PITCH INSPECTION
MATCH OFFICIAL GUIDANCE

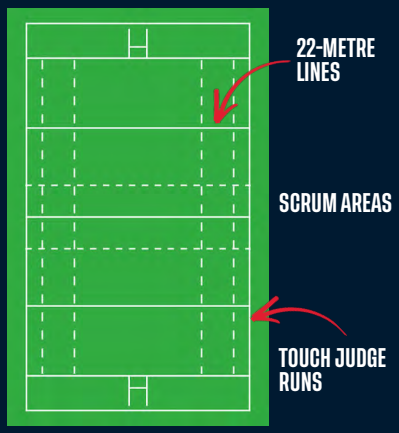
England Rugby

PITCH INSPECTION PRIORITIES

- Walk the whole playing enclosure and check the 22-metre lines, scrum areas, and touch judge runs for extreme compaction.
- Look for deep fissures, dusty bare patches, and hidden stones or metal pegs that can catch boots or cause cuts.
- Be aware of the RFU Natural Turf Pitch Surface Risk Assessment and use water breaks or tighter tackle monitoring if play continues.
- If the surface is concrete-like or the cracks are dangerous, prioritise player welfare, RFU regulations, and postpone the fixture.

1 WALK THE PLAYING ENCLOSURE

Check for extreme compaction and hard patches.



2 LOOK FOR HAZARDS

FISSURES AND CRACKS
Ensure no cracks are wide or deep enough to catch a player's boot, stud, or ankle, this increases lower-limb risk.

DUSTY BARE PATCHES
Dry, loose soil reduces traction and increases injury risk.

GRASS COVERAGE
Baked, dry dirt escalates severe skin abrasions during tackles and slides.

EMBEDDED HAZARDS
Check for exposed or buried sharp stones, broken flint, or old metal pegs.

MITIGATIONS AND OFFICIAL PROTOCOL

CLUB RISK ASSESSMENTS
Ask the home club to share its RFU Natural Turf Pitch (NTP) Surface Risk Assessment with you prior to your arrival.

MATCH POSTPONEMENT
If you deem the surface unplayable due to concretelike conditions or dangerous fissures, discuss with each team/ captains. However, you have the final authority under RFU Regulations to call off the fixture to protect player welfare.

PLAYER WELFARE INTERVENTIONS
If the pitch passes inspection but temperatures are high, coordinate with both captains to implement mandatory hydration breaks (e.g. 90-second intervals at the 20 and 60-minute marks) to combat heat exhaustion.

COMMUNICATING PITCH INSPECTION DECISIONS

INSPECT TOGETHER, NOT ALONE
Walk the pitch with both captains and a club representative. Make it clear your goal is to play the match safely and assess conditions against RFU safety criteria and the club's pitch risk assessment.

USE OBJECTIVE SAFETY-BASED DECISIONS
Base all decisions on identifiable risks, not personal opinions. Focus on player welfare, surface condition, and compliance with RFU regulations.

IF PLAY PROCEEDS, APPLY RISK CONTROLS
Introduce measures such as scheduled water breaks and close monitoring of dangerous play to reduce dehydration, impact injuries, and abrasions on hard ground.

IF PLAY IS CANCELLED, BE CLEAR AND FIRM
Explain the specific hazards, reference RFU regulations, acknowledge the disappointment, and reinforce that player safety is the overriding priority. Handle any objections professionally and avoid arguments. If one captain agrees to play and the other doesn't than the game **DOES NOT** go ahead.

USEFUL LINKS

RFU REGULATION 6.20-6.24
RFU Regulation 6 – Adult competitions | Rugby Football Union

WORLD RUGBY LAW 1.11 & 1.12
World Rugby passport - 1 the ground