

BRITISH FENCING STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR SAFETY IN FENCING

20th Edition – Approved by BF Board March 2023

This document is issued by British Fencing to ensure that fencing remains one of the safest sports.

All involved in fencing should follow the guidelines. Additional guidance is included as footnotes at the bottom of each page (*note footnote 1*).

British Fencing (BF) specifies certain minimum safety standards for fencing clothing in line with European CEN standards for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) – see Appendix 1 (Chart of BF Clothing Rules).

Accidents and injuries are rare in fencing. In the case of any accident or injury please ensure a BF Accident and Injury Report (<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/58ff7faa98ed427fa6f9049f8ea99762>) is submitted.

Reviewing accident and injury reports is one of the most useful ways to monitor and improve safety standards. A person with first-hand knowledge of a fencing accident which is serious enough to cause a fencer to abandon a competition or to withdraw from a club session or a fencing course, or which prevents an official from continuing their duties or results in a significant injury to a spectator, is therefore urged to complete an accident and injury report.

Appendix 2 deals with legal responsibility and liability.

Footnote 1

In particular: -

Coaches/instructors have a special responsibility for safety during training and should especially study section 3 + appendix 1. They should also give careful consideration to the circumstances in which they are prepared to instruct pupils who are not wearing full protective clothing.

Referees have an important safety role in competitions. They have the authority to prevent the use of unsafe equipment and to penalise dangerous play. It is in the best interests of the fencers and the sport that they should always do so.

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1. Protection, personal and of opponents

1.1: General

BF has laid down standards for personal protective clothing to be worn.

These standards are set out in a chart at the end of these Safety Guidelines, in Appendix 1 (chart of BF clothing rules).

These standards apply to fencing at competitions and everywhere else that fencing is taking place.

Unless otherwise specified, they apply to fencing with steel weapons. A separate section (1.8) refers to fencing with foam and plastic weapons.

When sparring or competing fencers must wear full protective clothing –i.e., mask, jacket, breeches/trousers, plastron and glove - in accordance with the clothing chart – Appendix 1 – as well as shoes, socks and, for women, chest guards. For lessons see 4.4.

These standards and indeed all the Guidelines have been drawn up in cognisance of contemporary FIE Rules for Competitions. In the event of these Rules changing and laying down more rigorous safety requirements, BF will if appropriate update these Safety Guidelines, announcing the degree and timing of the application of the revised Rules in the UK.

In particular the FIE has laid down equipment standards which fencers must observe in order to compete in the Olympic Games, in World Championships and in all 'A' grade/ World Cup/Satellite and Zonal events (*footnote 2*).

Every fencer is responsible for ensuring that their personal equipment is in a safe condition (cf. Rules for Competitions t.20.1).

Every fencer also has a duty of care to each of their opponents. In particular this involves fencing in a way that is safe, avoiding hurtful, violent and dangerous actions (cf. also Rules for Competitions t.121.2) and taking action if they see any potentially dangerous situation. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of every official and coach to ensure that fencers respect this obligation.

1.2: Masks:

Fencers must wear masks of appropriate size conforming at least to the minimum safety standard of CEN Level 1 and bearing the appropriate CEN safety mark (see chart - Appendix 1).

Masks must be checked for the following weaknesses and defects, if necessary, by a qualified armourer:

- i) Weaknesses in the steel mesh, softness, holes or excessive deformation of the hard shell from the original shape.
- ii) The bib not properly attached or revealing gaps between it and the mask or curling up.
- iii) Poor means of retention on the head, making the mask liable to come off. Fencers must wear a mask back-strap or some other approved method of mask retention (*footnote 3*).

Attempts must not be made to repair the steel mesh of a mask.

If the mask is weak or damaged, it must not be used.

Footnote 2: Note that some competition organisers may demand standards that are more stringent than those laid down in this document.

