



SPECIAL RULES APPLICABLE TO AFC COMPETITIONS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC



Special Rules Applicable to AFC Competitions During COVID-19 Pandemic (Edition 2021)

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PREAMBLE

These Special Rules are applicable to all AFC football Competitions and Matches taking place in the period during which they are in force in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (the “Special Rules”).

These Special Rules set out the responsibilities of the AFC, Host Organisations, Participating Teams/Participating Clubs and all other relevant stakeholders participating in and/or otherwise involved in the staging, organising, hosting and/or delivery of the AFC Competitions and Matches (collectively the “Stakeholders” and each a “Stakeholder”), as well as any and all persons affiliated to the Stakeholders and/or carrying out duties on their behalf (collectively the “Individuals” and each an “Individual”).

These Special Rules shall be read in conjunction with and be considered to form an integral part of the relevant Competition regulations and the AFC Competition Operations Manual (the “Manual”), and shall also be read in conjunction with the AFC Match Operations Protocol during COVID-19 Pandemic (“AFC MOP”) and all other protocols, directives, decisions, guidelines and circulars issued by the AFC in connection with its Competitions and Matches.

In the event of any discrepancy between these Special Rules and any of the foregoing documents, the provisions of these Special Rules shall prevail to the extent of the discrepancy.

Failure to comply with any matter set out in these Special Rules is an offence and may be sanctioned in accordance with the relevant Competition regulations and the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code (as applicable).

For the purposes of these Special Rules, all defined terms shall bear the same meaning as ascribed to them in the relevant Competition regulations and the Manual, unless the context requires otherwise.

1. Compliance with AFC and Host Country Medical Protocol

- 1.1. Notwithstanding anything to the contrary in the AFC MOP, all Stakeholders and Individuals are required to comply with:
 - 1.1.1. the provisions of these Special Rules and all rules set out herein; and
 - 1.1.2. all health, safety, medical, security, travel and other protocol and laws set by the relevant authorities of the host country any Match is held in, at all relevant times.
- 1.2. For the avoidance of doubt, where the relevant authorities of a host country have imposed additional and/or stricter requirements than those set out in these Special Rules, such additional and/or stricter requirements shall prevail.
- 1.3. For the avoidance of doubt, nothing in these Special Rules shall affect any obligations arising from any applicable national laws (whether in a host country, a Stakeholder or Individual's home country, any transit country or otherwise) and the relevant Stakeholder or Individual (as appropriate) shall be solely responsible for complying with all applicable laws and protocols.

2. Temperature Checks and Entry to the Stadium

- 2.1. All Individuals shall be subject to a temperature check prior to entering a Stadium.
- 2.2. Any Individual re-entering a Stadium for any reason shall be subject to another temperature check.
- 2.3. In case the measurement of a temperature check is higher than 37.5°C (or the temperature required by the host country, whichever is lower), the relevant Individual will be subject to a second temperature check which shall take place approximately ten (10) minutes after the first temperature check.
- 2.4. In case the measurement of a second temperature check is still higher than 37.5°C (or the temperature required by the host country, whichever is lower), the relevant Individual shall not be allowed to enter and shall be escorted to an isolation room/area. The relevant Individual shall be referred to the AFC Medical Officer or (if the AFC Medical Officer is not present in the Stadium) the LOC Medical Officer who will take the final decision on any further action(s). Individuals and Stakeholders must comply with all directions of the AFC Medical Officer or LOC Medical Officer (as appropriate) in this regard.
- 2.5. In case any Individual is not allowed entry to a Stadium as a result of the operation of Articles 2.3 and 2.4, the relevant Stakeholder shall be responsible for replacing such Individual and for ensuring that the delivery of the Match is not affected (subject to any applicable rules regarding registration).

