



COVID-19 RULES OF GOLF & RULES OF HANDICAPPING GUIDANCE

UPDATE: July 13, 2020

The guidance outlined below is designed to assist golf course operators, committees and golfers in better understanding the options available under the Rules of Golf and Rules of Handicapping, while temporary measures are in place to minimize the spread of COVID-19. **All golfers are reminded to follow the guidelines that are in place from Provincial government and health officials in their province, along with any additional precautionary measures implemented by their golf club.**

SCORING IN STROKE PLAY (Rule 3.3b)

RECOMMENDATION – it is strongly recommended that Committees choose to allow methods of scoring in stroke play that do not strictly comply with Rule 3.3b of the Rules of Golf, or the normal methods used under this Rule ([click here](#) to view Rule 3.3b). The Rules of Golf already allow for scorecards to be in any paper or electronic form approved by the Committee.

Any of the following scoring methods may be adopted on a temporary basis and Committees are reminded to consider how best to limit common touch points and ensure that physical distancing is maintained at all times.

Physical Scorecards

- Players may enter their own hole-by-hole scores on the scorecard
- The marker may enter the player's hole-by-hole scores and set the scorecard down on a surface in the scoring area for the player to visually inspect the accuracy of the hole-by-hole scores (any changes can be made by the marker and verbally confirmed by the player)
- Verbal confirmation of a player's hole-by-hole scores by the marker can be substituted for a signature
- Hole-by-hole scores can be communicated and confirmed verbally by the marker and player to the Committee in the scoring area

NOTE: If the Committee plans to use a more traditional method of scoring, facial cloth coverings and hand sanitizer should be made available and used by all players and any other individuals who are present.

Electronic Scoring

- Markers can be instructed to send an email or text containing the player's hole-by-hole scores to the Committee and player for whom they are marking
- Players can reply to the email or text to verify the accuracy of the submitted hole-by-hole scores and request any changes that need to be made by the marker



NOTE: All players should receive instructions in their pre-arrival communication for this scoring method.

Combination of Physical & Electronic Scoring

- Markers can be instructed to take a picture of the completed scorecard and send an email or text to the Committee and player for whom they are marking
- Players can reply to the email or text to verify the accuracy of the submitted hole-by-hole scores and request any changes that need to be made by the marker

NOTE: For any physical or electronic scoring method that is adopted, the Committee should clearly define when a scorecard has been returned (when no additional changes may be made). For example, the Committee could state that once the player has certified the scores as submitted by the marker, the scorecard has been returned.

RULES OF HANDICAPPING

All scores posted for rounds with any of the alternate scoring methods outlined above would be acceptable for handicap purposes.

BUNKERS (RULE 12)

RECOMMENDATION – it is strongly recommended that all bunker rakes be removed from the course and that one of the following options is adopted by the Committee to address the likely possibility of a player's ball coming to rest in an unmaintained area of sand.

No Modifications to the Rules of Golf

- Players can be strongly encouraged to try their best to smooth the disturbed area with a foot or club after playing their ball
- Courses with limited play or where most players use a golf cart can request that each player takes a rake with them on the course

Modifications under the Rules of Golf

- Changing the status of bunkers to be part of the general area
 - Players will have additional relief options under [Rule 16](#) (Relief from Abnormal Course Conditions) and [Rule 19](#) (Unplayable Ball)
 - All bunker restrictions normally in effect under Rule 12 would be removed ([click here](#) to view restrictions)
- Bunkers may be declared 'Ground Under Repair', allowing players the option to take free relief outside the bunker under Rule 16.1 ([click here](#) to view Rule 16.1)
 - Additionally, only the disturbed areas in bunkers may be declared 'Ground Under Repair', allowing players to take free relief elsewhere in the bunker



- Model Local Rule E-3 may be adopted to allow preferred lies in bunkers (e.g. allowing the ball to be placed **once** in the bunker within one club-length not nearer to the hole than where the ball came to rest). **It is strongly recommended that the other options listed above are considered first, and that this option is only used as a last resort.**

NOTE: The Rules of Golf **do not** allow a ball to be lifted, the bunker to be smoothed, and the ball to be replaced.

