

Guidance for All Sports Permitted to Operate During the COVID-19 Disaster Emergency to Ensure the Safety and Health of Employees, Athletes and the Public

Issued June 10, 2020, last updated November 19, 2020

Intent

The virus that causes the Coronavirus 2019 Disease (“COVID-19”) is easily transmitted, especially in group settings, and it is essential that the spread of the virus be slowed to safeguard public health and safety.

COVID-19 can be transmitted from infected individuals even if they are asymptomatic or their symptoms are mild, such as a cough. It can also be spread by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes. This guidance document addresses the procedures sports organizations and teams must follow to limit the spread of COVID-19 to the extent they are permitted to conduct in-person operations.

This guidance will be updated as more public health data and other information is available.

Organizations Subject to This Guidance

The Commonwealth is employing a regional and industry-specific approach to reopening non-life sustaining businesses. For more information, and up to date county designations, please refer to the Commonwealth’s Phased Reopening website.

All sports in Pennsylvania, including professional, collegiate, Pre-K to 12 school athletics, and amateur and recreational sports, are covered by this guidance.

Sports organizations and teams may only conduct in-person operations if they are able to do so in accordance with all applicable guidance.

Guidance

Everyone involved in sport activities must wear a face covering, such as a mask, unless they fall under an exception listed in Section 3 of the Secretary of Health’s Universal Face Covering Order. Coaches, athletes, and spectators must wear face coverings unless they are outdoors and can consistently maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet. Coaches, athletes, and spectators must wear face coverings while actively engaged in workouts and competition as well as when on the sidelines, in the dugout etc. unless they meet an exception in the Face Covering Order. Section 3 of the Order provides an exception that allows an individual to remove their mask if wearing a face covering would either cause a medical condition, or exacerbate an existing one, including respiratory issues that impede breathing, a mental health condition or a disability. The Order indicates all alternatives to wearing a face covering, including the use of a face shield, should be exhausted before an individual is excepted from this Order.

Professional Sports

Professional sports is defined as any sporting event at which the participants are paid by a league or team, or at which individuals or teams receive prizes or purse.

Professional sports teams must comply with league or local health department restrictions.

All individuals present at the venue including, but not limited to athletes, coaching and athletic staff, spectators, media, cheerleaders, and musicians, count towards gathering limitations and must comply with Face Covering Orders and social distancing guidelines.

Professional sports teams no longer need plan approval by the Department of Health.

Collegiate Sports

All collegiate sports sanctioned by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and collegiate athletic conferences, as well as intramural and club sports, may resume in-person activities, in alignment with the PA Department of Education (PDE) Preliminary Guidance for Resuming In-Person Instruction at Post Secondary Higher Education Institutions and Adult Basic Education Providers, guidance issued by DOH, the CDC, NCAA, and the team's relevant collegiate athletic conference. Postsecondary institutions must develop and post online an Athletic Health and Safety Plan for resuming sporting activities. The plan does not need to be submitted to DOH or PDE for approval.

While institutions may resume in-person sports-related activities, the decision to do so is at the discretion of the institution, and such events may only occur in compliance with the Phased Reopening Plan and this Guidance. All sports-related gatherings must conform with the amended guidelines on safe gathering limits released by the Department of Health on October 6, 2020 (effective 10/9/2020). Under the new amendment, venues hosting events or gatherings must determine their established occupancy limit as defined by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Life Safety Code.

All event attendees, including athletes, coaching staff, and officials, must wear face coverings, in accordance with the Secretary of Health's Universal Face Covering Order, and are expected to maintain social distancing when arriving, attending, and departing the facility.

For more details on the new maximum occupancy, see this [FAQ](#).

As more public health information is available, the administration hopes to work with impacted entities to release further guidance to address future sports seasons.

Pre-K to 12 School Sports

Pre-K to 12 (PK-12) school sports under the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA) and the Pennsylvania Independent Schools Athletic Association (PISAA) must follow the PDE Preliminary Guidance for Phased Reopening of Pre-K to 12 Schools and the CDC Considerations for Youth Sports.

The administration is concerned that holding school sports before January 2021 presents significant health risks to participants and the public, and strongly recommends against holding such events. The administration strongly recommends that Pre-K to 12 school sports be postponed until at least Jan. 1, 2021. The administration is providing this strong recommendation and not an order or mandate. As with deciding whether students should return to in-person classes, remote learning or a blend of the two this fall, school administrators and locally elected school boards should make decisions on sports. This recommendation:

- Applies to youth team and individual school sports, including cheerleading;
- Allows conditioning, drills and other training activities on an individual basis to continue; and
- Includes competitions, intramural play and scrimmages.

