

## Spring Sports Programs for the 2020-2021 School Year

Rev. March 23, 2021

### Background

The following guidance provides direction on school-sponsored winter sports programs for students K-12. This guidance is applicable to both public and independent schools. It was developed with input from public health experts and educators.

**All players, coaches, officials, staff, and spectators should complete a health check before arriving at school-sponsored practice sessions, scrimmages, games, meets or competitions.**

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, all people present 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. Do you feel unwell with any symptoms consistent with COVID-19? For example, have you 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?
3. Have you complied with Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) and Department of Health guidance around multi-household gatherings and travel-related quarantine for at least the last 14 days?

Should data emerge that indicates evidence of COVID-19 transmission resulting from interscholastic games, meets or competitions, 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 in-person academic instruction is resumed.

### General Guidance

#### Practices and Scrimmages

**School-based spring sports programs may initiate coach-led practice sessions (e.g., skills and drills work) and inter-squad scrimmages (within a school program) no earlier than April 5, 2021;** a limited exception is provided for baseball pitchers and catchers to begin coach-led practice sessions on March 29, 2021.

Students traveling out-of-state 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. 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 guidance](#).

Two-ply facial coverings are required to be worn by all players, coaches, officials, staff, and spectators 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.

An exception is provided for participants in activities such as distance running – both during practice sessions and interscholastic meets/competitions – where a minimum of six feet of physical distancing can be consistently maintained between individual participants at all times using staggered starts or other means.

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.

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**

**School-sponsored spring sports programs may initiate interscholastic games, meets and competitions no earlier than April 17, 2021.**

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

Parents/caregivers or other designated adults should be encouraged to transport participants to off-site, interscholastic games 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 Health and Safety Compliance 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. In all cases, athletes should arrive for practices, games, meets and competitions 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**

Baseball, softball, tennis, and track and field may hold team practice sessions and interscholastic meets and competitions. Teams must implement measures to ensure six feet of physical distance is maintained between players not actively involved in game play. Particular attention should be given to managing dugouts, including providing alternative seating for athletes to support physical distance when safely possible.

The number of participants in any track meet may not exceed current limits on event size – currently 150 for outdoor events; schools and event sites may choose to implement additional restrictions or requirements. A meet may involve multiple groupings through the day if the groups do not interact with one another. For example, meet organizers may consider staggered starts and departures or offering a subset of events on a particular day to ensure the number of participants on-location at a single point in time does not exceed limits on event size. Meet organizers must maintain lists of participants in each grouping for 14 days to assist in contact tracing. In addition:

- Track and field athletes must remain in their designated team area when not actively engaged in an event; and
- The maximum number of people present in the start area or an individual event area shall be kept to no more than 25 at any point in time.

### **Outdoor Sports Involving Close Proximity, Moderate or High Contact**

Lacrosse and ultimate frisbee teams may hold 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.

## **Spectators at School-Based Sports Events**

The number of spectators should be limited as much as possible and measures should be put in place to ensure social distancing between households. Interactions between spectators and participants should be minimized before, during and after events. At no time shall the total number of spectators exceed current limits on event size – currently 150 for outdoor events.

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

Prioritize outdoor training sessions 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**

All children and adolescents (ages 12- 22) diagnosed with COVID-19 infection, regardless of symptom severity, may not return to play until asymptomatic and evaluated and cleared by their primary care physician. Children and adolescents who meet clinical criteria will need to undergo the graduated Return-to-Play protocol overseen and monitored by the patient, their family and their health care provider with input from the school nurse and/or athletic department. Children less than 12 years of age can return to activity as tolerated after medical clearance by their primary care physician.

Adult athletes or others (e.g., 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**

Two-ply facial coverings are required to be worn by all players, coaches, officials, staff and spectators at all times, but for the limited exemptions provided above.

Teams should 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 or in the dugout.

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

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.

If restroom facilities (including portalets) will be provided for spectators, they should be cleaned and disinfected regularly, consistent with CDC guidance. If restroom facilities will not be available for public use, notify spectators ahead of time so they can prepare appropriately.

Concession operations must adhere to the most current guidance published by the Agency of Commerce and Community Development for food service operations.