3. Testing and Eligibility

- 3.1. Only Participating Players, Participating Officials and Match Officials who have tested negative for COVID-19 in accordance with the testing requirements set out by the AFC and the relevant authorities of the host country shall be able to participate in a Match.
- 3.2. Any Individual who travels to the host country of a Match or Competition and tests positive for COVID-19 at any time after his/her arrival to the host country shall immediately be quarantined by the relevant Stakeholder. This requirement also applies to any Individual who tests positive but is already present in the host country of a Match or Competition (i.e. an Individual who does not need to travel). The relevant Stakeholder shall also immediately report the positive test to the AFC and comply with all reporting obligations required under the national law and/or protocol of the host country, maintaining strict confidentiality. The relevant Individual shall be subject to the medical protocol of the host country. Any such Individual who subsequently tests negative for COVID-19 shall only be allowed to participate in a Match after providing such medical and other supporting documents as are required by the AFC and the relevant authorities of the host country (e.g. a negative test result from an approved and validly authorised testing facility), and any such participation shall always be subject to the prior written approval of the AFC (to be granted or withheld at the AFC's sole discretion).
- 3.3. Any Individual who has been tested positive for COVID-19 at any time prior to their arrival to the host country of a Match or Competition (whether such Individual has recovered or otherwise) shall provide such medical and other supporting documents as are required by the AFC and the relevant authorities of the host country. This requirement also applies to any Individual who has tested positive in the past but is already present in the host country of a Match or Competition (i.e. an Individual who does not need to travel). Individuals covered by this Article 3.3 shall only be allowed to participate in any Match with the prior written approval of the AFC (to be granted or withheld at the AFC's sole discretion).
- 3.4. The relevant Participating Team/Participating Club shall be fully responsible for all of its Participating Players who return to play after recovering from COVID-19 and neither the AFC nor any other Stakeholder shall be liable for any medical complication that may develop as a result of or in connection with any Participating Player's return to play in a Match and/or participation in a Competition (whether from the after effects of COVID-19 or otherwise) or for any other liability (whether financial or otherwise) connected with their return to play. The AFC may request the relevant Participating Team/Participating Club and/or the relevant Participating Player to sign a declaration that the relevant Participating Player is medically fit to participate in a Match and/or Competition.

- 3.5. Any withholding of information or failure to provide supporting documents by a Stakeholder, or the making of false or misleading statements by a Stakeholder, may result in the initiation of disciplinary proceedings in accordance with the relevant Competition regulations and the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code (as applicable), and/or legal action being initiated by the relevant authorities of the host country.
- 3.6. No media releases or public announcements (including any social media posting) regarding test results (positive or negative) or otherwise relating to AFC protocol or procedure shall be made by any Stakeholder and/or Individual without the AFC's prior written approval.
- 3.7. In case any Individual is not allowed to participate in a Match due to a confirmed case of COVID-19, the relevant Stakeholder shall be responsible for replacing such Individual and for ensuring that the delivery of the Match is not affected (subject to any applicable rules regarding registration).
- 3.8. For the avoidance of doubt, save to the extent expressly provided in these Special Rules or otherwise by application of the relevant Competition regulations, the existence of any confirmed COVID-19 case(s) for any Individual(s) shall not impact on the scheduling of any Match or Competition.

4. Determining the Result of a Match that cannot be Played

- 4.1. If a Participating Team/Participating Club has less than thirteen (13) Participating Players (including one [1] goalkeeper) available for a Match for any reason (whether or not relating to COVID-19), the relevant Participating Team/Participating Club shall not be able to participate in the Match. Such Participating Team/Participating Club shall be held responsible for the Match not taking place and shall be considered to have withdrawn from the relevant Competition. The relevant Participating Team/Participating Club and its affiliated Member Association shall be subject to the provisions of the relevant Competition regulations regarding the consequences of withdrawal, as applicable.

In exceptional circumstances and provided that any rescheduling will not affect the Match Schedule determined by the AFC General Secretariat, the AFC Competitions Committee (or any sub-committee carrying out duties on its behalf) may grant an exception to the foregoing and allow the relevant Match to be rescheduled.

Competitions (or parts thereof) to be played in a centralised format (including, for example, centralised Matches in the Group Stage of AFC Club Competitions)

- 4.2. In case a Participating Team/Participating Club cannot travel to the host country and/or Venue due to any travel or other restriction relating to COVID-

19, the Participating Team/Participating Club shall be considered to have withdrawn from the relevant Competition. The relevant Participating Team/Participating Club and its affiliated Member Association shall be subject to the provisions of the relevant Competition regulations regarding the consequences of withdrawal, as applicable.

- 4.3. Subject to Article 4.1, all Matches shall take place in accordance with the Match Schedule determined by the AFC General Secretariat.

