

## **Case Study: How to Design and Deliver a Safe and Secure Event in a post-COVID World**

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**ABSTRACT:** *As Qatar approaches the 2022 FIFA World Cup, the ability to safely host global, high profile events has been severely impacted by the restrictions imposed by COVID-19.*

*There are two key aspects to consider in relation to the resumption of large-scale events: providing effective and efficient safety procedures at venues, and ensuring attendees have sufficient confidence in those procedures.*

*The UK is at the forefront of the global re-opening process and is utilising a highly co-ordinated approach led by a successful vaccine deployment programme. It will be critical for Qatar to learn from the UK's experience and put in place similar systems with deep integration between vaccine rollout, venue health & safety procedures, and public confidence programmes in conjunction with the media.*

*With proper systems and safeguards in place, Qatar will be able to host what will likely be the most high profile major global sporting event since the COVID-19 crisis began and demonstrate itself to be a proven and trusted host nation for similar events in the future, in addition to reinforcing its position as a regional and global leader in a post- pandemic world. In this article we examine the steps and actions taken by the UK Government, alongside those of other nations, and consider areas of success and areas for improvement. We then consider how these lessons can be converted into a global and scalable response plan for sporting events in the era of COVID-19.*

### Key Learning Objectives:

- To identify the risks that Covid-19 continues to present to Global Sporting Events
- To examine strategies used in pilot events for reopening sport in the UK
- To assess the success of pilot event strategies, using primary data from spectator feedback
- To identify strategies and recommendations for the Qatar 2022 World Cup, and the implications for the MENA region

### Introduction

The impacts of the Coronavirus (“Covid-19”) global pandemic have been far-reaching and have dominated both policy and media coverage since early 2020. Covid-19 is an infectious disease spread through droplets of saliva or nasal fluid, with the possibility of catching the virus from surfaces/contact with the infected.<sup>1</sup> At the time of writing, there has been 233,503,524 global cases, with 4,777,503 deaths.<sup>2</sup> Nations across the globe deployed regional and national lockdowns, in varying degrees of severity, and battled to reduce the spread of the virus, whilst preventing panic within their populations. Lockdowns have included complete ‘stay at home’ orders, the closing of schools and universities, and the suspension of public leisure activities.

The pandemic required that mass gatherings be suspended or cancelled, and the global sporting world entered a period of uncertainty and frustration. As a source of transmission that crosses borders, due to the nature of international travel for both athletes and spectators, sporting events have been identified as extremely high risk for transmission of diseases<sup>3</sup>. Governments have been all-too aware that the cancellation of major sporting events has had an impact on the economy, the morale of the population, and the image of the organising bodies/nations. Sporting events have also been linked to the emotional well-being of the global communities, as well as social and economic health of host countries and cities.<sup>4</sup> Whilst many events were able to resume ‘behind closed doors’ in empty stadiums during the pandemic, the world is now turning its eyes to the resumption of spectator filled stadiums; albeit with a cautious outlook, and increased scrutiny on industry health and safety. This increased media scrutiny, and the damage to confidence in governments perceived as ‘getting it wrong’ are huge risks with resuming mass gatherings, and it has

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organisation, [https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1) ACCESSED 21/7/21

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organisation, <https://covid19.who.int/> ACCESSED 27/7/21

<sup>3</sup> Brian McCloskey, Alimuddin Zumla, Giuseppe Ippolito, Lucille Blumberg, Paul Arbon, Anita Cicero, Tina Endericks, Poh Lian Lim, Maya Borodina, Mass gathering events and reducing further global spread of COVID-19: a political and public health dilemma, *The Lancet*, Volume 395, Issue 10230, 2020, Pages 1096-1099, ISSN 0140-6736, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30681-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30681-4).  
(<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140673620306814>)

<sup>4</sup> Carmody S, Murray A, Borodina M, *et al* When can professional sport recommence safely during the COVID-19 pandemic? Risk assessment and factors to consider *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 2020;**54**:946-948.

been suggested that those concerns over image have dominated policy as opposed to a proper understanding of reducing transmission.<sup>5</sup>

As sporting events resume, the need to generate confidence in event protocols, reassure spectators of their safety, and ensure the experience holds the same vigour and status as they held before the pandemic has become a significant and delicate juggling act for host nations.

This case study will look at the UK Governments resumption of sporting events under the ERP (Events Research Programme) at various stages of deployment, and the impact these strategies had on the events. The ERP testing involved reintroducing sporting events, with various Covid-19 protocols and restrictions in place. These included crowd capacity restrictions, Lateral Flow Testing and social distancing measures, amongst other things.

### **The nature of Global Sporting Events and the Implications of Covid-19**

By nature, international sporting events are extremely high-risk environments in relation to the spread of contagious diseases as infection during the event can be rapid, and far-reaching. Covid-19 has presented a relatively novel threat to the sporting industry, in that a global pandemic status has rarely resulted in the cancellation or postponement of mega-events.<sup>6</sup> The impacts of the virus have had profound ramifications in the sporting world; financial, social and physical aspects of the industry have all suffered, and at the time of writing, continue to do so.<sup>7</sup> As event organisers grapple with the already complex task of hosting a secure and safe mega-event, they must now consider security on a biological level, alongside the necessary measures to also ensure security and counter-terrorism procedures are followed effectively.

