

# **Winter Sports Programs for the 2020-2021 School Year**

## **Interscholastic Games, Meets and Competitions**

**Rev. February 22, 2021**

### **Background**

The following guidance provides direction on school-sponsored winter sports programs for students K-12 on resuming full team-based practices and interscholastic games, meets and competitions where permitted for certain types of sports. This guidance is applicable to both public and independent schools. It was developed with input from public health experts and educators.

**All players, coaches, and staff should complete a health check before arriving at school-sponsored practice sessions.** The daily monitoring for COVID-19 exposure and symptoms schools conduct consistent with the Agency of Education's [Strong and Healthy Start](#) guidance is sufficient for student athletes. At a minimum, a temperature screening should be conducted for all people present and they should be asked to consider the following questions:

1. Have you been in close contact with a person who has COVID-19? If yes, have you been directed by the Department of Health to quarantine?
2. Have you travelled outside the State of Vermont in the past 14 days? If yes, have you complied with Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) and Department of Health guidance around quarantine?
3. Do you feel unwell with any symptoms consistent with COVID-19? For example, have they had fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, congestion or runny nose, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea?

Should data emerge that indicates evidence of COVID-19 transmission or significant disruption to academic instruction because of sports-related activities, additional restrictions may become necessary, including but not limited to the widespread cancelation of games, meets, competitions and practices. Specifically, if a decision is made at the state or local level to significantly restrict or eliminate in-person instruction as a result of confirmed COVID-19 illness in student(s), all school-based athletic activities in the affected schools shall cease until at least such time as academic instruction is resumed.

### **General Guidance**

#### **UPDATED Practices and Scrimmages**

If permitted under [Guidance for Specific Types of Sports](#) (below), **school-sponsored winter sports programs may initiate full team-based, coach-led practice sessions, including drills involving incidental contact and team-based scrimmages no earlier than January 18, 2021.** Students traveling out-of-state at any point in time must follow ACCD and Department of

Health guidance around quarantine before returning to school; the same quarantine requirements also apply to participating in any school-based activity, including sports. **Out-of-state travel currently requires a mandatory quarantine upon return.** More information is available on the [Vermont Department of Health's COVID-19 travel site](#) and in the [Agency of Commerce and Community Development's Phased Restart guidance](#).

Two-ply facial coverings are required to be worn by all players, coaches, officials and staff at all times, including during active play. Students who have a medical or behavioral reason for not wearing a facial covering **shall** not be required to wear one; these decisions should be made in partnership with the health care provider and school nurse.

A limited exception is provided for gymnasts engaged in activities that require inversion (i.e., tumbling, vaulting, bars, etc.), as well as for participants in Nordic skiing, downhill skiing and snowboarding – both practice sessions and competitions – so long as physical distancing is consistently maintained between individuals using staggered starts or other means.

Understanding that team-based social events are often considered an integral component of school-sponsored sports programs, and also that more frequent, extended physical or close contact increases the risk of COVID-19 transmission between team members should an outbreak occur – team-based social gatherings are strongly discouraged until all other COVID-19-specific restrictions regulating school-based sports are fully lifted.

## **Competitions**

If permitted under “Guidance for Specific Types of Sports” (see below), school-sponsored winter sports programs may initiate interscholastic games, meets and competitions no earlier than February 12, 2021, as long as the school is operating under Step III of the Agency of Education’s [Strong and Healthy Start](#) guidance. Again, students traveling out-of-state during the holidays must follow Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) and Health Department guidance around quarantine before returning to school or participating in school-based sports.

Games, competitions and meets may only involve Vermont-based teams and interstate teams where the school fully adheres to the Agency of Education’s [Strong and Healthy Start](#) guidance. Home teams must keep a list of all people present (players and personnel), and make available to the Health Department upon request, for a period of 14 days following any game or competition.

Consistent with the Agency of Education’s Strong and Healthy Start guidance, and to limit unnecessary exposure, only “key personnel” – players, coaches, officials, time and scorekeepers, live video stream – will be allowed to attend school-sponsored indoor sports events. This requirement is in effect regardless of whether the venue is owned or controlled by the school.

Any officials working games or competitions must properly mask at all times and use either an electronic, handheld whistle or whistle mask/gaiter. This includes during arrival, departure, warm-ups, half-time, etc.

Parents/caregivers or other designated adults should be encouraged to individually transport participants to off-site competitions, while avoiding carpools, to minimize the number of participants requiring bus transportation. Anyone utilizing shared transport (i.e., bus or carpooling with anyone outside your immediate household unit) is required to wear facial coverings and comply with all other relevant guidelines in the most current health guidance published by the Agency of Education related to buses and transportation. Regardless of weather conditions, steps must be taken to maintain constant airflow through the vehicle, including wearing appropriate clothing during cold weather so that windows may remain open.

Concerns related to compliance with these guidelines are best addressed to school administration or the local facility manager; on-going concerns may also be submitted via the Executive Order Reporting Tool on the [Department of Public Safety website](#).

## **Guidance for Specific Types of Sports**

The risk associated with different types of sports programs is a function of the degree of contact between participants and the type of setting or venue in which the contest is held. The following requirements reflect these differences and create a framework that appropriately limits risk.

Athletes should arrive for all sports-related activities dressed to play to the maximum extent practicable in order to minimize or eliminate time spent in locker rooms. Avoid congregating before, during, and after practice; promote an “arrive, play, and leave” mentality. Any locker room use must adhere to all physical distancing and masking requirements.

