



HEALTH AND SAFETY

Who is responsible for safety?

Ultimately it is your responsibility as the activity provider/coach in charge to ensure those taking part in the activity do not come to any harm.

One of the key factors in ensuring safety is the provision of suitable and sufficient supervision. Such supervision, and the expertise of those supervising, should be appropriate to individual circumstances and determined by the findings of a risk assessment.

Risk assessment and accident prevention

Under health and safety legislation, as an activity provider you, the coach in charge, have a duty to ensure the health and safety of those who participate in activities, i.e. other coaches/assistants and participants. You also have a duty to ensure that no one else is harmed as a result of those activities, i.e. non-participating members of the public.

As part of this duty, you must ensure that a risk assessment is undertaken by a competent person which covers those risks that are reasonably foreseeable. This includes assessing and planning for contingencies arising from foreseeable changes.

The following minimum five steps should be included in the production of a risk assessment

1. Look for and identify the hazards
2. Decide who might be harmed and how
3. Evaluate the risk and decide whether the existing precautions are adequate or whether more should be done
4. Record your findings
5. Review your assessment and revise if necessary

As there are many different factors to consider each time an activity takes place, you will need to determine what the site specific hazards are at any one time.

A sample completed Risk Assessment form is included as an Appendix to this document. Coaches should complete their own Risk Assessment forms for each coaching session (a blank form is also included as an Appendix).

Supervision of activities

The main hazards associated with fencing are:

- Being struck by weapons
- Slips and trips
- Broken blades
- Spectators/non-participating members of the public
- Unsupervised and/or incorrect use of equipment

Control measures

Listed below are the minimum measures that coaches should take to ensure the safety of participants.

Coach competence

The coach and any assistants should be equipped with the necessary skills to deal with any reasonably foreseeable occurrences. It is essential that the coach in charge should identify the levels of competence others coaches and assistants need to be able to ensure safety during activities. Equipment requirements may vary from day to day and group to group. It will need to be clear who is responsible for checking the equipment and what they need to do if it is not acceptable.

Qualifications are just one way of showing competence. Practical experience gained over the years should also be considered as a way of showing competence.

Competence of participants

You the coach should have in place a policy for identifying the competence, experience, special needs, physical and medical condition of the participants. Once this has been completed, a decision on which activities or levels of difficulty will suit the participants can be made.

It is recommended that you have a policy of informing the participants (parents/guardians) about the nature and extent of risks and what to expect from the activity. This is particularly important where the participants may have no concept or prior knowledge of fencing. You



HEALTH AND SAFETY

should make the risks clear, and offer realistic and uninhibited options to any participants who, as a result, wish to decline the activity.

Medical conditions and/or disabilities

There needs to be a policy for checking any conditions that may require a participant to receive special attention. They may need greater supervision or may even need to be excluded from the activity.

Group sizes

It is advisable to limit the maximum number of participants in a group per coach taking into account group management difficulties with particular types of activity. The use of assistants may help group management, but the responsibilities of assistants need to match their levels of competence.

The size of the group and number of coaches/assistants will depend on a number of factors including the age, skills and competence of the group, the venue used and the experience of the coach in charge. The coach in charge will need to ensure that for each particular activity the size of the group is appropriate to the skills, knowledge and overall competence of the coach in charge of the group and members of the group. If necessary, you should take measures such as providing additional instructors, reducing the size of the group, or splitting the group and providing a competent leader for each group.

Briefings

Participants should be told how they can ensure their own safety and contribute towards the safety of the group as a whole. The coach in charge should give a presentation on the various aspects of the activity, covering all the relevant information. A checklist may be useful to ensure that items are not missed.

Participants must be made aware of the dangers and, where possible, be prevented from accessing the equipment without the supervision of the coach.

