

# COVID-19 Sports Practice Guidance for Youth and Adults

12/28/2020

Guidance in this document applies beginning Jan. 4, 2021. Prior to that time, please refer to [COVID-19 Youth and Adult Sports under Executive Order 20-103](#) ([www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/sportsguide.pdf](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/sportsguide.pdf)) for requirements and recommendations.

This guidance does not apply to teams or athletes participating in professional or intercollegiate sports activities. Intercollegiate sports teams and athletes must follow the guidance for sports activities in *Recommendations for Different Levels of COVID-19 Transmission Among Higher Education Institutions*, available at [Institutes of Higher Education: COVID-19](#) ([www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/ihe.html](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/ihe.html)). For more information regarding which athletes are considered “professional,” see [Executive Order 20-103 Frequently Asked Questions](#) ([https://mn.gov/covid19/assets/eo20103\\_faq\\_tcm1148-458389.pdf](https://mn.gov/covid19/assets/eo20103_faq_tcm1148-458389.pdf)).

Decisions regarding sports and other activities in COVID-related Executive Orders and guidance take into account multiple considerations. These considerations include but are not limited to the factors that make an activity risky in terms of exposure to and spread of COVID-19; COVID-19 data and trends in Minnesota, surrounding states, and nationwide; and the well-being and economic health of Minnesotans.

The decision to resume sports does not mean engaging in sports is without risk. **Any time you gather with other people, you are putting yourself and others at risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2**, the virus that causes COVID-19. COVID-19 can lead to serious medical conditions and even death for people of all ages. We cannot predict who will become severely ill, although we know that older people and people with underlying health conditions are at higher risk. We do not yet know what the long-term effects of COVID-19 are; even people with mild cases may experience long-term complications. People with symptoms and without symptoms can spread COVID-19. The masking, distancing, and other guidance provided here is intended to reduce the risk of transmission, but does not eliminate it.

Starting Jan. 4, 2021, practices for organized youth and adult sports may resume. Practices cannot exceed pod sizes of more than 25. Spectators are not allowed; however, this does not prevent a parent, guardian, or support person from being present if necessary due to a participant’s age, disability, or medical condition. See guidance below for more details.

Starting Jan. 14, 2021, games and scrimmages with other teams may begin. Guidance is forthcoming.

Face coverings must be worn by all persons at all times, including practices and games, with only a few exceptions (see Follow Face Covering Requirements section, below).

Concessions and entertainment are not allowed at this time.

This guidance document outlines requirements and prevention strategies to reduce the spread of COVID-19 during sports activities. This document is intended for organizers and participants of all ages, in sports activities organized by entities, associations, clubs, or organizations providing for registration of participants and oversight on a regular basis for a defined period of time.

## Setting expectations

- ✓ Successfully resuming practices and, when allowed, games is dependent on the adherence to guidance necessary to prevent transmission as outlined in this document.
- ✓ It is important to communicate to parents and players that masks will be required for all practices and, when allowed, games. For further information see the [American Academy of Pediatrics COVID-19 Interim Guidance: Return to Sports](https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-interim-guidance-return-to-sports/) (<https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-interim-guidance-return-to-sports/>).
- ✓ Additionally, players, parents, and coaches should understand that social interactions outside of practices are sources of transmission among teams. Gatherings indoors should be strongly discouraged. Further, players, parents, and coaches must understand that any gatherings that exceed the current social gathering limits of up to two households indoors (maximum of 10 persons total) and up to three households outdoors (maximum of 15 persons total) are prohibited. Permitted social gatherings must follow the [Stay Safe in Social Gatherings](https://staysafe.mn.gov/individuals-families/social-gatherings.jsp) ([staysafe.mn.gov/individuals-families/social-gatherings.jsp](https://staysafe.mn.gov/individuals-families/social-gatherings.jsp)) guidance, including the requirement to maintain social distance between members of other households.