*Footnote 3: A back-strap consists of elastic at least 35mm wide, secured to the mask side mesh at each end, passing UNDER any mask spring piece at the back, and tensioned to keep the mask firmly in place. It must stay fastened and tensioned during fencing.
For FIE events (ie, CEN level 2), masks with a fabric main retainer rather than a back spring piece are required to feature a separate back strap in addition.*

1.3: Jackets & Breeches:

- i) Fencers must wear jackets of appropriate size conforming at least to the minimum safety standard of CEN Level 1 and bearing the appropriate CEN safety mark. (see chart - Appendix 1).
- ii) Where breeches are required, fencers must wear breeches of appropriate size conforming at least to the minimum safety standard of CEN Level 1 and bearing the appropriate CEN safety mark (see chart - Appendix 1).
- iii) There should be a minimum of 10cms (4 inches) overlap between breeches and jacket when the fencer is on guard.
- iv) Jackets should fasten on the opposite side to the sword arm, or at the back.
- vi) Breeches should reach and stay below the knee whilst fencing.
- vii) If both fencers are using non-electric foil blades or, at all three weapons size 3 or smaller blades, breeches may be replaced by full-length trousers or tracksuit trousers of sufficiently strong material, provided all openings/pockets are zipped/ sewn/taped closed – see chart.

Clothing must not be used which is damaged, shows visible tears or weakened by excessive use.

1.4: Plastrons:

Fencers must wear plastrons of appropriate size conforming at least to the minimum safety standard and bearing the appropriate CEN safety mark. For minimum safety standards for plastrons see chart, Appendix 1.

1.5: Chest Guards:

It is compulsory for women to wear rigid chest protection. It is recommended that girls wear rigid chest protection (shaped or flat) from the age of ten or from the onset of puberty if earlier.

1.6: Gloves:

The gauntlet must be long enough to cover approximately half the forearm and remain over the sleeve of the jacket whilst fencing. Gloves must not have any opening other than the one for the body wire; they should be inspected regularly for any holes and tears. Gloves must comply with the minimum standards set out in the chart (appendix 1).

1.7: Socks and shoes

Socks should always be covered by the bottom of the breeches, so that no bare skin is showing. Suitable indoor trainer type shoes should be worn.

1.8: Fencing with foam or plastic weapons, and the SabreLite programme.

- 1.8.1** For all fencing with foam or plastic weapons a plastic face-mask specifically designed for this purpose, or a regulation fencing mask should be worn.
- 1.8.2** For fencing with plastic weapons, a sleeved top should be worn, and the legs should be covered at least down to knee level.
- 1.8.3** For the SabreLite programme clothing rules see appendix 1

2. Weapons

2.1: Weapons – General

Note: The FIE has laid down equipment standards that fencers must observe in order to compete

in the Olympic Games, in World Championships and in all 'A' grade/ World Cup/Satellite and Zonal events. Other competition organisers may also demand these standards.

Weapons should be regularly inspected and checked to ensure they are in a safe, usable condition (*see footnote 4*).

Almost all serious fencing injuries are caused by penetration by a broken blade, so please pay particular attention to the following section.

2.2: Weapons - Blades

To reduce the risk of broken blades, never use a blade (or fence with someone who is using such a blade) if any portion displays obvious kinks or excessive plasticity that may lead to a break - e.g., irregular or uneven curve or inability to correct such a bend.

Also see footnote 5.

2.3: Weapons - Blades for children

Children under the age of ten should fence with weapon blades of size 0; children under the age of 14 should normally fence with weapon blades of size 3 or less, as required in competitions for their age. This will enhance their safety, comfort, technique and enjoyment of our sport.

2.4: Weapons - Tips

2.4.1 Weapon tips should conform to the FIE requirements. Sabre blades should be checked regularly as wear and tear risks reducing the tip size, making the penetration risk higher (*see diagram footnote 6, dimensions of sabre blade tips*).

The point of a non-electric foil or épée (including a dummy electric foil blade) must be covered with a commercially produced plastic button in good condition or an integrated button.

Weapons – Guards

2.4.2 Continuous use of a weapon can leave sharp edges round the guard circumference, which are a potential hazard. Such guards must not be used. Guards which are dented enough to risk trapping a point must not be used.

