

Government and sports stars urge everyone to get active as outdoor sports reopen

Some of the country's biggest sports stars have joined up with the Government to urge the country to get out and get active as outdoor sports, clubs and facilities reopen from today.

England men's World Cup-winning cricket captain Eoin Morgan, British No1 women's tennis player Johanna Konta and England Rugby Union prop Kyle Sinckler have joined Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden and Sports Minister Nigel Huddleston to support the Government's rallying cry.

In line with the government's roadmap, sports facilities including football and cricket pitches, tennis and basketball courts, outdoor swimming pools, golf courses and sailing clubs can now reopen safely, setting the nation on a path of improved physical and mental health.

From today, organised outdoor team sports can also resume meaning that sports competitions of all ages and skill levels can restart ahead of the Easter holiday break.

Parents and guardians are being urged to help their children follow the Chief Medical Officer's guidance and aim for at least 60 minutes of physical activity a day, and adults to aim for at least 150 minutes, or two and a half hours, a week.

Exercise and outdoor sports are well documented to reduce individuals' risk of major illnesses, such as heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and cancer by up to 50% and lower risk of early death by up to 30%.

The reopening of the outdoors sports sector will seek to help reduce the impacts of these debilitating diseases and in turn reduce pressure on the NHS.

Physical activity is known to improve health outcomes which can include improving mental health through better sleep, happier moods, and managing stress and anxiety.

It comes as the 'stay at home' message ends and 'rule of six' is reintroduced, which means that outdoor gatherings of either six people or two households are allowed. Social contact rules will not apply to outdoor, organised team sport.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

I know how much people have missed the camaraderie and competition

of organised sport, and how difficult it has been to restrict physical activities – especially for children.

So as teams return to outdoor pitches, courts, parks and fields, I hope today will kick-start a Great British summer of sport – with people of all ages reunited with teammates, and able to resume the activities they love.

I know many will welcome the increased social contact, with groups of 6 or two households now also able to meet outdoors.

But we must remain cautious, with cases rising across Europe and new variants threatening our vaccine rollout. Despite today's easements, everyone must continue to stick to the rules, remember hands, face, space, and come forward for a vaccine when called.

Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said:

The long wait is over. I urge everyone to get their trainers on, get outside and enjoy all of the positive benefits sport can bring.

We want to see children be active 60 minutes a day, and adults two and a half hours a week to help us build back fitter, healthier and happier from this pandemic.

Sport and physical activity will be at the heart of our national recovery and today marks a really important step forward.

Sports Minister Nigel Huddleston said:

Over the past year we have prioritised the importance of physical activity, permitting basic exercise at all times. Kids have responded to parents becoming PE teachers, and to Sport England's 'Join the Movement' campaign. However the reality is that activity levels have still dropped in lockdown.

That's why outdoor grassroots sport reopening today is so important. Many have waited patiently for this moment and cannot wait to get back to playing the sports they love. But we want to encourage everyone to get into sport. No matter what age or ability, there will be a sport out there for you.

Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden is set to visit Victoria Park in Warrington. He will join the Year 8 girls of Cardinal Newman High School, who will be the first team in the country to get back into organised outdoor team sport through a pre-school training session with the Warrington Wolves Foundation.

It comes ahead of a major year for Rugby League. The Culture Secretary will make the draw for the third round of the Challenge Cup today, and the season

will culminate with the men's, women's and wheelchair World Cups in October and November, and around 90% of matches being hosted in the North of England.

Victoria Park will use a new 3G pitch that has benefited from the Government providing £25 million towards the staging of the Rugby League World Cup, and improving community facilities to help grow the sport at grassroots level.

The Culture Secretary will also announce an additional £16.7 million in loan support to protect Rugby League, through the winter phase of the Government's Sport Survival Package. This follows the Government stepping in with £16 million in emergency support last year.

Sports Minister Nigel Huddleston is set to visit the Football Foundation's state of the art Rectory Park Facility in Ealing where he will tour the facilities and talk to a BTEC community training squad.

Eoin Morgan, England ICC Men's Cricket World Cup-winning captain said:

I know how lucky I've been as a sportsperson to play cricket for a living, and to have been able to continue to do so during the ongoing pandemic while so many others have been unable to.