## Requirements for holding athletic events

### Create a preparedness plan

- ✓ Adopt and implement a COVID-19 Preparedness Plan as required by [Executive Orders issued by Governor Tim Walz](https://mn.gov/governor/news/executiveorders.jsp) ([mn.gov/governor/news/executiveorders.jsp](https://mn.gov/governor/news/executiveorders.jsp)). An organization's COVID-19 Preparedness Plan must address the requirements listed below and should consider the recommendations in this document. The plan should be updated when there are changes to public health official guidelines regarding group gatherings or sports activities.
  - All businesses (sports facilities, gyms, associations, sports clubs/teams, etc.) are required to develop a program-specific plan. Templates for developing a program-specific plan can be found at [Stay Safe MN](https://staysafe.mn.gov) ([staysafe.mn.gov](https://staysafe.mn.gov)).
  - All youth sports programs must also develop a COVID-19 Plan and follow the parameters outlined in the [COVID-19 Prevention Guidance for Youth and Student Programs](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/socialdistance.pdf) ([www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/socialdistance.pdf](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/socialdistance.pdf)). "Youth programs" are programs providing care or enrichment to children or adolescents such as day camps, summer activities, and recreational or educational classes that require

- registration and have on-site supervision. “Youth programs” does not include licensed child care facilities or school district summer learning programs.
- The COVID-19 Preparedness Plan must be available and accessible to participants, volunteers, and employees.
- ✓ Identify a plan administrator for your organization’s COVID-19 plan.
- Communicate your COVID-19 plan to officials, umpires, and trainers.
  - This should include expectations around screening, face coverings, and other prevention efforts.
  - Plan templates are available at [Stay Safe Guidance for All Business Entities \(staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/all-businesses.jsp\)](https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/all-businesses.jsp).
- ✓ Whenever possible, identify a COVID-19 Coordinator (which can also be the COVID-19 Preparedness Plan administrator)
- This person will be the point person for any cases or outbreaks in the team/association
  - This person will report COVID-19 cases to MDH, and work with LPH, MDH, and school health professionals to ensure close contacts are quickly identified and that isolation and quarantine are followed; as well as prompt communication with parents and athletes.
- ✓ Create protocols that are considerate of coaches, staff, players, volunteers, and participants at highest risk of complications from COVID-19.
- [CDC: People at Increased Risk \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/index.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/index.html)
  - [Executive Order 20-55, Protecting the Rights and Health of At-Risk Populations during the COVID-19 Peacetime Emergency \(www.leg.state.mn.us/archive/execorders/20-55.pdf\)](https://www.leg.state.mn.us/archive/execorders/20-55.pdf)

## Follow physical distancing

- ✓ Maintain at least 6 feet between participants when they are not playing (on the bench, in the dugout, on the sideline, etc.).

## Follow guidance for the event setting (e.g., gymnasium, rinks)

- ✓ Do not exceed the number of people allowed in the venue.
- Facility and venue guidance is available at [Stay Safe Guidance for Businesses & Organizations \(staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/index.jsp\)](https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/index.jsp). Including:
    - [Stay Safe Guidance for Outdoor Recreation Entities \(staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/outdoor-recreation.jsp\)](https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/outdoor-recreation.jsp)
    - [Stay Safe Guidance for Entertainment \(staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/entertainment.jsp\)](https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/entertainment.jsp)
    - [2020-21 Planning Guidance for Minnesota Public Schools \(education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET\\_FILE&dDocName=MDE032934&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary\)](https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=MDE032934&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary) – Updated 12/1/20

- A visual guide to capacity limits can be found here: [Minnesota's Stay Safe Plan \(mn.gov/covid19/for-minnesotans/stay-safe-mn/stay-safe-plan.jsp\)](https://mn.gov/covid19/for-minnesotans/stay-safe-mn/stay-safe-plan.jsp).
- ✓ Stagger game times to avoid crowding and congestion when participants are arriving, playing, and leaving.
- ✓ Don't allow concessions to minimize opportunities for crowding.

