

Horse Racing Interim Works and Fit for Racing Wednesday 1st April 2020

Racing facilities will currently have many questions about the current and potential restrictions the Government may impose to reduce the transmission of Coronavirus with regards to Racing surfaces, their ongoing maintenance and what works may be carried out to provide a fit for Racing surface when sport resumes.

This document sets out what may happen to racing surfaces and the soils beneath should they be left alone for lengthy periods, what can currently be done to maintain them and also what works can be carried out should racing resume.

Please ensure you always follow government guidelines (www.gov.uk/coronavirus) should you be permitted to work outdoors either as lone workers or as part of a team.

Racing surfaces may be maintained by the following category of people:

Professional managers and staff are advised to continue to actively consult and discuss working practices with their employers, who should ensure all employees are informed of and are following Government guidelines. Subject to Government policy, your employer should determine with you whether your continued work is necessary, essential and/or safe.

Self-employed grounds staff or contractors are advised to follow the latest Government guidelines, formulate an agreed plan that includes your safe working procedure, and clearly communicate with clients in advance and agree safe working procedures. We advise regular review as Government guidelines develop. Ultimately it is your decision to suspend operations or, to continue to work. The emphasis though is to ensure safe working practices, as communicated by Government. Make plans now for the future and reschedule appointments where you can and keep reassessing this in order that when restrictions are lifted you are able then to return to projects that may have been suspended.

Volunteers should follow latest Government guidelines and not put themselves or others at risk. We advise that the volunteer network monitors the timings of any announcements of the various sports re opening for play, however realistically this will be dependent on how we are able to slow the virus down and return to normality.

The main question you may have is about mowing. Here are some suggestions for you to follow.

Mowing heights of cut (HoC) during non-Racing (not necessarily out of season)

Racing Flat and Jump	Suggested HoC	How much to remove	Frequency (where possible)	Comments
Point to Point (In preparation to race in October)	100mm <i>(Try not to allow the grass to get too long and thin the sward density.)</i>	Max 1/3rd	X1 per week, <u>where possible</u> , with the clippings returning to the surface.	Maintaining this HoC will help maintain root growth which is vital for Horse Racing

Why am I leaving the grass longer than usual? 100mm is not normally longer than usual, but with reduced wear and tear on the grass and no need to provide a racing experience we need to maintain a thick sward and if the grass gets too long the sward will be thin and not take the wear when racing starts again. The grass plant maintained at this height will encourage greater root growth as more leaf means more food produced by photosynthesis.

What may happen if I do not cut the grass at all? The grass will grow very tall, the surface will become very thin, it will try to set seed, and this will result in an even thinner surface. It will be hard to get the surface back into a suitable Racing surface when we can start Racing again.

Other tasks you may be able to carry out:

1: Control or removal of thatch

Why should I do this if Racing is not taking place? Grass clippings, old leaf matter and sheaths will build-up at the base of the plant and with mowing at 100mm you will get some prostrate or horizontal growth. To keep the surface upright and healthy you will need to keep the base clean on a periodic basis with spike harrows or similar equipment.

If I am spike harrowing how 'deep' should I go? As it will be the growing season mainly work the surface of the soil, cleaning out the grass plant. Don't do this if there is a prolonged dry period as it will increase the drying out of the surface.

2: Aeration

Should I do this at all if no racing is taking place? Yes, but only if ground conditions are suitable. If it becomes too dry, then the tines won't go into the soil very well so it would be best to wait until the ground has softened some more. Don't aerate when it is too wet though.

If I can do this, how will it help the soil? It will increase infiltration rates; roots will be able to explore more of the soil profile and this will help produce a racing surface which can better withstand wear and tear when racing starts up again.

When should I decide to not aerate? When it is coming into a dry spell, it is already too dry or too wet. Remember the saying 'One aeration in the dry is worth 5 in the wet'

3: Fertilising

Should I do this if no racing is taking place? In many cases there will not be a need to apply a fertiliser as the grass will grow naturally, it won't need to recover from wear and tear and we don't want it too dense or fast growing as this can increase disease attack and the need for mowing and scarification. Consider an autumn / winter fertiliser to help maintain or improve root growth without excessive leaf growth that will require more mowing.

4: Weeds

We must readily accept that weeds are part of everyday life on the racing surface.

What could be the potential outcome if I just do the minimum of work and how can I overcome this? If you can do the basic maintenance of mowing etc and create the good conditions for the grass plant weed growth should be minimised.

Should all work to racing surfaces be prohibited how can I reduce weed content once works commence to improve the playing surface? Many weeds will die out once regular mowing starts again, but do not consider weed treatment until the normal grass height is established because the grass will be stressed.

5: Rolling?

Should I roll my racing surface in preparation for racing? No! there is no need to roll any race surface, it only damages soil structure and reduces root growth. As maintenance will be limited concentrate on maintaining a thick, well rooted grass surface. Remember rolling does not level a surface. The use of an aerator with heave and harrowing will give a truer surface.

Local repairs to racing surfaces

Where and possible, and where resources permit take time to repair those areas that have always caused issues such as jump take-off and landing. This would typically be light renovations with over seeding equipment for large areas and a light fertiliser application. Regular watering will be needed to aid germination and establishment.

Try to get any treading back and seeding done whilst the surface is not being used.

6: Irrigation

Should I do this if no play is taking place? Water plays a major part in ensuring grass growth especially during the establishment phase of development following repairs or renovation. Irrigation should be carried out as and when needed as indicated by weather conditions.

Do not over irrigate. Too much water will affect the turfgrass growth and may also affect the soil conditions to the extent that compaction occurs with subsequent maintenance operations.

If your ability to irrigate is limited focus on those areas with the weakest turfgrass growth or newly sown grass.

7: Synthetic Racing Surfaces

With no usage taking place, an occasional working of the material would be required during this quiet period. This is an opportunity to top-up any infill levels and repair any surrounding features, fencing etc. Depending on the time when the surface was taken out of use some decompaction



would also typically be beneficial: Discuss this with your specialist contractor well in advance of the surface opening again.

8: How can I get my racing surface back to a 'fit for use' condition should a ban on racing be lifted?

I have been given the go ahead to get back on the racing surface, how can I get it back in to shape within 2 weeks and how will I know it is ready and safe for use? If you have been able to do the basic operations above, you may be able to start racing (weather permitting). You may need time to irrigate to produce 'safe ground'. If needed, apply a fertiliser application to help the grass plant take the wear and tear from racing. Two weeks will allow time for British Horseracing Authority to inspect the course prior to racing.

It is important that some form of reduced but regular maintenance work has been carried out during this period so that a gradual altering in mowing height if needed over a 2-week period can be achieved. Alongside this, a gradual increase in other maintenance activities along with a fertiliser application will help to produce a suitable racing surface quickly. The actual length of time needed to become fully useable and to what standard will also depend on the condition of the surface in the first place.

Closing statement

Ensure all operations conform to British Horseracing Authority General Instruction:
(3.2 Annex A Best Practice)

Please always ensure you adhere to up to date government guidelines
(www.gov.uk/coronavirus) regarding the current situation.

The main message to ground staff / volunteers is to ideally continue with all, or most, of the typical good maintenance practices but at a reduced intensity to meet the needs of your particular racing surface.

An ongoing dialogue with your relevant authorities will be necessary to ensure sufficient lead in time to get the surface safe and race ready.