Supervision between activities

Participants not involved in an activity may become harmed e.g., those 'waiting their turn' can start to 'play' with the equipment unsupervised. Participants 'waiting'/'resting' should do so in a safe location and be prevented from 'playing' with the equipment unsupervised. Adequate supervision should be provided at all times.

It is also important to ensure the location of all members of the group is known at all times in the event of an emergency e.g. fire.

Normal operating procedures

The coach can use the findings of the risk assessment to compile the normal operating procedures. These should include systems for segregating non-fencers/spectators from the fencing area, systems for the storage, movement, allocation and collection of equipment.

The coach should ensure that all activities are supervised by suitably qualified and competent persons and that all necessary equipment is worn and used in the correct manner.

Inspection regime

An inspection regime which includes checks by the user, formal visual inspections on a regular basis and combined inspection and testing where necessary should be established.

User checks

The person using the equipment should be encouraged, after basic training, to visually check the equipment that they use for any signs that it is not in a safe condition. Defects should be reported to the coach in charge.

Formal visual inspection

To control the risk and to monitor the user checks, a competent person (i.e. someone who has had the necessary training or experience) should carry out regular formal inspections of the equipment which include visual checks undertaken in a systematic way.

For the most part equipment should be visually checked by a competent person. This visual



HEALTH AND SAFETY

inspection should include some/all of the following as appropriate:

Masks – free from damage, significant dents, completeness (back strap and bib present), no penetration/soft spots of the mesh

Jackets/under plastrons/breeches – no holes, tears. Zips and fasteners present and in working order. Clean and suitable to be worn.

Gloves – free from damage

Weapons – no broken or ‘soft’ blades. Blades complete with buttons or complete electrical ‘point’.

Electrical equipment – no bare wires, plugs and fittings present and correctly fitted. Casings undamaged.

Combined inspection and testing

Some faults may not be picked up by user checks or formal visual inspections. It is therefore important that combined inspection and testing is carried out by a person trained to do so at intervals appropriate to the type of equipment, usage, conditions and the risks. An example of equipment requiring such checks is any mains powered electrical item.

First aid

A first aid box should be present and easily accessible. The contents and size of the first aid box may need vary depending upon the size of the group and the activities to be undertaken. With any serious accident professional assistance should be sought immediately.

Picking the venue

It is important to ensure that the venue selected is suitable for the activity planned and the size of the group.

In addition you will need to identify emergency signals, exit points, assembly areas and health and welfare facilities before the activity takes place in case there is a need to stop the activity at short notice.

Selecting clothing and equipment

What is appropriate may vary from day to day, session to session. For most activities participants should wear full fencing clothing, i.e. mask, under plastron (breast protectors if appropriate), jacket, breeches, a glove and suitable appropriate footwear. The clothing should of appropriate to the participant using it, i.e. it should fit correctly.

Equipment should be stored such that its use by unauthorised persons is prevented.

A system for checking the safety and suitability of all equipment prior to its use is essential.

Emergency action plans

All those involved in the activity need to be aware of their responsibilities in the event of an emergency. You should have in place a system for ensuring that the relevant authorities are notified and emergency contact details are known. Those running the activity need to have the necessary competencies to deal with any immediate problems and know where and how to get help if it is needed. The position and functionality of the nearest emergency telephone should be determined prior to the activity commencing. In the event of an accident the Secretary of the BAF should be informed of the details as soon as possible.

Further advice

You can obtain further advice and guidance from the following

Secretary of the British Academy of Fencing

Email: secretary@baf-fencing.org

The British Fencing Association
1 Baron's Gate,
33-35 Rothschild Road,
London W4 5HT,
Tel: 020 8742 3032, Fax 020 8742 3033



HEALTH AND SAFETY

This document contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.

Associated documents

Appendix 1 – Risk Assessment Form (Sample)

Appendix 2 – Risk Assessment Form (Blank)

Appendix 3 – Risk Assessment and Duty of Care

Appendix 4 – Personal Safety Rules

Appendix 5 –BAF Incident Report Form