3. Special Guidelines for Children

3.1: Child protection/welfare: See the BF child protection/welfare policies [BF child protection/welfare policies \(https://www.britishfencing.com/policy-zone/welfare-policies-guidelines/\)](https://www.britishfencing.com/policy-zone/welfare-policies-guidelines/)

Footnote 4: Weapon checks. Weapons should be regularly checked to ensure they are in a safe, usable condition:-

- i) Blades should be observed and tested to ascertain if any portion displays obvious kinks or excessive plasticity that may lead to a break e.g., irregular or uneven curve or inability to correct such a bend by the usual straightening methods.*
- ii) If blades develop sharp edges or splinters, these should be smoothed off with an emery cloth.*
- iii) The end of the blade must be folded over onto itself or fashioned in one piece to form a button which, in the case of sabre blades, when viewed end on, must have a square or rectangular section of 4 mm. x 4 mm. minimum*

Footnote 5: Consider using a blade made out of a special steel, such as Maraging steel.

Footnote 6, Dimensions of sabre blade tips: see bottom of next page.

3.2: Blade sizes: See 2.3.

3.3: Clothing:

Fencing with steel weapons – see appendix 1.

Fencing with foam/plastic weapons – see 1.8.

3.4: Lessons/classes: See 4.3 and appendix 3.

4. Fencing Activities

They should also ensure as far as practicable that individual fencers observe their own accident prevention responsibilities, and that the rules to prevent accidents during lessons are observed

Club officers, coaches/instructors and competition organisers are under an obligation to conduct risk assessments for all fencing activities in which they are involved and to act in accordance with their conclusions;

They all have responsibility for ensuring that the accident prevention precautions in respect of premises are observed.

They should all ensure that at all times the rules to prevent accidents are obeyed including during lessons and, as far as practicable, that individual fencers are taught to and indeed do observe their own accident prevention responsibilities.

Importantly, they should also remember that failure to observe the risk assessment in some circumstances could risk invalidating the insurance cover.

4.1: Venues

4.1.1 The venue must be adequate for the activity.

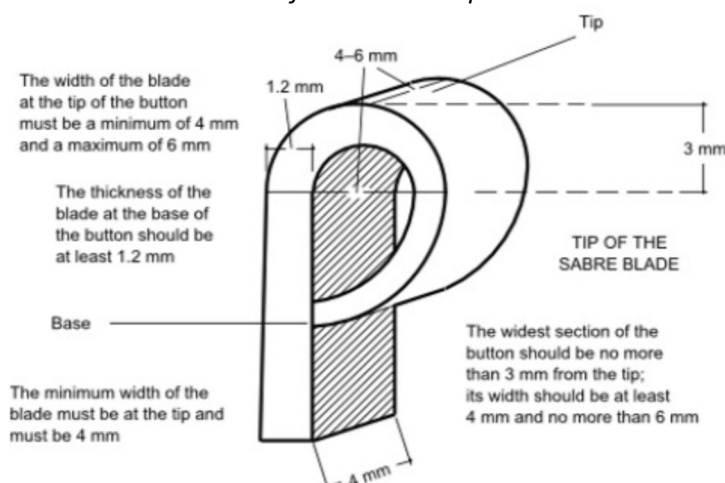
4.1.2 The venue must have an adequate first aid kit (see also section 6).

4.1.3 All fencers must be made aware of emergency evacuation procedures.

4.1.4 The fencing area should be such that fencers performing all normal fencing movements, however fast, are not in danger of slipping.

4.1.5 Cables on the ground should be arranged so that they present a low risk of tripping to fencers and/or spectators.

Footnote 6: Dimensions of sabre blade tip.



4.1.6 Spectators should not be allowed so near the sides of the piste that there is a risk of collision with a fencer who fleches off the piste nor any risk that they may be hit by a weapon, Furthermore, spectators must never interfere with the safe positioning of the fight officials.

4.1.7 Particular care should be taken if it is necessary to cross an area on which fencing is taking place.

4.1.8 In the cases of lessons and classes the coach/instructor has particular responsibility to ensure the above points are covered.

