

Update on return to play for men's and women's domestic cricket

Men's County season set to begin on 1 August with the First-Class Counties to decide on men's formats to be played at a meeting in early July. The first year of women's elite domestic structure under discussion; but women's domestic game commits to play this season



The men's County season is set to begin on 1 August

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has given its approval for the professional men's county cricket season to begin on 1 August.

The formats to be played during the delayed men's county season are due to be agreed by the 18 First-Class Counties in early July, with a new fixture schedule to be published thereafter.

A commitment to play women's domestic cricket in 2020 has also been made, but may differ from the planned rollout of the new women's elite domestic structure.

The women's elite domestic structure is the equivalent of the men's county set-up and is formed of eight regions. Establishing a structure for a new competition during a pandemic has provided specific challenges for the women's domestic game, most notably having the required medical personnel in place to handle stringent return-to-play protocols.

Preparation and planning for the season across the men's and women's domestic game remains subject to ongoing advice from Government and medical professionals with the safety of players, staff and officials the first priority.

The ECB Board has also approved the return to training of Men's First-Class County players on or before 1 July. Plans for the new men's season include options for red-ball and white-ball cricket.

A dedicated working group with representatives from the First-Class Counties and ECB has been formed to provide specific focus to Domestic Cricket, while COVID-19 continues to impact the game.

The main objectives for this group are:

- To develop a single set of operating procedures that will incorporate cricket operations, venue operations and medical protocols
- To provide a single delivery model that can be implemented across all 18 FCCs and regional women's teams
- To provide feedback and progress to the ECB Board and FCC Chairs

ECB Chief Executive Officer, Tom Harrison, said: "It is a significant step for our game that we are able to approve the start of the men's domestic season for 1 August and one which will be welcomed by everyone connected with County Cricket.

"It follows extensive consultation between the 18 First-Class Counties, the Professionals Cricketers' Association and ECB and has only been achievable thanks to the significant hard work that continues to occur as we prepare for a domestic season unlike any the game has faced before.

"It must be stressed that the safety of our players, staff and officials has been the first priority through all discussions and Government guidance will continue to shape our planning and preparation.

"Planning for the return of the women's domestic game remains ongoing, but our commitment to women's domestic cricket is unwavering and we look forward to sharing further news shortly.

"Our strong preference is that the women's new elite domestic structure starts this summer and we will work hard to ensure that happens. For this to be achieved, brand new infrastructure still needs to be rolled-out, alongside imperatives we need in place when playing competitive cricket during a pandemic.

"Our first choice remains to do everything we can to start this year and build on the fantastic momentum in the women's game. In the event that proves impossible, we will explore other options for play to enable our women's players to enjoy competitive domestic cricket in 2020.

"We will continue to work closely with both the men's and women's domestic game to ensure necessary safety measures are in place to protect the wellbeing of everyone involved."