Competitions (or parts thereof) to be played in a home and away format (including any single-leg Match which is not to be played as part of a centralised format)

- 4.4. Host Organisations shall cooperate with the relevant authorities of the host country and use their best endeavours to obtain exemptions from any travel and/or other restrictions relating to COVID-19 which may impact on the relevant Match(es). In particular, Host Organisations shall ensure that:

4.4.1. the away Participating Team/Participating Club is allowed to travel into the host country and/or Venue of the Match (i.e. borders open);

4.4.2. if a full exemption cannot be obtained, the away Participating Team/Participating Club will serve a quarantine period of no more than two (2) days (unless otherwise mutually agreed between the Participating Team/Participating Clubs and/or as instructed by the AFC) upon their arrival to the host country and/or Venue of the Match; and

4.4.3. the away Participating Team/Participating Club will be provided with an Official Training Site and be allowed to conduct training sessions during its quarantine period, if any.

- 4.5. In case the Host Organisation is not able to comply with the requirements set out in Article 4.4, it shall propose an alternative neutral venue for the relevant Match that would ensure the requirements set out therein are met. Such proposal shall be submitted by no later than thirty (30) days prior to the relevant Match or as otherwise instructed by the AFC for the AFC's written approval (to be granted or withheld at the AFC's sole discretion). The Host Organisation will remain responsible for the organisation of the Match at the neutral venue and all related costs. In case the Host Organisation fails to propose an alternative neutral venue in accordance with the applicable deadline, its Participating Team/Participating Club shall be considered to have withdrawn from the relevant Competition. The relevant Participating Team/Participating Club and its affiliated Member Association shall be subject to the provisions of the relevant Competition regulations regarding the consequences of withdrawal, as applicable.

- 4.6. If the Host Organisation has complied with the requirements set out in Article 4.4 but an away Participating Team/Participating Club cannot travel to the

host country and/or Venue of a Match due to any travel and/or other restriction relating to COVID-19 imposed by its home country and/or any transit country (e.g. due to travel restrictions imposed by the relevant authorities of its home country), such away Participating Team/Participating Club shall be held responsible for the Match not taking place and shall be considered to have withdrawn from the relevant Competition. The relevant Participating Team/Participating Club and its affiliated Member Association shall be subject to the provisions of the relevant Competition regulations regarding the consequences of withdrawal, as applicable.

- 4.7. Subject to Article 4.1, all Matches shall take place in accordance with the Match Schedule determined by the AFC General Secretariat.

5. Financial Responsibilities

- 5.1. Subject to Article 5.2, the Host Organisation shall be responsible for:
- 5.1.1. implementing preventative measures in all Controlled Access Areas in compliance with the medical protocol set by the AFC and the relevant authorities of the host country, at its own cost; and
 - 5.1.2. organising and covering the cost of the COVID-19 testing process for the AFC Delegation and Participating Teams/Participating Clubs upon their arrival to the host country and (if required) on an ongoing basis, as well as for organising and covering the cost of the COVID-19 testing process for Participating Teams/Participating Clubs already based in the host country. This shall include, without limitation, the purchase of testing kits, the delivery of testing, the analysis of samples and the results management process. The Host Organisation shall ensure that these obligations are discharged using appropriately skilled personnel and in a timely manner, in the utmost confidence.
- 5.2. The relevant Stakeholder shall be responsible for any and all costs and/or expenses (unless agreed otherwise with any relevant Individual) incurred by all Individuals affiliated to it and/or carrying out duties on its behalf in connection with their involvement in any Match or Competition, including, but not limited to, any insurance coverage, hospitalisation, medical and quarantine costs.

6. Decisions

- 6.1. All decisions made by the AFC Competitions Committee (or any sub-committee carrying out duties on its behalf) in accordance with these Special Rules, except where expressly identified otherwise, are final and binding and not appealable.

7. Enforcement

- 7.1. These Special Rules were ratified by the AFC Executive Committee on 10 September 2020 and came into force immediately.
- 7.2. These Special Rules were amended by the AFC Executive Committee on 17 March 2021 and came into force immediately. The relevant amendments are highlighted in these Special Rules.
- 7.3. These Special Rules shall continue to remain in force until such time as the AFC Executive Committee decides otherwise.
- 7.4. The AFC Executive Committee may amend these Special Rules at any time.

For the AFC Executive Committee

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