4.1.9 Mains operated equipment

4.1.9.1 Mains operated equipment that requires an earth should not be used unless it is correctly earthed using a plug with an earth pin and connected to mains supply via a Residual Current Device (R.C.D.).

4.1.9.2 Mains cables must not be placed on top of or under the conductive pistes, or in any other situation where they could be subject to rubbing or pressure.

4.1.9.3 Cases of apparatus should only be opened when disconnected from the supply.

4.1.9.4 A fuse should not be replaced before a qualified electrician or other competent person has found and rectified the fault that caused the fuse to blow.

4.1.9.5 Electrical equipment should be used only if it is made by a reputable manufacturer, and it should not be modified except by the manufacturer or with their permission.

4.1.9.6 All mains equipment, including mains leads, should be tested by a qualified electrician or other person qualified to conduct such testing at least yearly.

4.1.9.7 All current regulations regarding the use of mains powered equipment, where it is accessible to the public, must be observed

4.2: Clubs, lessons, classes

4.2.1 It is highly recommended that every club maintains an incident book in which accidents and injuries are recorded.

4.2.2 If there are any fencers in a club or class who have health problems (e.g asthma, diabetes) which may cause difficulties during training, the club organisers/coaches/ instructors should be fully aware of the best way of dealing with this.

4.2.3 A class coach/instructor must ensure that:

4.2.3.1 The class does not exceed the appropriate numbers for the available space and the available number of instructors (see appendix 3).

4.2.3.2 All fencers have been given a thorough briefing on good safety practices in fencing and been made aware of these BF Safety Guidelines.

4.2.3.3 All fencers have been advised of the correct use of the equipment and the potential dangers of mishandling it.

4.2.3.4 The class, in normal circumstances, is not left unattended.

FOR FURTHER DETAILS SEE APPENDIX 3.

4.3: Lessons/classes - clothing

During lessons – both individual and class –

4.3.1 For plastic weapons only, when giving individual lessons the coach/instructor should wear a mask.

4.3.2 When steel weapons are being used: -

The coach/instructor

- should normally wear the appropriate full protective clothing; and
- must always wear the following items: mask; fencing jacket and plastron or a teaching jacket and plastron combined, glove (*but see footnote 7*).

The pupil

- should normally at a minimum wear the appropriate full protective clothing required for those fencing non-electric foil -see chart - Appendix 1.
NB If the coach/instructor, having done a risk assessment considers that particular circumstances justify less than this level of full protective clothing being worn, they should draw the attention of the pupil or parent/guardian to the increased notional risk of accident or injury that could result because full protective clothing is not worn).
- must always wear, mask and glove.

In Epee class lessons when pupils are practicing movements in pairs the legs must not be included in the target unless the pupils are wearing at least 350N breeches and long socks.

For more detailed advice on the running of classes see Appendix 3

4.4: Sparring in adult beginner/taster classes - Clothing

Exceptions to the requirements set out in Appendix 1 are as follows:

4.4.1 When sparring is supervised by a coach and a risk assessment has been done, fencers can wear tracksuit trousers rather than breeches at the discretion of the coach or club manager even when size 4/5 electric blades are being used.

4.4.2 Epee fights must not include the legs as target unless the pupil is wearing at least 350N breeches and long socks, even if size 2/3 blades are being used.

4.5: Competitions

4.5.1 Piste-laying: A risk assessment should take place, taking into account all relevant factors including: the age group; the weapon; the standard of fencing; and a safe position for the referee and for spectators.

Subject to this specific competition risk assessment the following distances are recommended: -

4.5.1.1 between the edges of adjacent pistes on the side where score boxes are placed: not less than 1 metre.

4.5.1.2 between the edges of adjacent pistes on the side used for refereeing: 2.5 metres. If the distance is less, the referee should wear some form of protection, such as a mask or goggles.

4.5.1.3 between any person (e.g., scorers, box operators, spectators) and the edge of the piste: 1.25 metres.

4.5.1.4 total distance between the rear line of two pistes placed end-on: not less than 2 metres.