Each school entity must develop and adopt an Athletics Health and Safety Plan aligning to the PDE Preliminary Guidance for Phased Reopening of Pre-K to 12 Schools and the Public Health Guidance Regarding COVID-19 for Phased Reopening of Pre-K to 12 Schools prior to conducting sports-related activities with students. The plan must include the provisions of this guidance, be approved by the local governing body of the school entity and be posted on the school entity's publicly available website. The Athletics Health and Safety Plan must be included in the school entity's School Health and Safety Plan submitted to PDE.

All sports-related gatherings must conform with the amended guidelines on safe gathering limits released by the Department of Health on October 6, 2020 (effective 10/9/2020).

All event attendees, including athletes, coaching staff, and officials, must wear face coverings, in accordance with the Secretary of Health's Universal Face Covering Order, and are expected to maintain social distancing when arriving, attending, and departing the facility.

For more on the amendment to the order, see this FAQ.

All individuals present at the facility at which such activities are held count towards gathering limitations and must comply with face covering order and social distancing guidelines.

As more public health information is available, the administration may work with impacted entities to release further guidance which could impact future sports seasons.

Recreational and Amateur Sports

Recreational and amateur sports organizations and teams (not affiliated with a public or private PK-12 school), including, but not limited to basketball, hockey, field hockey, football, soccer, swimming, baseball, softball, lacrosse, gymnastics, and kickball, are permitted to conduct in-person activities, including games and practices, if they strictly adhere to the requirements of this guidance, including amended guidelines on safe gathering limits released by the Department of Health on October 6, 2020 (effective 10/9/2020).

The administration is, however, concerned that holding recreational and amateur sports before January 2021 presents significant health risks to participants and the public. Similar to school sports, the administration strongly recommends that youth recreational sports be postponed until at least Jan. 1, 2021. The administration is providing this strong recommendation and not an order or mandate. This recommendation:

- Applies to youth team and individual non-school recreational youth sports;
- Allows conditioning, drills and other training activities on an individual basis to continue; and
- Includes competitions, intramural play and scrimmages.

Youth sports should also follow CDC guidance.

Guidance Applicable to All Sporting Events

Local political units and school districts may impose more stringent requirements than those contained in this guidance. In such instances, businesses must adhere to this guidance as well as any other requirements imposed by the local political units. Teams and organizations should contact their local political subdivision to discuss their plan to resume play and to notify them of their intention to resume play.

To conduct games and practices, organizations and teams authorized to conduct in-person activities pursuant to this guidance **must adhere to the following:**

- Everyone attending the sporting event, including coaches, officials, athletes, staff, and spectators, age 2 and older must wear face coverings (masks or face shields), unless they are outdoors and can consistently maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet.
- Individuals who fall under an exception listed in Section 3 of Universal Face Covering Order, are not required to wear a face covering.
- Coaches, athletes, and spectators must wear face coverings while actively engaged in workouts and competition as well as when on the sidelines, in the dugout etc. unless they meet an exception in the Face Covering Order. Section 3 of the Order provides an exception that allows an individual to remove their mask if wearing a face covering would either cause a medical condition, or exacerbate an existing one, including respiratory issues that impede breathing, a mental health condition or a disability. The Order indicates all alternatives to wearing a face covering, including the use of a face shield, should be exhausted before an individual is excepted from this Order.

Using football as an example, wearing a mask in addition to a mouth guard and a helmet would likely create a medical issue for the athlete whether the athlete is a professional or youth player even if a previous medical issue was not present. For example,

the CDC says that “wearing a mask with these types of protective equipment is not safe if it makes it hard to breathe.” There are other sports where there are similar concerns that a mask would create a medical issue where one would otherwise not exist in an athlete. For example, it should also be obvious that wearing a mask while swimming presents an imminent health issue.

According to Section 3, the athlete would be asked to work through alternatives that would reduce or eliminate the respiratory droplets that would impact others in proximity. If the sport, equipment, or exertion level does not allow for face covering to be worn safely then the athlete should not wear a face covering.

There are no exemptions for specific sports, leagues, teams, or levels. We know that some people don't like masks. We are asking everyone to please give this their best effort so we can continue these activities and others as we all unite to fight COVID-19.