Protect and Prepare Ltd have explored the security requirements for mega-events in detail, and in relation to the Qatar 2022 World Cup and examined the need for thorough planning based around preventative strategies.<sup>8</sup> This Case Study will build upon the systems of preventative planning, with a focus on measures in place to prevent the spread of Covid-19, and enable the reopening of global events in a post-pandemic world to be both safe, and enjoyable for the international community. Illustrated in Figure 1 are the 'routine'

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<sup>5</sup> Brian McCloskey, Alimuddin Zumla, Giuseppe Ippolito, Lucille Blumberg, Paul Arbon, Anita Cicero, Tina Endericks, Poh Lian Lim, Maya Borodina, Mass gathering events and reducing further global spread of COVID-19: a political and public health dilemma, *The Lancet*, Volume 395, Issue 10230, 2020, Pages 1096-1099, ISSN 0140-6736, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30681-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30681-4).

(<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140673620306814>)

<sup>6</sup> Jan Andre Lee Ludvigsen & John W. Hayton (2020): Toward COVID-19 secure events: considerations for organizing the safe resumption of major sporting events, *Managing Sport and Leisure*, DOI: 10.1080/23750472.2020.1782252

<sup>7</sup> Al-Dosari, K. N. K. A. (2020). ASSESSING THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON MEGA SPORTING EVENTS: A CASE OF THE 2022 FIFA WORLD CUP IN QATAR. *Global Journal of Health Sciences*, 5(2), 1 – 17. Retrieved from <https://www.iprjb.org/journals/index.php/GJHS/article/view/1130>

<sup>8</sup> Scoular, Mark (2020): Multi-Agency Response Capabilities and Planning for Significant Sporting Events, Josoor Institute Knowledge Hub [https://knowledgehub.josoorinstitute.qa/case\\_studies/multi-agency-response-capabilities-and-planning-for-significant-sporting-events/](https://knowledgehub.josoorinstitute.qa/case_studies/multi-agency-response-capabilities-and-planning-for-significant-sporting-events/)

considerations required by event organised, and highlighted are the new challenges presented by Covid-19. This ultimately illustrates that as well as complicating organisation even further, the risks of Covid-19 often present challenges that undermine or conflict with existing security protocols and practices.

Event Requirement	New challenge presented by Covid-19
Ensuring the event is secure, and you have sufficient staff/stewards to maintain order.	Private companies often relied upon for these staff are experiencing shortages due to self-isolation, or have been deployed to vaccine/testing centres.
Monitoring who and what is entering the premises; bag searches/pat-downs/ ticket checks.	Minimising contact between individuals as far as possible. Wearing of masks can present a challenge in identifying/monitoring those on site.
Multi-agency response systems that are thoroughly tested, reviewed and adapted for each individual venue/event.	Emergency services have been under immense pressure during the pandemic, there has been shortages of personnel due to isolation, and their priorities have been managing the pandemic.
Protocols and response to threats need to be fully embedded and test exercises should familiarise all stakeholders with emergency protocols.	Advice and WHO/Government guidelines may change at extremely short notice. There is a greater need than ever for reactive planning and last-minute adoption of specific measures.

*Figure 1: The security considerations for mega events, with the new considerations required due to Covid-19*

Global events are considered to be the most ‘at-risk’ arenas for international violence or terrorism, and as such academic focus has often been on how to deliver secure events.<sup>9</sup> Media scrutiny has been on how events have mitigated the physical risk of attacks, or managed the factors of risk that came to be the focus of the event space in the post-9/11 world.<sup>10</sup> As evidenced by decisions made surrounding the Cheltenham 2020 festival, the media scrutiny has turned their eye specifically to how far organisers and policy-makers are ensuring the safety of events from a Covid-19 perspective, and harsh criticism of perceived failure has fuelled public frustrations with such bodies. Indeed, if we take the Cheltenham Festival as an example, criticism of permitting the event to proceed quickly became accusations of profit-fuelled policy over humanitarian consideration. Cheltenham is a large-

<sup>9</sup> Houlihan, B. and Giulianotti, R. (2012), Politics and the London 2012 Olympics: the (in)security Games. *International Affairs*, 88: 701-717. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2346.2012.01097.x

<sup>10</sup> Tracy Taylor & Kristine Toohey (2007) Perceptions of Terrorism Threats at the 2004 Olympic Games: Implications for Sport Events, *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 12:2, 99-114, DOI: [10.1080/14775080701654754](https://doi.org/10.1080/14775080701654754)

scale horse-racing event with the second highest prize money of any UK race meeting. At the event racing takes place over the course of four days alongside music performances, social dining and drinking and shopping areas. The decision to continue with this festival was controversial;

***‘Then we watched aghast as the Cheltenham Festival went ahead, and 250,000 people packed the terraces “like sardines”. It appears to have been a super-spreader event, blamed by some for a spike in infections and deaths.’<sup>11</sup>***

***‘Allowing the Cheltenham Festival to go ahead in March could have helped ‘accelerate the spread’ of Covid-19, a former government chief scientific adviser has warned.’<sup>12</sup>***

Bitterness, and indeed media scrutiny following the festival damaged public confidence in the authorities handling of Covid-19, and the intensity of this scrutiny on mass gatherings can be expected to continue, ‘whether it is in 2020 or 2021 and beyond’<sup>13</sup> Mass gatherings and global sporting events have long been held with pride by host nations, cherishing the opportunity for prestige and praise, but what was previously a double-edged sword in instances of shortcomings, has just added a third blade; the Covid-19 scrutiny. Events will now be expected to not only protect spectators from security risks, they will also be expected to visibly show preventative measures in relation to Covid-19, all whilst ensuring the experience is enjoyable and meets the expectations attached to global sporting events.