School campuses and other venues with multiple facilities (such as multi-rink locations, multi-court gyms) may have more than one unit of the maximum event size as long as those units are in distinct portions of the facility (a different gym, unique and distinct rinks) and the distinct gatherings have no interaction with one another (for example, a basketball team and a cheer squad should not have access to the same locker room at the same time).

### **UPDATED Outdoor Sports Involving No or Low-Contact**

Nordic skiing, downhill skiing and snowboarding may hold team-based practice sessions and limited competitions. **Competitions must be limited to no more than two participating schools or 25 participants, whichever is greater; a competition may involve multiple groupings throughout the day if the groups do not interact with one another.**

Event sites may choose to implement additional restrictions or requirements that school-sponsored sports programs will need to observe. Meet organizers must maintain lists of participants in each grouping for 30 days to assist in contact tracing.

### **Indoor Sports Involving No or Low Contact**

Bowling, dance and gymnastics may hold team practice sessions and virtual competitions where all participants are at a facility are members of a single team. The number of participants must be limited to 25% of approved fire safety occupancy or one person per 200 square feet and events should be structured in a manner that ensures a minimum of six feet of physical distance

is maintained between individual participants for all non-essential activities (e.g. spotting a routine is allowed).

Officials and judges for virtual competitions are encouraged to utilize remote participation to the maximum extent practicable. When it is necessary for officials or judges to be on-site: a health check must be completed before arriving; facial coverings are required to be worn at all times; and, physical distancing must be strictly observed, both between individual officials and between officials and athletes.

Indoor track will not be sanctioned during the Winter 2020-21 season due to concerns related to training and restrictions on meet venues.

### **Indoor Sports Involving Close Proximity or Moderate Contact**

Basketball and hockey programs may hold team practice sessions, inter-squad scrimmages and interscholastic competitions. Teams must implement measures to ensure six feet of physical distance is maintained between players not actively involved in game play with particular attention given to ensuring sufficient bench space for physical distancing. Teams are limited to no more than two games in any 7-day period and allow a minimum of at least three days between competitions.

Cheerleading squads, and basketball and hockey programs may hold team practice sessions. Cheerleading squads may also hold virtual competitions where all participants at a facility are members of a single team. The number of participants must be limited to 25% of approved fire safety occupancy or one person per 200 square feet where all participants are members of a single team or the total number of participants does not exceed 25 individuals.

Because of the increased risk of transmission associated with vocalization and stunting, cheerleading squads may not perform vocal routines or stunting during the Winter 2020-21 season. Further modifications to cheerleading should be considered to ensure participant safety while wearing face coverings, such as limiting tumbling and inversions.

Schools are strongly encouraged to video all games and competitions for indoor sports involving close proximity or moderate contact, as game tape has been shown to be a potentially important tool for identifying and narrowing the number close contacts should an infectious person be determined to have been present. Videos should be kept for a minimum of 14 days.

### **Indoor Sports Involving High Contact**

Wrestling matches will not be sanctioned during the Winter 2020-21 season. Wrestling teams may hold no contact, team practice sessions limited to individual skill building exercise and strength and conditioning sessions. The number of participants must be limited to 25% of approved fire safety occupancy or one person per 200 square feet, and a single team.

### **Weight Rooms and Other Indoor Training Facilities**

Outdoor training sessions should be prioritized as much as possible for all sports programs. Use of indoor training facilities, such as weight rooms, must adhere to the most current guidance published by the [Agency of Commerce and Community Development for fitness centers](#) and

similar exercise facilities, which currently limits use to 25% of approved fire safety occupancy or one person per 200 square feet. Usage must be structured in a manner that ensures six feet of physical distance between individuals for any activity that will occur for more than a few moments (e.g., spotting a lift).

## **Return to Play After Illness**

Consistent with the most current guidance available from the American Academy of Pediatrics, all children and adolescents (through age 22) diagnosed with COVID-19 infection, regardless of symptom severity, may not return to play until asymptomatic for at least 14 days **and** cleared by their primary care physician.

Adults (e.g., coaches and referees) who exercise vigorously during an athletic event diagnosed with COVID-19 infection should not return to play or vigorous exercise until asymptomatic for two weeks and cleared by their physician.

## **Additional Safety Precautions**

Facial coverings are required to be worn by all players, coaches, and staff at all times, but for the limited exemptions provided above.

Teams are encouraged to prioritize non-contact activity, such as conditioning and drills where physical distance can be maintained and give strong consideration to implementing modifications to reduce intensity of face-to-face contact and promote physical distancing.

During times when athletes are not actively participating in practice or competition, appropriate physical distancing should be maintained. Structure team meetings to limit congregation and ensure physical distancing between players on the sidelines or benches.

During competition, alter spacing of players, coaches, officials and staff to achieve physical distancing to the greatest extent possible.

School campuses and other venues with multiple facilities (such as multi-rink locations, multi-court gyms) may have more than one unit of the maximum event size as long as those units are in distinct portions of the facility (a different gym, unique and distinct rinks) and the distinct gatherings have no interaction with one another (for example, a basketball team and a cheer squad should not have access to the same locker room at the same time).

Discourage unnecessary physical contact, such as high fives, handshakes, fist bumps or hugs.

Equipment and other supplies touched by participants must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected regularly. Limit sharing equipment as much as possible.

No spitting or expulsion of bodily fluids of any sort on the playing service (field, court, ice, etc.), or anywhere in or around the playing service or in the facility.

No sharing of water bottles.

## **Guidance for Spring Sports**

Guidelines for school-based spring sports programs will be published in March 2021.