



Madison County Department of Health

HIGH RISK SPORTS IN SCHOOLS

JANUARY 28, 2021

MADISON COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH
Guidance for Higher Risk Sports in Schools
January 28, 2021

BACKGROUND

Governor Cuomo recently announced that effective February 1, 2021, participants in higher-risk sports may participate in individual or distanced group training and organized no/low-contact group training and other types of play, including competitions and tournaments, if permitted by local health authorities.

The resumption of these activities does not mean that they are safe or without risk. Districts/schools must meet sport-specific minimum requirements and communities must meet COVID-19 metrics. Sports-related travel outside these regions is strongly discouraged.

Higher Risk sports include, but are not limited to:

- Football
- Ice hockey
- Basketball
- See the [NYS guidance](#) for a full list

Wrestling**

**Wrestling is particularly problematic, since close contact is inherent to the sport, and masks cannot safely be worn. The Board believes that it is not safe to begin wrestling competitions at this time

Higher risk sports are allowed subject to NYS Department of Health's INTERIM GUIDANCE FOR SPORTS AND RECREATION DURING THE COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY. The State's guidance is the minimum requirement and districts/schools may issue additional guidance. The Madison County Board of Health has issued the following requirements and recommendations for K-12 sponsored higher-risk school sports:

- Each school district's Board of Education or non-public school's Board of Directors (or other appropriate person/entity) must approve the district/school's participation in each specific higher-risk sport.
- Each school superintendent/school leader must oversee the creation of a sport-specific preparedness plan that delineates:
 - A plan administrator, who is responsible for communicating the plan to athletes, coaches, parents, trainers, referees/officials, etc.
 - A plan coordinator, who will serve as a point of contact, should any cases be identified. The coordinator must facilitate and assist with case investigation and contact elicitation and notification.
 - A daily system to ensure that no one associated with the practice or competition is ill, including referees/officials and spectators.
 - This may involve a culture change for some teams – the message should not be to play through an illness, but to stay home to protect others.
 - Temperatures should be taken prior to practices and games/contests.
 - A system for logging attendance by all individuals associated with the practice or competition, including referees and officials. The system must capture names, phone numbers and email addresses.
 - How practice and game times can be staggered to avoid crowding and congestion when participants, referees/officials and spectators are arriving, playing, and leaving.

- If feasible, how pods can be created to limit the potential for transmission in the event of an exposure. A pod is a group of student-athletes who only practice or play with members of their own pod.
 - Pods should either practice in physically separate rooms, facilities or areas or steps taken to ensure that pods are appropriately distanced.
 - Teams should avoid reassigning athletes to different pods to the maximum extent possible.
 - The smaller the pod size, the more the team can minimize potential transmission.
- How sharing of objects and equipment (e.g., water bottles, towels, and snacks) will be avoided and the use of dedicated personal equipment encouraged.
 - When not avoidable, how shared objects and equipment will be cleaned and disinfected between uses.
- How frequently touched surfaces on the field, court, or play surface will be cleaned and disinfected at least daily, or between uses as much as possible.
- If feasible, how practices or competitions can be held outdoors. If indoors, how large and well-ventilated spaces for play will be used and time spent indoors minimized.
 - Districts/schools may choose not to allow spectators to minimize risk.
 - If spectators are allowed, all NYS guidelines regarding venues and gatherings must be followed.
- How locker rooms and facility shower use will be avoided. The use of locker rooms is strongly discouraged.
 - If locker rooms are used, they must be cleaned/disinfected as per NYSDOH guidance.
- How carpooling will be discouraged to the extent possible.
- How travel by school buses will conform to NYS requirements.
- How congregate dining will be avoided, but when necessary, how NYS regulations related to dining and gatherings will be met.
- How other methods of prevention (e.g., hand washing) will be emphasized.
- How unnecessary physical contact among individuals (e.g., handshakes, high-fives) will be avoided.
- If overnight travel is essential, how accommodations will be made to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission (e.g., avoiding room sharing, maintaining social distancing).
- Each sport-specific preparedness plan must be approved by the district/school's medical director.¹
- Each parent/guardian, athlete, coach, manager, referee/official must sign an agreement that a condition of ongoing participation includes full cooperation with case investigations and contact elicitation and adherence to isolation and quarantine orders.
- Each parent/guardian and athlete must sign a district/school developed COVID-19 informed consent. While the content of the informed consent must be determined by the district/school in consultation with their medical director, factors to be considered include but are not limited to:
 - Participation in the sport may expose the athlete to COVID-19.
 - Symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals can spread the virus.
 - Masking, distancing, and other mitigation measures reduce, but do not eliminate risk.
 - At present, it cannot be predicted who will become severely ill if infected.
 - COVID-19 can lead to serious medical conditions and death for people of all ages.
 - The long-term effects of COVID-19 are, at present, unknown; even people with mild cases may experience long-term complications.
 - There is a significant risk of transmission to those in the home of infected athletes.
 - Older people and people with [underlying health conditions](#) are at higher risk of serious disease.

¹ Sport-specific preparedness plans, once approved by the school medical director, do not need to be submitted to NYSDOH or {LHD}.