### **What have we learned during, after and beyond the ERP (Events Research Programme)?**

For the purpose of this case study, several people were interviewed or surveyed, with the aim of gaining insight into the perceptions of Covid-19 strategy in the pilot events within the UK. Some were interviewed/surveyed as spectators from events to offer feedback from a consumer perspective, others as specialists involved in the planning and delivery of ERP events, and some experts beyond the UK ERP who have been delivering global events in other regions. We gathered comments and feedback from people who attended two of the core ERP events; Euro 2021 finals at Wembley, and the Wimbledon 2021 Tennis Championships.

The answers given in interviews seemed to vary by event, an unsurprising outcome based on the fact each pilot had different Covid-19 restrictions. For this reason, we will analyse some of the feedback by the event discussed.

It is worth noting that at the time of writing findings from the ERP, phases 2-4 have not yet been published, and answers given here are reflective of individual spectators’ perceptions,

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<sup>11</sup> Monbiot, G. 2020. “The Government’s Secretive Covid Contracts are Heaping Misery on Britain.” The Guardian. October 21. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/oct/21/government-covid-contracts-britain-nhscorporate-executives-test-and-trace>

<sup>12</sup> Boyle, Darren. 2020. “Top Scientist Said Cheltenham Festival Best Way to Accelerate Covid-19 spread.” Daily Mail. 1 May 2020. Accessed 27 July 2021. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8277249/Top-scientist-said-Cheltenham-festival-best-way-accelerate-Covid-19-spread.html>

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Parnell, Paul Widdop, Alex Bond & Rob Wilson (2020): COVID-19, networks and sport, Managing Sport and Leisure, DOI: 10.1080/23750472.2020.1750100

not on definitive outcomes. The findings of the ERP Phase 1 testing have been used to inform further testing and include the following points:

1. Outdoor venues pose a smaller risk for transmission
2. Unstructured gatherings pose a higher risk (I.E where people freely move around more than a structured/seated event)
3. Whilst compliance with measures such as mask-wearing and distancing were generally high, where there was non-compliance tended to be in high risk areas
4. The study itself cannot be accepted as conclusive/wide-ranging enough to draw definitive answers for all other future events.

For further detail on the findings please see the published report.<sup>14</sup>

### **Wimbledon Championship 2021 (ERP Pilot)**

Phase	Criteria
1	Proof of Covid Status (Lateral flow negative within 48 hours, or fully vaccinated +14 days)
2	Masks required only for moving around inside venue; outside seating meant no mask once in seats
3	Gradual increase of capacity as championship progressed (beginning with 50% in first stages, going to 100% for Capacity for the Mens and Womens finals)
4	Tickets/entry documents required in digital format

The Wimbledon Tennis Championships took place between 28/6/21-11/7/21. Athletes travelled from around the globe to compete, and the ERP used the contest as a phase 3 pilots. Tim Cutbill, who has previously held advisory positions to the government in coordinating mass-gatherings, held the position as Safety Officer at the Championships, implementing the Covid-Secure planning for the event. He offered insight into the intricacies of planning and delivering such events in what have become the most challenging years in the event space.<sup>15</sup>

From the early stages of planning, and receiving confirmation that Wimbledon would be included in ERP events, communication and dialogue across stakeholders was vital.<sup>16</sup> Covid-19 has presented unprecedented challenges, and as such guidance has changed with very little notice, often with deadlines pushed back or restrictions imposed quickly. This means that event organisers needed to stay abreast of changes to advice, and act very quickly

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<sup>14</sup> [Events Research Programme: Phase I findings - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/events-research-programme-phase-1-findings) UK Government, ERP Report Phase 1, 2021

<sup>15</sup> Tim Cutbill, Director, Protect and Prepare. Safety Officer, Wimbledon Championships, Interviewed July 28<sup>th</sup> 2021

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

should these impact the planning process.<sup>17</sup> Liaison between national health agencies, local health agencies, event organisers and event staff was crucial to ensure everyone remained fully informed of expectations and measures in place.<sup>18</sup> Staff were expected to have a thorough understanding of the event protocols, and feel confident in challenging conduct which violated the guidelines. Throughout the event staff were present in all areas, to remind spectators of the protocols, and signage supported them in feeling in a position of authority when enforcing the measures.<sup>19</sup>

This communication, and dissemination of guidelines and practices is equally vital when considering the behaviour of attendants. Cutbill expressed the importance of building this information into the ticketing and attendance strategies, allowing spectators to make informed decisions regarding the control measures required for those attending, and compliance with restrictions in the grounds.<sup>20</sup> By ensuring the Covid-19 processes and requirements, such as mask-wearing, social distancing and the potential for isolation ‘pings’ (instruction to isolate due to contact with a positive case), are made very clear to the public, those in attendance are more likely to conform with the measures, as a social contract they have willingly entered into. Isolation pings were triggered by the NHS track and trace system. If someone tested positive, and a person showed on track and trace as being in the vicinity of them during the infectious period, they would receive a text or app notification to isolate for 10 days.

