

MADISON COUNTY
B O H
BOARD OF HEALTH

BOARD MEMBERS

John Endres, DVM
President

The Madison County Board of Health is responsible for making recommendations to safeguard the health of all county residents. This requires us to balance numerous competing priorities. The opening of high-risk sports represents a situation in which the risks and benefits to different groups are very complex.

Wendy Cary
Vice President

The Board wishes to acknowledge the benefits of exercise and athletic competition to both physical and mental health. It has been a significant hardship for students to miss out on the benefits of school and community sports. However, these benefits must also be balanced with the goal of returning students to full-time public education and the goal of protecting vulnerable populations. At this time, we see the return to full-time school as a high priority. Each school has chosen a different model to return at least some students to in-person school, and we commend each of the school districts in the country for the extensive efforts to keep children, teachers, and staff safe. Due to these efforts, there have been very few cases of COVID19 attributable to in-school transmission.

Samual Barr, DMD

<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7004e3.htm>

Gerry Edwards, MD

Rachel Elder, MD

Since most schools in the county are still running hybrid learning programs, we would support returning students to full-time public education as a high priority. In addition to the educational benefits to children, other business and economic recovery in the county is dependent on children returning to school so that parents can return to work.

Jennifer Meyers, MD

Alex Stepanski

The return to sports is inherently riskier than return to classrooms. Most of the sports in question, particularly winter sports, are indoors, involve contact closer than 6 feet as part of the sport, and make consistent masking more challenging. The risk does vary by the sport, but any exercise leads to heavier breathing, causing increased aerosolization of viral particles, and increasing the risk of transmission of COVID19 if a participant is infected. Even among professional sports, where cohorting, limited spectators, and widespread testing have been used, outbreaks have occurred. There have been numerous outbreaks among school and recreational sports teams, including hockey, wrestling, and basketball. In addition to affecting the athletes themselves, we are sensitive to the fact that any positive cases on sports teams may lead to school closures or classroom quarantines. In response to an outbreak at a wrestling tournament,

Marla Velky-Reger,
LCSW-R



www.healthymadisoncounty.org "Your source for local health information."

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“An estimated 1,700 in-person school days were lost as a consequence of isolation and quarantine of patients and contacts during this COVID-19 outbreak. ** The number of in-person school days lost would likely have been higher had the outbreak not occurred toward the end of the fall 2020 semester. In addition, this outbreak resulted in the suspension of all winter indoor and outdoor high school athletics in county A, affecting approximately 1,500 students”.

<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6941a4.htm>

<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7004e4.htm>

<https://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/south-bay/nearly-100-covid-19-cases-linked-to-unlawful-basketball-tournament-in-santa-clara-co/2421535/>

Before schools were allowed to open in the fall, schools were required to present extensive plans for cohorting, cleaning, and handling ill children. Even then, they were only allowed to open if cases in the area were below the 5% mark. Once they opened, they were asked to close again if rates went back above 8%. While our schools have been successful at limiting in-school transmission, the local prevalence of COVID19 cases is substantially higher now than it was when schools reopened in the fall. We are also experiencing a number of new SARS-COV2 variants that are more highly transmissible. Given limited testing capacity, we do not have a way of knowing to what extent these variants are present in the area right now. This makes us much more concerned about opening higher-risk competitive sports, which brings students into closer contact during practices and games, as well as mixing students of different districts.

Our Board as a whole, feels it is safest to delay opening of moderate- and high-risk sports for at least another month until rates can further decrease, more vaccinations can occur, and we can gain a better understanding of the new virus variants and their epidemiology.

<https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-interim-guidance-return-to-sports/>

Governor Cuomo announced that high risk sports may occur as permitted by their local health authority, effective February 1, 2021. The Board of Health believes that it is safest if schools did not participate in high-risk sports at this time. However, if schools choose to allow for high-risk sports, they must follow



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the NYS Department of Health's INTERIM GUIDANCE FOR SPORTS AND RECREATION DURING THE COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY and the Madison County Board of Health requirements, provided in the attached guidance document.

Madison County Board of Health

John Endres, DVM – President
Wendy Cary, City of Oneida Representative – Vice President
Samuel Barr, DMD
Gerry Edwards, MD
Rachel Elder, MD
Jennifer Meyers, MD
Alex Stepanski, Madison County Board of Supervisors
Marla Velky-Reger, LCSW-R

Sincerely,



John Endres, President
Madison County Board of Health

Cc: attachments

