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Crowds 'could' return to Scottish football by the start of next season - Prof Jason Leitch

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Crowds could return to Scottish football next season, says Prof Jason Leitch - but only "if we get it right as a nation" dealing with Covid-19.

The Scottish Premiership and Championship are currently continuing - but behind closed doors.

However, leagues below have been suspended until at least 14 February.

National clinical director Leitch thinks it "credible" for all levels to be back playing next season but said: "Crowds is much less predictable."

Responding to a question from Aberdeen chairman Dave Cormack, Leitch told BBC Radio Scotland's Off The Ball: "I would hope that, by September, the


whole country vaccinated, nine million doses of vaccine. That's huge and a massive logistical exercise.

▪ **Lower league football remains suspended**

"We will have to see what the vaccine does, we'll have to see if we've managed to not import the virus again with travel restrictions. If we get that right as a nation, yes, there could be crowds in September."

The suspension of Leagues 1 and 2 and those below, including the Scottish Women's Premier League, will be subject of review in February and Leitch said that the return of play this season will depend on transmission rates of the virus in the community.

"The vast majority of our conversations with football authorities have been fantastic," he said. "Football has done really well. You need prevalence to fall for football authorities to think it is worth people from Dumfries travelling up to Aberdeen."

Top microbiologist Professor Hugh Pennington, of Aberdeen University, **was this week quoted**  as saying fans will only be present at Wembley to see Scotland face England at the Euro 2020 finals this summer if Covid-19 statistics fall to 10% of current levels.

"I am not sure I would put a numeral value on it," Leitch responded. "It is more complicated than the prevalence."

"It is dependent on hospital capacity, on what version of the virus we have at the time, if we have managed to vaccinate everyone and we haven't had vaccine escape from the virus, but his fundamental point is right."

"We have always said this. The way to get stuff open, and the way to get stuff back to normal, is of course to have low prevalence of the virus."

Leitch pointed out that the Australian Open tennis is taking place in front of crowds of fans.

"They have pretty much no virus out in the community and what few cases they have, test and protect, their version, grabs them," he said.

"We do have virus out in the community, so as it stands now, there would be no crowd at Scotland against England tomorrow, but five/six months away, I'm very hopeful the country will be vaccinated, very hopeful that we will have got the prevalence down considerably and I'm confident the game will go ahead."

"I am not confident about how many people will see it live."

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