‘It was fantastic, no face masks were required outdoors...it was as if Covid-19 didn’t really exist in the Wimbledon bubble’ **Spectator 1 Wimbledon Final 2021**<sup>21</sup>

‘Face masks didn’t feel particularly necessary in a big, open, uncrowded space’ **Spectator 2 Wimbledon Final 2021**<sup>22</sup>

This acceptance, and celebration of relaxing Covid-19 measures at the event is built upon confidence in the environment, and the fact spectators felt that other factors were mitigating the risk of spread (e.g. outdoor environments.) This points toward the suggestion that compliance amongst spectators relies upon them understanding the ‘trade-off’ regarding certain measures; masks can be removed if social distancing can be maintained. The culture of events like Wimbledon help this; there is not traditionally a culture of heavy alcohol consumption/ spectator clashes like there is in football, and thus the overall feeling of security and control within the event feeds into the confidence in Covid-19 measures.<sup>23</sup> Wimbledon has an image that has been carefully constructed over

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Data from Spectator Survey, Conducted by Protect and Prepare, July-August 2021

<sup>22</sup> Data from Spectator Survey, Conducted by Protect and Prepare, July-August 2021

<sup>23</sup> Tim Cutbill, Director, Protect and Prepare. Safety Officer, Wimbledon Championships, Interviewed July 28<sup>th</sup> 2021



years with ‘invented traditions’ surrounding behaviour of both athletes and spectators.<sup>24</sup> This makes the monitoring of spectator behaviour easier, and any disturbance to expected protocols can be detected quickly. This may be more challenging in events such as football where ‘rowdy’ crowd behaviour is more commonplace.

Wimbledon 2021 was achieved through intricate planning and preparation; and certainly, was not without challenges.<sup>25</sup> These came down to very simple logistical implications; the necessity of all spectators to evidence digital documentation at the gates slowed down the entry process, and as an event with an older demographic of spectators, meant some were confused or slow to present requirements.<sup>26</sup>

‘Needed a mobile phone for electronic tickets and NHS Covid Pass so had to buy a power bank to ensure I had enough battery! I did worry how some older and less technologically able people would manage and might miss out as a result.’ **Spectator 2 Wimbledon Final 2021**<sup>27</sup>

Alongside this, were increased demands for ‘boots on the ground’ at a time of national shortages within event staff agencies.<sup>28</sup> Many events steward staff have been deployed to vaccine/test centres in the UK, and the agencies usually providing logistics staff were ‘spread thin.’<sup>29</sup> Planning for these shortages meant Wimbledon was able to run smoothly, as detailed plans were in place for what would happen in the event of staff absences/isolation ‘pings’ impacting the event stewards/ticket gates.<sup>30</sup> This will be explored in relation to the MENA (Middle East North Africa) region later in this case study.

#### **UEFA Euro 2020 (including Semi Final and Final), Wembley Stadium (ERP Pilot)**

Phase	Criteria
1	Proof of Covid-19 Status (Lateral flow negative within 48 hours, or fully vaccinated +14 days)
2	Masks required at all times; can be removed when seated in stadium
3	Gradual increase of capacity as championship progressed (beginning with 25% in first stages, going to 75% for final)

The UEFA Euro 2020 competition signalled to many the early signs of a return to normality. International teams competed in front of spectators, and the usual sweep of ‘it’s coming

<sup>24</sup> Lake, R. J. (2018). The Wimbledon Championships, the All England Lawn Tennis Club, and “Invented Traditions”, *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 11(1), 52-74. Retrieved Aug 5, 2021, from <https://journals.humankinetics.com/view/journals/ijsc/11/1/article-p52.xml>

<sup>25</sup> Tim Cutbill, Director, Protect and Prepare. Safety Officer, Wimbledon Championships, Interviewed July 28<sup>th</sup> 2021

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Data from Spectator Survey, Conducted by Protect and Prepare, July-August 2021

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



home' excitement spread through the UK. Initially games were held at 25% capacity, although this gradually increased to 75% for the final. The same Covid-19 pass requirements were enforced, as with all ERP events, although documentation was permitted in physical formats. At the game, face coverings were required at all times when moving in and around the venue but could be removed once seated in the designated seat.

The nature of the Euro 2020 final meant that 60,000 people needed to be processed and monitored, all within the same venue and at the same time. Given the logistical implications of this, it is perhaps unsurprising that feedback generally pointed towards feelings of uncertainty from spectators, with areas of development more readily identified than by those at other events.

