

Winter Sports Programs for the 2020-2021 School Year

Full Team-Based Practices

Rev. February 3, 2021

Background

The following guidance provides direction on school-sponsored winter sports programs for students K-12 on resuming **full team-based practices**. 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?

Data will be reviewed weekly by the Department of Health, in consultation with the Agency of Education, to determine when interscholastic competition can be initiated for winter sports.

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](#).

Facial coverings are required to be worn by all players, coaches, and staff at all times, including during active play. Students who have a medical or behavioral reason for not wearing a facial covering should 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.**

When schools are operating under Step I of the AOE's [Strong and Healthy Start](#) guidance or if a decision is made by the local superintendent to restrict or eliminate in-person instruction as a result of confirmed COVID-19 illness in student(s) or staff, all school-based athletic activities shall cease until at least such time as the decision to resume academic instruction under Step II of the AOE guidance is made by the local superintendent after consultation with the Department of Health.

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.

UPDATED Competitions

Outdoor sports - Nordic skiing, downhill skiing and snowboarding - may hold competitions where all participants are from a single school or the total number of participants does not exceed 25 individuals. Competitions 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.

Indoor sports involving no or low contact – bowling, dance and gymnastics – and cheerleading, consistent with the modifications indicated below, may hold virtual competitions where all participants at any individual facility are members of a single team. 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.

Interscholastic scrimmages, games and competitions by any Vermont school-sponsored hockey or basketball team is currently prohibited, both within and outside of Vermont.

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.

Guidance for Specific Types of Sports

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).

Outdoor Sports Involving No or Low-Contact

Nordic skiing, downhill skiing and snowboarding may hold team practice sessions and limited competitions where all participants are from a single school or the total number of participants does not exceed 25 individuals; a competition may involve multiple school teams or groupings of 25 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.

UPDATED 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.

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

UPDATED Indoor Sports Involving Close Proximity or Moderate Contact

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.

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.

Additional Safety Precautions

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.

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

Teams should structure team meetings to limit congregation and ensure physical distancing between players.

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 surface (field, court, ice, etc.), or anywhere in or around the playing surface 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.