



COVID-19: penalisation of spitting and other related actions

Dear Referees & Clubs,

Considering the major impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the world and football, we kindly ask you to take note of the information below.

With a view to avoiding the possible spread of the virus, the FAW has a responsibility to ensure players refrain from spitting and similar actions (e.g. nose-clearing & deliberate coughing) during matches where possible.

“Spitting at someone” is a sending-off (red-card) offence under the Laws of the Game. However, where spitting does not fall into this category, it would be impractical to make it a yellow-card (YC) offence because it is impossible for the match officials to detect every incident, as spitting can occur anywhere on the pitch, at any time and often away from play (e.g. as players move to take up a position before the next sequence of play). Consequently, treating “general” spitting and other such actions as a YC offence during matches would lead to inconsistency and unfairness.

If the referee is certain that someone deliberately, and from close range, coughed into the face of an opponent or match official, the offence would fall under the category of using offensive, insulting, or abusive language and/or gestures. If the referee feels the action was deliberate but not severe enough to merit a sending-off, a caution could be issued for ‘unsporting behaviour – showing a lack of respect for the game.’

It is important to note that all incidents of spitting or other actions (nose clearing & deliberate coughing) should be dealt with on a case by case basis and where possible a common-sense approach should be adopted.

It is advised that referees should remind club personnel (e.g. club secretaries, managers) of their teams’ responsibilities in this matter pre-match to try and avoid any such incidents. It is further advised that clubs should remind their players and officials of this responsibility to ensure that there is a safe environment for everybody to participate.

If a further misconduct report requires completion for such incidents in league matches it should be completed either via the Comet system (adult football) as per any other misconduct report or via the Area Association disciplinary departments (junior football). If the incident occurs in a friendly fixture the misconduct report should be emailed to the relevant disciplinary department dependant on the club’s membership (FAW or Area Association).

Yours sincerely,

Phil Thomas (FAW Referees Manager)