'Social distances were missing and people weren't wearing masks in the areas required.'  
**Spectator 3 Euros Final**<sup>31</sup>

*(In response to question about how confident spectators felt that the risks of spreading Covid-19 were mitigated):* '50%. Once inside the stadium it was not enforced to wear our face masks and it was really, really crowded.'  
**Spectator 4 Euros Final**<sup>32</sup>

'Wembley took only the most cursory glance at my NHS Covid Pass so really that would have been easy to forge and I think they are of little benefit unless they are checked properly, including against ID. The pre-event information for Wembley said temperatures would be checked before entry to the stadium but they were not.... Masks were being handed out upon exit and entry at the tube station by Wembley which I thought was a good idea (but there was still a lot of people drinking alcohol or singing instead of wearing a mask!). I didn't come across any officials insisting/reminding people to wear masks.'  
**Spectator 5 Euros Final**

When compared to other events, generally feedback from the Euros games indicated that spectators perceived there to be concerns around enforcement of mask-wearing, and the initial checks of documentation at the gate. Whilst this is perhaps understandable as the event is the largest single crowd event to have taken place, it does offer insight into how football games may fall short of Covid-19 precautions. Indeed, the Euros 2020 Final was criticised in the media by leading WHO Covid scientist Maria Van Kerkhove, who tweeted at the time:

*"Am I supposed to be enjoying watching transmission happening in front of my eyes?"*

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<sup>31</sup> Data from Spectator Survey, Conducted by Protect and Prepare, July-August 2021

<sup>32</sup> Data from Spectator Survey, Conducted by Protect and Prepare, July-August 2021

*"The #COVID19 pandemic is not taking a break tonight... #SARSCoV2 #DeltaVariant will take advantage of unvaccinated people, in crowded settings, unmasked, screaming/shouting/singing. Devastating."*<sup>33</sup>

This public condemnation, from such respected experts and figures of authority, can feed into narratives that go on to blame host nations for any increased outbreak of the virus, and thus are dangerous for the reputation of an international mega-event host.

Negative behaviour of fans at football games has been attributed to a range of factors; 'emotional arousal, hard masculinity, territorial identifications, individual and collective management of reputation, a sense of solidarity and belonging, and representations of sovereignty and autonomy.'<sup>34</sup>

This may explain the tendency for football spectators not complying with Covid-19 measures, or the influence of alcohol consumption has on observing such precautions. Many countries identified this risk, and implemented Covid-19 alcohol-specific regulations. For example, after the first lockdown for a period of time alcohol could only be purchased and consumed with a substantial meal and 10pm curfews were placed on the hospitality sector. These measures sought not only to reduce social gatherings in general, but also acknowledged that alcohol influenced the behaviour of individuals, and the extent to which they mitigated the risk of spreading Covid-19. This is especially important for mega-events, where excitement can run high amongst extremely large, often rival, groups.

Perhaps what should be made clear to all spectators, and the wider media is that ultimately those attending made informed decisions to be there. It may be impossible to guarantee preventative measures are 100% successful at football mega-events, but as long as spectators themselves observe regulations, they can contribute to lessening the risk. Transference of responsibility through pre-match communication with the public can not only enable people to make these informed choices, but also reinforce the message from hosts and organisers that all measure possible have been implemented, but attendance itself presents a risk which is taken willingly. This was achieved somewhat for the Euros, as commented by Spectator 1, but will need greater focus for Qatar in 2022, hosting a global football event.

'Again, I believe personal choice helps. If you want it to feel safer, you would stay away from larger groups on your way into and around the stadium. Events work with Covid protocols in place.' **Spectator 1 Euros Final**<sup>35</sup>

### **Beyond the ERP; Resumption of Sport in The Wider World.**

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<sup>33</sup> Natalie Grover, 'Devastating': WHO scientist condemns Euro 2020 final over Covid risk' The Guardian Newspaper, July 2021, ACCESSED 4/8/21 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jul/12/devastating-who-scientist-condemns-euro-2020-final>

<sup>34</sup> Spaaij R. Men Like Us, Boys Like Them: Violence, Masculinity, and Collective Identity in Football Hooliganism. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*. 2008;32(4):369-392. doi:[10.1177/0193723508324082](https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723508324082)

<sup>35</sup> Data from Spectator Survey, Conducted by Protect and Prepare, July-August 2021

The ERP has offered insight into how sport was able to resume amidst the pandemic in the UK, and provides valuable instruction for the global sporting industry in the near future. However, it is important to note that the ERP events are UK-based, and as such looking beyond these practices will also be useful for Qatar to take a comprehensive approach for the 2022 Qatar FIFA World Cup.