4.5.1.5 there should be an unobstructed run back beyond each rear line of as near 1.5 metres as possible, which should be unobstructed by chairs, cables, fencing equipment, or by anything else which might trip up or obstruct a fencer.

4.5.2 Referees should use their best endeavours to ensure that these Guidelines are observed, in particular checking on those concerning competitors' personal equipment, especially blades and masks and ensuring that proper plastrons are worn.
Referees should ensure that spectators do not encroach on the field of play.

Footnote 7: Protective clothing is not required if the coach is simply supervising a class which at no time involves face to face teaching or demonstrating whilst either pupil or coach is holding a weapon

4.6: Accident and Injury Reporting

In the case of any accident or injury please ensure a BF Accident and Injury Report (<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/58ff7faa98ed427fa6f9049f8ea99762>) is submitted. See also introduction and 4.2.1

5. First aid

5.1: Facilities/personnel

Clubs: Premises should have at least a basic first aid box available and a named person responsible for making sure it is accessible and re-stocked as necessary. It is recommended that all clubs keep a basic first aid manual with the box and have a method of recording incidents.

Events: Organisers using sports centres must be aware of the first aid facilities available and make sure that they are accessible.

Although significant injuries are unusual, it is necessary at large competitions to ensure appropriate medical cover and first aid supplies. The event organiser should always check qualifications and liability insurance cover.

5.2: Intervention

- 5.2.1 The official responsible for any fencing activity should ensure that immediate use of a telephone is available in the event of a significant injury. 111 is the number for medical problems but 999 can also be used in urgent situations.
- 5.2.2 A doctor has an ethical duty to intervene and do their best. If more than one doctor or paramedic is present, the most appropriately qualified person should take charge.
- 5.2.3 A first-aider appointed for this purpose also has a duty to assist.
- 5.2.4 In the UK members of the public are not under a legal duty to intervene in an emergency but if they do their best, they are unlikely to be criticised. Therefore, the average club member should step in and help another fencer if they are injured, in the absence of anyone medically qualified.
- 5.2.5 Coaches/instructors as sporting activity professionals, (in the absence of anyone more qualified) are likely to owe a duty of care to intervene. They would be judged by the action of a reasonable coach/instructor with their skill set. They may be liable if they act recklessly or negligently but not otherwise.

APPENDIX 1: CHART OF BRITISH FENCING CLOTHING RULES WHEN FENCING WITH STEEL BLADES

The following are the minimum safety standards for clothing: -

A) Those fencing with size 3 or smaller blades, electric or non-electric, all 3 weapons (both fencers), those fencing with non-electric foil blades (both fencers) (1) and the SabreLite programme (5)

	<i>Jackets</i>	<i>Plastron</i>	<i>Trousers/breeches</i>	<i>Masks</i>	<i>Gloves -sabre only (4)</i>
Either	CEN 1 350 Newtons	CEN 1 350 Newtons	Full length Trousers with openings/pockets, zipped/sewn/taped closed or fencing breeches	CEN 1 (350N.bib) (2, 3)	Non-FIE level
or	350 Newton +	integrated 350 Newton plastron	As above	As above	As above

B) FIE official competitions A-grades, Satellites, Zonal and World Championships

	CEN 2 800 Newtons	CEN 2 800 Newtons	CEN 2 800 Newtons	CEN 2 (1600N.bib and FIE 2018 specifications for security straps – see Rules for Competitions m.25.7.f.)	FIE glove specification
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C) All other fencing, all weapons (5)

	CEN 1 350 Newtons	CEN 2 800 Newtons	CEN 1 350 Newtons	CEN 1 (350N.bib) (2, 3)	FIE glove Specification
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- (1) 'Non-electric foil blades' does not mean dummy electric foil blades fitted with a button. To qualify for this level of clothing standard, both fencers must be using the traditional lightweight non-electric foil blade as used universally before the invention of electric foil. **See also sections 4.3.2 and 4.4.**
- (2) All masks must be fitted with safety back straps.
- (3) All fencers competing in a British National Championships (Cadet, Junior, U23 & Senior) must use masks that feature the two rear safety systems (securing devices), so fitted that they comply with Rule m.25.7.f. The British Youth Championships are excluded from this requirement.
- (4) Glove minimum standard being introduced only for fencing sabre. Currently there will be no minimum standard demanded for the fencing of foil and épée.
- (5) For the SabreLite programme, weapon tips must be covered by a rubber tip.

