

SPORT FIELD CLOSURES

1. OVERVIEW

Council aims to provide opportunities for residents and visitors to participate in sport, however sports fields may need to be closed from time to time due to ground conditions or maintenance and renovation activities. When ground conditions are unfavorable, the closure of fields is undertaken to ensure the safety of users and the longevity of the playing surfaces. The safety of participants is council's primary concern. Hard ground, slippery turf and heavy conditions may affect player safety. Damage to the playing surface may occur from boot imprints on soft ground or grass being ripped out at the roots leaving bare patches. Using a field for even one match in poor conditions may result in it being unavailable for several weeks.

The open/closed status of fields is displayed on council's website at <https://www.moretonbay.qld.gov.au/Services/Sport-Recreation/Sporting-Field-Closures>. The website is updated regularly during periods of wet weather until 4pm each business day.

Clubs may take a pro-active approach and cancel activities on a field that remains open, however must not play on a closed field. Clubs are responsible for notifying stakeholders of the field status and enforcing the decision. It is recommended that clubs include the field status on their own website or link to council's website.

Council recommends clubs consider alternative training options at the start of each season which do not rely on access to fields. This enables members to continue participation and stay active without damaging the playing surface. Options include organised runs, connecting with a local gym or gaining access to a local school's covered play facility.

2. FIELD INSPECTIONS

Council officers undertake assessments of sports fields during business hours on weekdays using a combination of the measures below. Clubs and associations are expected to make similar assessments on weekends. If heavy rain occurs late on a weekday afternoon, clubs should assess if training or play is suitable. It is recommended that the same club member(s) undertake the assessment on each occasion to ensure consistency in decision making and the individual(s) can gain a thorough understanding of the nature of the field(s).

a) Moisture Content of Soil

Council officers use a digital soil moisture sensor probe to take readings from a variety of locations across a single field, as some areas retain water more than others. If readings exceed critical levels, the field is closed. Where the field exhibits an excessively wet area, but the remainder of the field is playable and a smaller field is useful, such as for a junior game, part of the field may be made available in direct consultation with the club. In the majority of cases, fields are closed in their entirety.

Clubs may assess the moisture content of the soil by an adult walking across the field. If water rises to the surface around the foot or between the toes or the person sinks into the field, the soil is saturated and highly susceptible to damage. Any visible surface water indicates the same. The field must be closed, and all training and competition cancelled.

b) Soil Profile and Drainage

Fields are constructed with different soil profiles and have different drainage capacities. Sand-based fields drain quickest, and play may be able to occur soon after rain events. Fields constructed on clay bases, including those on former tip sites, generally have the lowest drainage capacity. Council officers take soil moisture readings when rain events occur to build a data profile of each field to make informed decisions on field closures and to assist club personnel to understand how well the fields drain following rain.

c) Amount and Duration of Rainfall

The pattern of rainfall affects the playability of fields. A large amount of rain in a short period, such as a storm, can result in much of the water sheeting off the field and not being absorbed. Alternatively, lower daily amounts consistently across a week are likely to result in the water being absorbed and filtering deep into the soil profile. If the soil profile has been saturated from consistent rainfall, a day of sunshine before the weekend is unlikely to dry the field to a level suitable for competition. The top surface may feel dry but the impacts of running, tackling or jumping will transmit through to the wet layer's underneath and cause imprints.

d) Weather Forecast

When fields are assessed as borderline playable, the weather forecast is taken into consideration. If there is a high likelihood of rain, the field is likely to be closed. Alternatively, if dry warm winds are predicted, the field is likely to be open.

e) Grass Coverage

In dry conditions, fields may be closed due to poor grass coverage that has resulted from overuse of a field or area. Winter sports are particularly susceptible as grass growth slows and wear increases. Clubs should rotate areas of use, limit repetitive training drills on the same part of the field, avoid field marking lines as start or turn points for drills, reposition player boxes throughout the season where possible, and remove goal posts at the end of each season. Grass coverage below 60% can result in excessive soil compaction, hardness and potential for injury.

In wet conditions, fields are susceptible to long-term damage if grass coverage is below 70% and play occurs. Usage of the surface when wet churns the soil which significantly slows new grass growth. Grass growth during winter, even in small amounts, is critical in sustaining use of the fields through to the end of the season.

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f) Usage and Users

The difference in player movement and intensity between sports means that fields are impacted to differing levels depending on the age and size of participants, training versus competition and the sport being played. Junior members generally have less impact than senior members, although consideration must be given to the number of junior games being played concurrently on a senior field. Four games of junior competition over three time slots may occur on the equivalent sized field and time for a senior fixture and could potentially do more damage to the playing surface. Council officers will consider the type of use and scheduled fixtures when determining field closures. Clubs should consider limiting usage, playing only priority games or deferring games until a later date.

Status	Definition
Open	Field are in a safe operational condition - full access and scheduling can be undertaken
Determined By User Group	Club representatives are required to assess the fields referencing the MBRC Sportsfield Manual and make a decision on the suitability of the surface for play. This usually occurs after rain events when fields are likely to be suitable 24 hours post rain or inspection when rain is forecast over the weekend when proposed sport is due to be undertaken.
Closed due to Weather	The field is closed due to the playing surface now saturated to a level where, any sporting usage will incur significant long-term damage to the playing surface. Use may make the surface uneven and dangerous and will incur large cost to rectify.
Closed Maintenance	The field is closed due to the playing surface receiving short term maintenance to rejuvenate or renovate the playing surface.
Closed Major Works	The field is closed due to the field or complex being under construction for the renewal or installation of new irrigation, drainage, turf surfaces, lighting or other related sporting infrastructure.