An excellent example of this can be seen in the resumption of Formula E racing, and in particular the measures put in place at the 2021 Mexican Meeting. Similar to the ERP events and in-line with the wider recommendations of this article, practices were based heavily around WHO and national government guidance.<sup>36</sup> Using the data and input from the National Health Services, the Formula E races were built around the premise of having clearly established restrictions defined as mandatory and non-mandatory.<sup>37</sup> The national policy of the time set the minimum requirements, then it came down to the organising body (in this case the International Federation of Automobiles) to establish what they would direct as mandatory practices at the event.<sup>38</sup>

The Puebla ePrix took place in June 2021, Puebla in Mexico, at the time of writing still categorised as 'red list' by the UK government. This event saw teams from across the globe and from different continents meet to compete. At this time, it was clear that the Covid-19 situation and mitigations were inconsistent across the globe, the venue itself had to be changed from the original Autódromo Hermanos Rodríguez track as this was being used as a Covid-19 hospital. As teams came from continents of such varying infection rates, the bubble system for competing teams was stringent and protocols were thorough.<sup>39</sup> Competing teams were kept in a separate bubble and tested every other day with full PCR testing. As a measure directed by the FIA (Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile), they developed results themselves in rapid labs, allowing full PCR results within 3-4 hours.<sup>40</sup> This process was efficient, and enabled such global gatherings as FIA operating as the primary agent in monitoring Covid-19 meant that the speed and frequency of testing were greatly enhanced as they did not rely upon already stretched national services.<sup>41</sup>

Regarding spectators the overall capacity of the event was reduced, and many of the usual attractive qualities of the race meeting were not in place. For example, the 'E-village' which normally enables spectators to purchase food and drink, interact with the vehicles, and socialise with other enthusiasts was not present, and the impact of this on the general atmosphere was somewhat apparent in the stands.<sup>42</sup> The sport itself was able to function as normal, but the overall experience was somewhat diminished by Covid-19 precautions. This trade-off was at the time necessary to enable the event to take place at all and perhaps the

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<sup>36</sup> Uri Aronson, Corporate Security & Business Protection Latin America Head, JAGUAR LAND ROVER, Interviewed July 31<sup>st</sup> 2021

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

key learning here is that the reopening of sport is a positive move out of the post-Covid world, but we should not assume an instantaneous return to pre-pandemic experiences.

Indeed, industry experts believe that perhaps the best strategy is to embrace the new 'normal' that spectators have come to adapt during Covid-19.<sup>43</sup> Some feel that Covid-19 has opened the global populations' eyes to hygiene, and measures such as accessible sanitation stations, mask-wearing in crowded areas, or social distancing may well become a feature of global events that outlast both the pandemic, and any mandatory restrictions on gatherings.<sup>44</sup> Establishing these practices as normal at future global events will be key to building confidence and engaging the public back into the world of sport with a perception of a responsible and prepared host nation, rather than one putting people at risk for the sake of financial gain.

### **Implications for MENA and the 2022 Qatar FIFA World Cup**

#### **1. A fluid and thorough dialogue.**

As with any event held during, and in the aftermath of the pandemic, decisions and protocols will need to be based on the most up-to-date guidance from the WHO. Throughout the organisation of the event communication needs to be held across venue, local, regional and national stakeholders, to ensure everyone is acting on the most accurate information.<sup>45</sup> The need for fluidity in the planning process must not undermine the thoroughness of planning, but instead be capable of reacting and adapting to any change in situation. Plans for events will need to be reinforced to all event staff and stakeholders at each individual venue, and continuously checked alongside the advice and guidance of a range of bodies. Whilst the WHO will of course be the most heavily utilised guidance, Qatar must also look to their own individual practices, and the responsibilities as a host country for a global event. Qatar has continued to deliver sporting events in some capacity throughout the pandemic, and this good practise has offered an opportunity for reflection and learning in how to move forward in the new 'covid' world.

It is important to consider that the event will host spectators, press, VIPs, athletes and politicians from many countries, each with a unique Covid-19 journey and recovery, and that this will need to be factored into the event planning. Some spectators will present higher risk than others, and there needs to be sufficient planning for the 'worst case' spectator, to ensure there can be no outbreak of Covid-19 during the games.

The dialogue must filter through the command structure efficiently, and on a practical day-to-day basis, there needs to be a regular flow of information all the way from event

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Tim Cutbill, Director, Protect and Prepare. Safety Officer, Wimbledon Championships, Interviewed July 28<sup>th</sup> 2021

staff, to lead organisers. Daily debriefings containing information such as spectator compliance, logistical challenges and successes for the day's events can actively inform rapid areas of development to ensure that any issues experienced early in the tournament can be ironed-out in time for the large final events. Qatar has taken the lead on interoperable practices in the MENA region, and applying these efficient systems of command to post-pandemic events will greatly benefit the safety of all in attendance.

The dialogue around planning must continue throughout the event, and be reflective as the tournament continues. Spectators, as well as staff will need to be clear on expectations, and media scrutiny will undoubtedly hone-in on any perceived shortcomings. By evidencing a thorough and informed dialogue across the planning stages public confidence in the event will be secure, and Qatar can position themselves as the leader in post-covid recovery for the MENA region.