- Spectators may attend sporting events, but count towards the statewide large gathering limitations, and must follow the Universal Face Covering Order and social distancing guidance when arriving, attending, and departing the event.
- Athletic directors, coaches and league officials must review and consider the CDC guidance on consideration for youth sports to modify practices and games to mitigate the risk of spreading the virus. This includes focusing on individual skill building versus competition and limiting contact in close contact sports.
- The community, league, or team must designate a primary point of contact for all questions related to COVID-19, and all parents, athletes, officials, and coaches must be provided the person's contact information.
- The community, league, or team must develop a plan of action in the event an athlete, coach, or official falls ill, make the plan publicly available, and explain it to the entire sport community.
- The community, league, or team must educate all athletes, staff and families about the symptoms of COVID-19 and when to stay home. Athletes also should be educated on proper hand washing and sanitizing.
- Coaching staff, officials, and other adult personnel must wear face coverings (masks or face shields) at all times, unless doing so jeopardizes their health.
- Coaches and athletes must maintain appropriate social distancing at all times possible, including in the field of play, locker rooms, sidelines, dugouts, benches, and workout areas. During down time, athletes, coaches, and officials should not congregate.
- Coaches and athletic staff must screen and monitor athletes for symptoms prior to and during games and practices. If individuals participating in sporting activities show symptoms, have a temperature of 100.4 degrees or higher, or are sick, they must be sent home.
- All athletes, coaches, and officials must bring their own water and drinks to team activities. Team water coolers for sharing through disposable cups are not allowed. Fixed water fountains should not be used.
- Activities that increase the risk of exposure to saliva must not be allowed including chewing gum, spitting, licking fingers, and eating sunflower seeds.
- Avoid shaking hands, fist bumps, or high fives before, during or after games and practices. Limit unnecessary physical contact with teammates, other athletes, coaches, officials, and spectators.
- Whenever possible, equipment and other personal items should be separated and not shared. If equipment must be shared, all equipment should be properly disinfected between users. Follow the CDC guidance for cleaning and disinfecting.
- If multiple games are to be held at the same facility, adequate time shall be scheduled between contests to allow for facilities to be cleaned and disinfected, and to minimize interaction between athletes. Sports complexes with multiple fields may operate simultaneous games or practices on fields within a complex only if social distancing can be maintained. Each individual game or practice at a complex must adhere to the gathering occupancy limits.
- Concession stands or other food must adhere to the Guidance for Businesses in the Restaurant Industry.

To operate games or practice, organizations, and teams that are otherwise permitted to conduct in-person activities pursuant to this guidance **are encouraged to do the following:**

- Coaches should create a back-up staffing plan which should include cross-training staff and coaches and training all coaches and officials on safety protocols.
- Limit cash transactions to the extent possible; find alternative ways to charge admission and pay for concessions.

- Create protocols to limit entrance and exit traffic, designating specific entry to and exits from facilities. Establish protocols to ensure staggered pick up and drop off for practice and events and ensure that athletes are not congregating while awaiting pick up and to ensure congregation or crowding does not occur on drop off. Pickups and drop offs should remain outside. Parents should not enter the facility.

Guidance for Caregivers and Spectators

- Seating areas, including bleachers, must adhere to social distancing requirements of at least 6 feet of spacing for anyone not in the same household. To assist with proper social distancing, areas should be clearly marked.
- Everyone age 2 or older must wear face coverings (masks or face shields) at all times, unless they are outdoors and can consistently maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet, or fall under an exception listed in Section 3 of the Secretary of Health's Order on Universal Face Coverings.
- Caregivers or spectators should not enter the field of play or bench areas.
- Non-essential visitors, spectators, and volunteers should be limited when possible, including activities with external groups or organizations. Parents should refrain from attending practices, or volunteering to assist with coaching.
- Caregivers and coaches should assess levels of risk based on individual athletes on the team who may be at a higher risk for severe illness.
- Caregivers should monitor their children for symptoms prior to any sporting event. Children and athletes who are sick or showing symptoms must stay home.

Further Guidance and Support

In addition to this guidance, communities and organizations should also review the CDC's Considerations for Youth Sports.

See answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs) involving application of the business safety order.

Help is available for people who are struggling with their mental or emotional health or feeling anxious or overly stressed. Contact the Crisis Text Line by texting PA to 741-741.

The Administration recognizes the difficulty of procuring materials businesses need to safely resume operations. If assistance is needed to locate masks and other supplies to carry out these required safety procedures, please visit DCED's Business2Business Interchange.

Enforcement

Law enforcement officers should refer to Pennsylvania State Police Enforcement Guidance.

If employees or customers want to report possible health and safety violations related to COVID-19:

1. File a complaint with a local health department or a law enforcement agency.
2. Submit this web form to the PA Department of Health.
3. Review OSHA guidance and, if appropriate, file a complaint at OSHA.gov.

Reminders to Contain the Spread of COVID-19: Social Distancing and Other Requirements

When people need to leave their places of residence in connection with allowable individual activities, allowable essential travel, or by virtue of exemption from this policy, the Department of Health strongly encourages individuals to abide by the following social distancing requirements to:

- Maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from other individuals;
- Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds as frequently as possible, or use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available;

- Cover coughs or sneezes with a sleeve or elbow, not hands;
- Do not shake hands;
- Regularly clean high-contact surface areas; and
- When sick, stay at home.

Additional Information

For the most up-to-date, reliable information, please continue to refer to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's website for Responding to COVID-19 in Pennsylvania.