The reason I started playing cricket as a child was because I loved it, but it also helped me keep fit and active, spend time with my friends, make new ones and have fun. I know that so many people, and especially children, have missed out on those vitally important things because of the pandemic so I'm delighted to endorse the #returntoplay campaign.

With summer – and the cricket season – just around the corner, there's no better time for everyone, young and old, to get back to having fun by getting outdoors, being active and playing sport.

Johanna Konta, British No1 women's tennis player, said:

I'm so happy people in England are now able to get back on court and enjoy the mental and physical health benefits of tennis.

It's a great sport for anyone looking to get active outdoors after lockdown at a safe, social distance, and I'd encourage everyone to pick up a racket, no matter whether they're a seasoned player or trying tennis for the first time.

Kyle Sinckler, England Rugby Union player, said:

I can wait to see you guys get out there, and all the kids getting back out there to enjoy themselves.

Because that's what it's about at the end of the day, grassroots rugby, everyone getting back out there and enjoying themselves and hopefully I can get down there and see you guys soon.

Serena Guthrie, England Netball player, said:

It is brilliant to see grassroots sports returning today and in particular netball players the length and breadth of the country getting ready to step back out on courts again.

With outdoor sport unlocking, this is a chance for people to reconnect with teammates in the fresh air, get active and maybe even try something new.

It's been a tough period for everyone, and there's never been a more important time to look after your physical and mental wellbeing, so I'd encourage as many people as possible to grab their trainers and find a netball session near them to get involved with.

Jodie Cunningham, St Helens and England Women Rugby League player, said:

The return of grassroots sport is a fantastic moment for everyone who loves sport, and the positive impact it makes on people's lives.

I know the girls from my old school, Cardinal Newman, will be really excited to use these brilliant new facilities at Victoria Park – and there will be so many others of all ages in our Rugby League communities who can't wait to get back doing what they love.

DJ Locksmith, from Rudimental said:

I'm going to be honest with you, I'm not that great at golf. But with that said, I love playing it. And I love getting out there with family and friends with all the bants and the laughs that come with it.

With the horrendous shots, mixed with the good ones, and to be honest with you, that's what I'm there for. I'm there for that one good shot. That brings me back time and time again.

Dual Olympic sailing silver medallist Ian Walker said:

Spring is always an exciting time for sailors looking forward to getting back afloat as the weather warms up, but this year there is more excitement than ever. I will be racing at my club at the first opportunity next week!

Sport England Chief Executive, Tim Hollingsworth said:

Today is a vital milestone as many people can get back to the sports and activities they have missed so much.

It also signals a big step on the nation's road to recovery as the nation starts to move out of the winter restrictions. The fact organised sport is one of the first things to reopen underlines its importance to our health and wellbeing and we hope many people feel the confidence to get back out there and enjoy it this week.

I have been so impressed by the resilience and adaptability of sport providers over the past year since the pandemic began. We've all worked together to get to this point and now we must focus on rebuilding activity levels and making sure we do all we can so that everyone can benefit from the joy that being active brings.

Youth sport is a top priority in the Prime Minister's roadmap. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and Department for Education are now working with experts from the world of sport, education and business to look at how we can get children fit and fully active over the next few months, both at school and during the holidays.

This comes on top of a £10.1 million investment made by the Department for Education into schools across England, to help open existing school sports and swimming facilities. At the same time, since the outbreak of COVID-19, schools have continued to provide PE to those attending and have provided innovative remote teaching of PE and physical activity. The £320 million per year Primary PE and Sport premium funding can be used to support this.

The sport and leisure sector has benefited from more than £1.5 billion worth of business support made available by the Government, including a bespoke survival package for major spectator sports, the furlough scheme, business rates relief and business interruption loan scheme that has helped many sports clubs and leisure businesses to survive and be able to reopen when safe to do so.

Last week the Government announced that £100 million has now been allocated to 266 local authorities across England, to support the recovery of publicly-owned leisure centres and gyms. Grassroots sports and the physical activity sector are also benefiting from £270 million in emergency funding delivered by Sport England.

Earlier this month, the Chancellor announced that the Government will provide an initial £25 million to support the growth of grassroots football, which

will be enough to build around 700 new pitches across the UK.

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