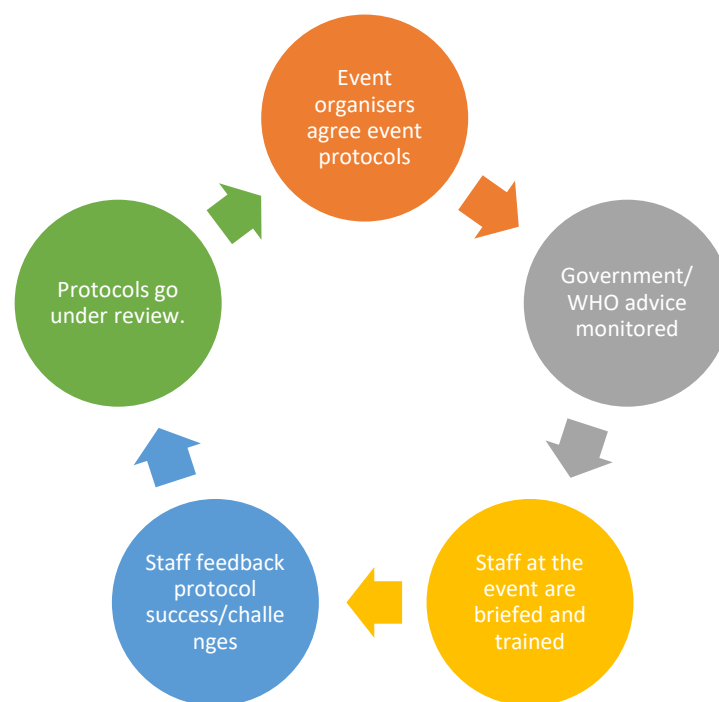


Figure 2: Communication and protocol review flow of information

## **2. Ensure logistical challenges do not compromise security**

As previously mentioned, Covid-19 precautions for mega events can sometimes be in contradiction with the fundamental preventative security protocols used for mass gatherings. Whilst this may create some logistical challenges such as a need for increased gate security staff or delays in admittance to the grounds, it is integral that fundamental security remains a priority.

Qatar should ensure their recruitment of event staff such as stewards and security staff are not only in-line with the usual demand of mega-events, but also take into account the aforementioned increased demand for such personnel. This is particularly important to take into consideration beyond the stadiums themselves. There will also be an increased demand for personnel around transport hubs, surrounding areas and commercial centres within the host country. It is not yet clear what the pandemic will look like in 2022, but contingency plans that take into account possible bubble isolation/ logistic staff deployment to Covid related sites are vital to ensure the delivery of a safe and secure games. The 2020 Euros Final witnessed first-hand the impact of overwhelmed security staff, and alcohol-fuelled spectators aware that reduced capacity meant empty seats. Rioting crowds attempted to storm Wembley grounds by force and such a break in security could have devastating consequences, as well as great international damage to the reputation of the host nation.<sup>46</sup> Deployment, training and preparation of all emergency services staff using the Bronze/Silver/Gold command structure will be crucial to the success of the event, and is an area in which Qatar have shown excellent growth in recent years.<sup>47</sup>

### **3. Managing and planning for the nature of football spectatorship.**

As previously discussed, the nature and culture of international football events can be problematic, and these problems are particularly important to challenge during a global pandemic. Qatar as a country does not frequently encounter alcohol-related incidents, as the sale of alcohol is generally restricted. For the World Cup Qatar has already announced that there will be alcohol sold to spectators, although this will also be in a more controlled manner than usual in western countries.<sup>48</sup> Culturally Qatar operates a zero-tolerance policy regarding public intoxication, and this may aid managing excessive drinking, and thus non-compliance of restrictions during the games. Qatar has the opportunity to visibly minimise risk, by showing an understanding of Western football culture, and actively working to minimise the impact of such negative actions, whilst also maintaining an enjoyable event. There will be a difficult balance to strike; overly restrictive measures may result in criticism of the experience, whereas perceived insufficient action could lead to blame.

Qatar permitting alcohol shows an understanding and flexibility that will cement their position in the MENA region as a mega-event pioneer, and ensuring that Covid-19 is contained as far as possible despite the challenges that a football culture will place on them, all whilst being at the forefront of building positive relationships across nations through sporting events.

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<sup>46</sup> Eliza Menendez, Wembley warns ticketless fans they will be kicked out after hundreds storm gates, 11/7/2021, Metro Newspaper <https://metro.co.uk/2021/07/11/crowds-storm-wembley-and-clash-with-police-hours-before-euro-final-14908897/> ACCESSED AUGUST 1<sup>st</sup> 2021

<sup>47</sup> Paul Burnham, Interoperability on a global events platform: The implementation of multi-agency response systems at sporting events and the implications for the FIFA 2022 Qatar World Cup, (2021) Josoor Institute

<sup>48</sup> Ashwin Muralidharan, 'Qatar is a hospitable and open nation' - Hassan Al Thawadi assures fans on alcohol & more at 2022 World Cup', GOAL, Jun 2021 <https://www.goal.com/en/news/qatar-world-cup-2022-hassan-al-thawadi-hospitable-culture/298s9adrizg41febeh4k558up> ACCESSED 8/8/21

#### **4. Keep a 'Human' aspect to the event**

Covid-19 as a topic is synonymous with restrictions and the enforcement of safety measures. Whilst these should of course be the main priority of hosting organisations, there is also a requirement to provide a 'human' side to resumption of sport. One example given was that when comforting a victim or patient during a crisis, the human interaction and reassurance is greatly diminished by the wearing of face masks.<sup>49</sup> The global community is also dealing with the aftermath of the pandemic socially and mentally, and many now look to sporting events as a means for not just financial recovery. The Qatar 2022 World Cup is an excellent opportunity for the MENA region to play a role in the celebration of a global community, untied in recovery, and as such is a huge chance for Qatar to gain positive attention from the global media.

