will vary depending on their fitness level pre-lockdown and also what, if any, exercise and training has been done in the interim. Weight and condition will need to be checked and all will need to be "inducted" into work again. To help there is a form that you can use to support re-introducing them into RDA.

Volunteers and Staff

- Most groups are doing a great job of keeping in touch with their volunteers. It's really important to keep them updated on what is (or isn't) happening; letting them know the group remains closed and what plans the group has.
- To understand if a group can get started, one thing they must do is find out which volunteers are able (**they are not self-isolating**) and willing (they may have changed circumstances or just not want to take the risk at the moment) to help. It's important to contact everyone to

discuss what the group's plans are and to find out what they are willing to do to help. There is a Volunteer Availability Tool which you can use to help collate the information.

- You may also have volunteers who want to come back and help, but actually it's not possible – perhaps you only have a need for a small team and to reduce risk you will keep that to the same small group of people. It's important to be honest but also mindful that some people will be upset that they haven't been chosen to help. Please reassure them that it's not that they are not valued, talk through the plan and let them know you want them back as soon as possible.
- Any volunteers attending sessions MUST complete a Getting Started Consent Form.
- New volunteers can be taken on at the group if appropriate; the usual application form, references and disclosure check will be needed, along with the volunteer consent form. Should a participant's household member or carer attend to support the participant only, during this period of social distancing – they will need to complete a Consent Form and the Covid-19 Basic Training Record Sheet.
- **New participants can only be accepted presently for non-mounted activities e.g. sensory work. This is because it is not possible to safely undertake pre-participation assessments.**

Coaching Sessions

- For the remainder of 2020, there will be no more coach reviews done. Anyone due a review in 2020 will have these postponed to 2021 (anyone due 2021 will be postponed to 2022 etc.). If anyone was due a review in 2019 or before we will be requiring these to be done Q1 2021 (COVID-19 permitting).
- First Aid certificates are currently extended by 6 months if due for renewal. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have now stated that:-
England – has a final deadline for requalification of 30/9/20
Other parts of the UK are to be reviewed over coming months, but should try to arrange training at the earliest opportunity.
- If anyone was due to do a face-to-face safeguarding workshop, these are extended for 6 months, whilst we look at adapting the workshop to a virtual format. Alternatively, you can refresh on-line for 12 months to give more time to attend a face-to-face workshop.
- Initial sessions must have SAFETY FIRST. Session plans should go "back to basics".....consider it as a first session, even for your experienced participants. Focus on balance, strength and confidence.
- Social Distancing is required, so groups will need to consider:-
 1. Which participants can realistically take part – whether independently or with support from a carer (who may need to be trained and Basic Training Record Sheet completed)
 2. Feasibility of private sessions or sessions of reduced numbers, with sufficient time between sessions to comply with sanitising and safety procedures.
- Refreshments (tea/coffee and cakes) should not be served and shared at sessions. Anyone who attends must be advised to bring their own refreshments if they wish.

Venues

- Venue hard surfaces (**contact and access points**) will need to be cleaned down before people start using sites. A list of suitable suppliers for products to help with required cleaning of surfaces, equipment and tack is available on the MyRDA website.
- If groups are based at a centre that is BHS/ABRS/Pony Club or other BEF member body, it is best to check their requirements on preparing of venues for re-opening.
- All tack and equipment will need to be sanitised between uses, and at the end of the day. The products list includes examples of products that can be used on leather at the end of each day to ensure the sanitisation doesn't ruin them.
- Communal areas will need to be cleaned daily when used e.g. toilets and waiting areas.
- Hand washing facilities and/or sanitisers need to be on site at all times. Soap and warm water is always preferable – but groups must make sure that either disposable towels are used or anyone visiting the venue brings their own towels and takes them home. Hand washing or sanitisation must happen on arrival and departure, and between riders if volunteers are supporting more than one.

Participants

- Groups will need to establish who is able to take part – this will mean contacting participants, their carers or the schools and care homes to understand their current situation and ability and timescales to return. There is a Participant Assessment tool available to help collate this information.
- Where assistance is needed within 2M e.g. mounting or side-walking, this should be provided by parents or carers where possible; this may mean them receiving training before sessions can start.
- Only essential family and carers should attend to keep numbers on site to a minimum and reduce the risk of cross contamination.
- Any participant taking part in sessions MUST complete a Getting Started Consent Form.

First Aiders

There is a need for a first aider to be present for sessions to run: it is important for groups to check that their trained first aider(s) are able and willing to attend. RDA has a great safety record, but if a group starts sessions they need to recognise there is always a level of risk that can lead to accidents for participants and volunteers.

St John's provides the following guidance for first aiders:

- When approaching a casualty there is always a risk of cross contamination – especially when you may have to get close to the casualty to assess what is wrong or to check their breathing. It is always important to be aware of the risks of how this cross contamination has occurred.

- In line with government advice, make sure you wash your hands or use an alcohol gel, before and after treating a casualty also ensure that you don't cough or sneeze over a casualty when you are treating them.

The Resuscitation Council (UK) provides some useful advice of how to keep yourself safe when providing CPR. <https://www.sja.org.uk/get-advice/first-aid-advice/unresponsive-casualty/how-to-do-cpr-on-an-adult/>

Don't lose sight of other cross contamination that could occur that isn't related to COVID-19.

- Wear gloves or cover hands when dealing with open wounds
 - Cover cuts and grazes on your hands with waterproof dressing
 - Dispose of all waste safely
 - Do not touch a wound with your bare hand
 - Do not touch any part of a dressing that will come in contact with a wound.
- The vast majority of incidents do not involve you getting close to a casualty where you would come into contact with cough droplets. Sensible precautions will ensure you are able to treat a casualty effectively.
 - As this is a new disease this is an ever changing situation and the government and NHS are continually updating their advice. Make sure that you regularly review the NHS 111 or Gov.uk website which has a specific section on Coronavirus.
 - These are challenging and uncertain times for all. The COVID-19 outbreak has meant a lot of upheaval and worry for people. In order to help others you will also need to look after your own needs. Make sure you take time to talk about your fears and concerns with someone you trust and to take out time to look after yourself.

There is a lot to consider, and for some there will be a lot to do, in preparation for getting started again. Remember – SAFETY FIRST and if in doubt don't do it.

The RDA UK team is here to help you; whether it's the County, Regional or National team. These are unprecedented times so we all need to support each other. Don't hesitate to call or email with questions, feedback or requests for help.