APPENDIX 2: LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY

- a) A fencer is generally deemed at Law to accept the ordinary risks involved in fencing.
- b) Examples of ordinary risks that a fencer is deemed to accept are accidents arising from breakage of blades, or from normal bodily contact with an opponent, arising in the normal course of a bout. However, a fencer may possibly be legally liable if he injures an opponent by an action that is illegal under the Rules of fencing or is recklessly violent.
- c) All fencers are strongly recommended to obtain the insurance cover provided by joining British Fencing. This cover is provided automatically among the benefits of membership.
- d) Fencers can limit the risk of legal liability by fencing within the Rules and ensuring that their equipment is safe.
- e) The Rules for Competitions make it clear that each fencer is responsible for the safety of their own equipment and that the organisers and referees are not responsible. Organisers of competitions will normally wish to include a clause on entry forms, - and brochures advertising competitions seeking to exclude liability. A suggested form of words is as follows:
"Each fencer is personally responsible for making sure that their clothing and equipment conform to BF rules and are in good condition.
Neither BF nor the organisers of the competition, nor any official or referee involved in the competition is responsible for these matters, or for any accident, loss or damage to persons or property however caused".
- f) The degree of liability that may fall on organisers and referees is unclear and depends on the particular circumstances. In any event, they should take care to ensure so far as is reasonably possible that the Rules governing safety of equipment and conduct are properly enforced.
- g) When fencers under the age of 18 are entering a competition, they must have the consent of a parent or other person in 'loco parentis' to take part and the entry process must make provision for this. (For all FIE competitions also see Rules for Competitions Article o.29.5).
- h) BF has an indemnity policy against legal liability. The insurers have agreed that all BF registered competitions fall within this policy.

APPENDIX 3

ADVICE ON THE RUNNING OF CLASSES

In addition to section 4 of the Safety Guidelines:

1. Never allow fencers to begin or continue fencing if their clothing or weapon is inappropriate, or unsafe (see these Safety Guidelines). Remember, it is the coach/instructor's responsibility that fencers are always safely attired and equipped.
2. All fencers must, when they are not fencing or practising, carry their weapons either by the pommel with the points towards the floor or by gripping the point, with the weapon hanging down vertically.
3. All fencers must be taught not to put on their masks using both hands while holding a weapon – but to put the mask on first.
4. NEVER give the instruction to begin fencing without checking that all fencers are wearing their masks correctly.
5. All fencers must be told to stop fencing immediately if a mask falls off, a blade breaks or a point or button falls off.
6. The instructor must identify unsafe practices, even if those involved are not under their control. The law recognises that all instructors have a duty of care to ensure that all those who take part in fencing do so without endangering themselves or others.

ADDITIONALLY, THE FOLLOWING APPLY SPECIFICALLY FOR CHILDREN'S CLASSES

7. Generally, no more than twelve children per coach/instructor should fence at any one time (a larger number may be appropriate depending on the age, experience etcetera of the pupils). If the ratio in the group is higher than this, the group should be split into relays for fencing activity (larger numbers can take part together in footwork and games without weapons). In the case of groups of young children fewer than twelve may be an appropriate maximum.
8. Never allow fencers to act irresponsibly with equipment.
9. Always make your fencers aware of the potential hazards of mishandling their weapon.
10. Ensure all masks are fitted correctly before allowing fencers to start fencing, and make sure that they do not remove them before being instructed to do so (reminder: For all sparring with plastic weapons a plastic facemask specifically designed for this purpose or regulation fencing mask should always be worn).
11. With children aged under 8 ensure that any regulations applicable to this age group are complied with.
12. BF maintains a central register of qualified coaches who are required to have a DBS check and attend SPC in sport courses regularly in order to register.
It is strongly recommended that any organisation engaging a fencing coach check that they are on the BF register.