Achieving this will not be simple; it requires ticket-holders to 'buy-in' to restrictions as much as possible, as opposed to coercion through monitoring and steward enforcement. In the build-up to the event frequent communication with spectators through digital formats can reinforce expectations, whilst also engaging them and contributing to the excitement building around the event. A positive relationship between the organising body, and the spectators will reduce non-compliance, and encourage spectators to feel that they have regained the experiences they had missed during the pandemic.

This is also true of volunteer staff; when they have given their time to support in the delivery of an event, they need to feel valued and supported. Covid has altered many interactions between staff in the 'day-to-day' operations such as limited contact due to social distancing, and a more pressurised environment of learning caused by the urgency of understanding. Considering how to ensure volunteers have a positive experience at the event will also be crucial for their dedication to delivering the games safely.

#### **Conclusion**

The resumption of sport in a post-pandemic world has thrown mega events into a spotlight even greater than previous years, with a whole new complexity to consider and plan for. Indeed, the resumption of sport to date has been a blended picture; huge successes and obstacles overcome, whilst perceived shortfalls magnified under scrutiny of a global media. ERP events have undoubtedly enabled people to feel a resumption of normality, or a taste of the post-pandemic world, but are by no means definitive in their success. Data remains limited to UK-based events within the scheme, and we are yet to discover what the full impacts of such events have been. What does seem to be the initial findings of the ERP is that sporting events can and will thrive beyond the pandemic, although they will need even greater planning and preparation than usual. The world largely remains under travel restrictions, and there is no way of predicting what the scenario will become the 2022 Qatar

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<sup>49</sup> Uri Aronson, Corporate Security & Business Protection Latin America Head, JAGUAR LAND ROVER, Interviewed July 31<sup>st</sup> 2021



FIFA World Cup. The only certainties lie in the need for reactive, yet thorough planning and the expectation that Qatar will deliver an experience befitting of one of the most-watched sporting events in the world. Through frequent and clear communication, both internally and externally, Qatar may seize this opportunity to deliver the first post-pandemic World Cup, and become the precedent for success on a global platform.

1. How have the impacts of Covid-19 caused challenges for security protocols at events?

*The challenge of Covid-19 and event security is that ultimately the two require precautions that directly undermine the aims of each other.*

- *Some events have seen the delays in venue entry protocols develop beyond normal waiting times, as staff have checked digital documentation rather than physical, and have gradually passed crowds through security in socially distanced methods.*
- *Similarly security protocols are systems thoroughly tested, practised and embedded over a sustained period to ensure multi-agency interoperability, however Covid-19 plans have had to react to policy changes with very little time before an event.*
- *It is important that Covid-19 protocols don't 'trade off' security demands, and that conflicting requirements are overcome through precise contingency planning, and a thorough analysis of areas of potential delays and challenges.*

2. Why was it decided that ERP events would each trial differing protocols?

- *The ERP events were designed to tailor protocols to specific events and venues, taking into account that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to event planning.*
- *The indoor/outdoor setting, capacity and nature of spectator movement were all considered when trialling the Covid-19 restrictions, and when a full analysis of outcomes is available it will undoubtedly highlight what was identified as good practise, and which methods require further development.*
- *Varying the conditions of tests help identify these areas, and also ensured each event was as enjoyable for spectators as possible, without the burden of perceived 'unnecessary' restrictions in place.*

3. In what ways can the increased media scrutiny of Covid-19 protocols impact on the reputation of event organisers?

*Potential narratives include:*

- *The event should not have been permitted to happen, it caused a surge in cases, the organisers were prioritising profits over safety and that ultimately it was managed so poorly it posed a risk to national health.*
- *The event had a pretence of restrictions in place, but very little enforcement or action. These events have been perceived as organisers paying 'lip service' to Covid-19 risks, but failing to properly act on the guidance*
- *Covid-19 has added a further layer of expectation from the public; to uphold good Covid-19 practise alongside all of the other demands of such events, without compromising the experience of spectators.*

4. What logistical challenges has Covid-19 created in terms of staffing mega events?

- *On a practical level the pandemic generated shortages in event staff such as stewards, security and catering personnel.*
- *The increased number of individuals isolating due to Covid-19 created a shortage of staff able to come in, and often these shortages could become apparent very close to the event date.*
- *It is worth noting that teams who had spent time in close vicinity of one another during training/ staff-based activity could be pinged to isolate, removing a large number of staff in one go as identified 'contacts' of the positive case.*
- *The deployment of security companies to vaccination or testing sites also meant that the pool of personnel usually available to events was smaller, as many were used across the country at Covid-19 venues.*

5. What is the core difference between proactive and reactive planning, and which is better suited to events during and after the pandemic?

- *Proactive planning is done in advance with an element of expecting what is to come, and acting on established principles and practises.*
- *Reactive planning is much shorter-notice, reacting to changes in policy or circumstance as it happens.*
- *In relation to mega-events reactive planning has become more important than ever, especially during the ERP events whereby guidance was reviewed and updated at very frequent intervals.*
- *For Qatar this will be especially important as welcoming spectators from around the world, each from countries with varying levels of infection, will need to be considered and live data analysed at frequent points to inform practises 'on the day.'*

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