RULES OF HANDICAPPING

All scores posted for rounds with any of the options outlined above would be acceptable for handicap purposes.

FLAGSTICKS (RULE 13.2)

RECOMMENDATION – it is strongly recommended that all golfers are required to leave the flagstick in the hole at all times and that a sign is put on the flagstick stating that it is not to be touched.

The Committee may choose to include this requirement under their *Code of Conduct Policy* and are authorized under Rule 1.2b of the Rules of Golf to include penalties (i.e. warnings, one-stroke penalty, general penalty, etc.) for any breach of the listed standards in the Code. It is recommended that only deliberate acts to affect the outcome of the hole by removing the flagstick be penalized, as removing the flagstick is an instinctual act for many players.

The Committee may also choose to allow players to centre the flagstick in a safe manner which does not involve using the hand, even when wearing a glove or using a towel (e.g. by using a club). The centring of the flagstick may be allowed while another player putts, as this may be desirable in windy conditions when the flagstick is required to be left in the hole and is leaning towards the player making the stroke.

As a temporary measure, flagsticks may have external attachments (e.g. movable platform, trays) to eliminate the need to lift the ball out of the hole and do not need to meet the specifications outlined in Part 8 of the Equipment Rules for the purpose of player safety ([click here](#) to view the Equipment Rules).

RULES OF HANDICAPPING

All scores posted for rounds with restrictions placed on removing the flagstick or with external attachments to eliminate the need to lift the ball out of the hole would be acceptable for handicap purposes.



HOLE AND HOLED

RECOMMENDATION – it is strongly recommended that a method of inserting the hole liner (“cup”) be used that restricts all of the ball from falling below the surface of the putting green and allows for the ball to be easily retrieved by handling the ball only.

If any of the following provisions are used, play in such circumstances **is not** in accordance with the Rules of Golf:

- Treating a ball as holed or holed with the next stroke if it is within a certain distance of the hole
- Having the hole liner sitting above the surface of the green and treating a ball as holed if it strikes the liner
- Treating a ball as holed when it has bounced out of the hole for any reason (e.g. when it has bounced off the flagstick, a tray attached to the flagstick or the hole liner)

RULES OF HANDICAPPING

A temporary measure is in place in Canada to accept scores played under these safety measures for handicap purposes, using the ‘most likely score’ guidelines (see [Rules 3.3](#) of the Rules of Handicapping) outlined in the appendix, even though the player has not holed out. **Please note that improper application of ‘most likely score’ may result in lower scores. It is important for players to apply the procedure consistently and accurately to protect the integrity of their Handicap Index. Most likely score is at the player’s best judgement and should not be used to gain an unfair advantage.**

Any questions about the guidance above or a discussion about another implication to the Rules of Golf or Rules of Handicapping can be directed to:

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Appendix - Applying the 'Most Likely Score' Procedure

A 'most likely score' is used to record a player's probable score on a hole, when the hole has been started but the player did not hole out their ball. It should be a reasonable assessment of the number of strokes needed to complete the hole. The player should use their best judgement to assess whether the ball would have been holed had they been able to complete the hole. When making this decision, the player should consider where the ball struck the flagstick or hole liner, as well as the speed at which the ball was traveling when it came into contact with either piece of equipment.

The 'most likely score' is:

- The number of strokes already taken to reach a position on a hole, plus
- The number of strokes the player would most likely require to complete the hole from that position, plus
- Any penalty strokes incurred during play of the hole

Most likely scores should be determined on any hole in accordance with the following guidelines:

'MOST LIKEY SCORE' GUIDELINES	
Position of the Ball	Strokes to be Added
If the ball lies on the putting green, and is no more than 5 feet from the hole:	Add one additional stroke
If the ball lies between 5 feet (1.5 metres) and 20 yards from the hole:	Add 2 or 3 additional strokes, depending on the position of the ball, the difficulty of the green and the ability of the player
If the ball lies more than 20 yards from the hole:	Add 3 or 4 additional strokes, depending on the position of the ball, the difficulty of the green and the ability of the player

Note: For players with an established Handicap Index, the most likely score on any hole cannot exceed net double bogey for handicap purposes.