- Each district/school obtains a medical clearance from the student-athletes healthcare provider.²
- Each district/school establishes and disseminates their own confidential phone number and email address to allow athletes, parents or others to report alleged failures to adhere to the obligations reflected in these requirements and/or those in NYS' [Interim Guidance For Sports And Recreation During The Covid-19 Public Health Emergency](#).
 - Each district/school should keep a log of any complaints and when indicated, [report the complaint to NYS](#).
- Cloth face coverings/masks that conform to recommendations from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) should be worn by all athletes, coaches, managers, referees/officials, individuals dropping off or picking up athletes, etc.
 - It is important that the cloth face covering/mask fits the individual well and is worn over the nose and below the chin at all times when in use.
 - If the cloth face covering/mask is removed for a break, the individual should remain at least 6 feet away from all other individuals.
 - Cloth face coverings must be washed daily in hot water and not reused until cleaned.
 - Coaches, managers, and other employees should monitor proper use of cloth face coverings/masks and correct improper use, when indicated.
 - The AAP has indicated that cloth face coverings have been shown to be well tolerated by the majority of individuals who wear them for exercise but acknowledges that the coverings may need to be removed under certain circumstances.
 - District/school medical directors should review AAP guidance and other scientific literature for recommendations regarding specific sports where a cloth face covering/mask could pose a hazard and address those in their sport-specific preparedness plans.
 - Boards of Education and Boards of Directors should, in consultation with the district/school medical directors, consider this information when approving participating in individual sports.
 - In the rare case that a medical condition would be complicated by wearing a cloth face covering/mask, an athlete can apply to the district/school medical director for an exemption by providing appropriate documentation that the condition will be present throughout the length of the sports season.
- For indoor sports, including practices, scrimmages, etc., no spectators will be allowed. For outdoor sports districts/schools must limit spectators to minimize the risk of transmission and comply with all NYS regulations regarding venues, gatherings and capacity limits.
- Vaccination status does not alter any requirements.
- Each district/school agrees to indemnify and hold harmless the County, its directors, officers, employees and agents from and against any and all claims, actions or liabilities of any nature that may be asserted against them by third parties in connection with participation in higher-risk school sports.
- All other guidance in NYS's [Interim Guidance For Sports And Recreation During The Covid-19 Public Health Emergency](#) must be followed wherever games and practices are held.

COMMUNITY COVID-19 METRICS

- The 7-day rolling average percent positivity in the county, [as calculated by NYSDOH](#), must be below 5%. If the 7-day rolling average percent positivity is above 5%, then activities must be restricted to individual or

² A physical is not required to be performed as part of the medical clearance, but can be done if indicated by their healthcare provider.

distanced group training or organized no/low-contact group training.³ Should the 7-day rolling average percent positivity go above 8%, all sporting activities will be suspended.

- The region's hospital capacity (percent of hospital beds available) is above 25%, [as calculated by NYSDOH](#).
- The region's rate of hospital admissions must not be unacceptably high or require additional interventions to control the rate of growth, as determined by NYSDOH.
- The absence of other epidemiological data, information or factors as determined or identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) or {LHD} that impact COVID-19 control or mitigation.

ONGOING REQUIREMENTS

- If school is closed for in-person education due to an increase in COVID-19 cases, school-sponsored sports must be suspended until in-person education is resumed; however, this restriction does not apply to schools that are conducting only remote instruction.
- Travel to, or from, any area that has been [designated by NYSDOH as a red or orange zone](#) is not permitted.
- Travel to, or from, any area that has been [designated by NYSDOH as a yellow zone](#) is permitted so long as it adheres to all applicable NYS guidance.
- Superintendents/school leaders from outside the CNY or Mohawk Valley regions must stipulate to the host district/school that no one associated with the team is known to be ill or currently infected with COVID-19 prior to their team traveling to the region to participate in a practice or competition.
- Monitoring and enforcement of New York Forward requirements are expected to be performed by districts/schools, as limited public health resources are focused on vaccination efforts, case investigation and contact tracing. Districts/schools must investigate complaints of non-compliance and report findings to the school district's Board of Education or non-public school's Board of Directors or their designee.
- Failure to comply will result in approval for the given district's/school's team being rescinded.
- Districts/schools must have additional cloth face coverings/masks on hand in case an athlete player forgets or needs to replace one.
- Coaches will be required to complete an approved COVID-19 training through John's Hopkins. [<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/contact-tracing>]

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- When and where feasible, districts/schools should consider weekly COVID-19 testing for each athlete, coach, manager, referee/official, or other individual associated with the higher-risk sport, unless the individual has documentation of a positive COVID-19 test within the previous 90 days.
 - Testing could be arranged or conducted by the district/school.
 - The district/school must report patient-specific results (positive or negative) to the LHD where the individual resides.
 - The 'home' team should be responsible for arranging for and reporting of results from officials/referees.
- Sports-related travel outside the CNY and Mohawk Valley Region is strongly discouraged.
- Districts/schools should consider asking coaches and athletes to sign coach/player pledges. The pledges should help coaches and athletes understand what team members do outside of practice and games can affect their teammates, opponents, and their community. Their actions can directly impact the future of the

³If the district/school is located in a county whose 7-day rolling average percent positivity is at or below 5% and is scheduled to compete against a district/school in a county 7-day rolling average percent positivity is above 5%, the competition should be postponed. District/schools should follow a similar approach for hospital capacity and hospital admission metrics.

sports season.

- Consider creating pod/bubble leagues to minimize contact. For example, if ten schools are in a league, have two mini leagues of five that only play one another.
- Participation in multi-team events or tournaments is not recommended.