## Follow face covering requirements

- ✓ Face coverings must be worn by all persons at all times, including practices and, when allowed, games with only the following exceptions.
  - During wrestling contact, a cloth face covering could become a choking or visual hazard and is discouraged. For gymnastics and cheerleading, if there are concerns about safety in regards to choking or the face covering getting caught on objects, athletes may temporarily remove the face covering during activities such as tumbling/stunting/flying or on certain apparatuses. However, athletes must wear face coverings for all other practices and routines.
  - Individuals who swim/dive/participate in water sports should not wear a cloth face covering while they are in the water.
  - For further information on wearing face coverings during sports activities please see the following guidance: [American Academy of Pediatrics COVID-19 Interim Guidance: Return to Sports \(https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-interim-guidance-return-to-sports/\)](https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-interim-guidance-return-to-sports/).
- ✓ Face coverings must be worn in accordance with MDH guidance and Executive Order 20-81.
  - Types of face coverings can include a cloth mask, a neck gaiter, a scarf, a bandanna, or a religious face covering. CDC recommends using two layers of fabric when making a cloth face covering. Face coverings that are made of thinner single-layer fabric such as certain types of masks, scarves, neck gaiters, or bandannas may not be as effective for blocking droplets that come out when speaking, coughing, or sneezing and should not be used unless there are no alternatives.
  - A face covering must cover the nose and mouth completely. The covering should not be overly tight or restrictive and should feel comfortable to wear.
  - Any masks that incorporate a valve that is designed to facilitate easy exhaling, mesh masks, or masks with openings, holes, visible gaps in the design or material, or vents are not sufficient face coverings because they allow droplets to be released from the mask.
  - [Face Covering Requirements and Recommendations under Executive Order 20-81 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facecover.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facecover.html)
- ✓ People are not permitted to remove their face coverings during activities that involve a high level of exertion. For guidance on when a person refuses to wear a face covering, or is unable to wear a face covering due to a disability, medical, or mental health condition, please see [Frequently Asked Questions About the Requirement to Wear Face Coverings \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facecoverfaq.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facecoverfaq.html).

## Promote health checks

- ✓ Create protocols to maintain health checks and screening of participants and staff/volunteers.
  - Any staff, volunteers, or participants who are sick must stay home.
  - Have policies in place outlining the process for those who become sick while participating in a sport.
  - Be aware that persons can get a positive COVID-19 test even if they do not have symptoms.

---

## Requirements for holding practices (effective Jan. 4, 2021)

**Only practices are allowed from Jan. 4 through 13.** No games or scrimmages with other teams are allowed. Games and scrimmages with other teams will be allowed starting Jan. 14. Guidance on competition and gameplay with other teams is forthcoming.

Follow the “Requirements for holding athletic events” in addition to the following:

### Spectator requirements

- ✓ Spectators are not allowed at practices.
- ✓ Participants who need assistance to participate in the activity due to age, medical condition, or disability, are each allowed to have one parent, guardian, or adult support person present to support them. Parents, guardians, and support persons must maintain social distancing of at least six feet from persons in other households. .

### Practice requirements

- ✓ Participants must maintain 6 foot social distancing when not actively playing (team meetings, side lines, waiting for a turn).
- ✓ Keep practices small in size. For youth and adult organized sport practices or training (non-game or competition activities), create pods. Pod sizes cannot exceed 25 people per pod, either inside or outside.
  - A “pod” is a group of individuals that only practice or play with members of their own pod, which limits the potential for transmission in the event of an exposure or outbreak. Teams and organizations are responsible for ensuring that members of different pods do not practice together, interact, or otherwise come into close contact while organized sports are occurring. Pods must either practice in physically separate rooms, facilities, or areas, or steps must be taken to ensure that pods are kept separated by a distance of no less than 12 feet at all times. Teams must also avoid reassigning athletes to different pods to the maximum extent possible.
  - The smaller the pod size, the more the team can minimize broader transmission of COVID-19 among team mates, so teams are strongly encouraged to create pods that are smaller than the maximum of 25.

## Additional practice recommendations

- ✓ Start with skill development practices that allow participants to maintain social distance from members of other households for the first week or two of practice. This may help slow initial disease transmission on the team and ease participants back into practice for those who have not had much physical activity during the pause.
- ✓ Host practices outdoors if possible.
  - Outdoors is safer than indoors. If indoors, minimize the time spent indoors, as risk of transmission increases with the more time spent indoors. Consider keeping indoor practices to 30 minutes or less.
- ✓ Avoid using locker rooms and facility showers.
- ✓ Carpooling should be discouraged as much as possible.

---

## Important risk considerations

### Level of contact in a sport

Before starting any sport, consider the risk associated with that sport in terms of COVID-19 being spread between players.

- ✓ The more physical or close contact that occurs the greater risk there is in spreading illness.
- ✓ A sport or training that takes place indoors is riskier than if the activity is done outdoors.
- ✓ Resources for Risk Categorization of Sports:
  - [National Collegiate Athletic Association COVID-19 Coronavirus \(www.ncaa.org/sport-science-institute/coronavirus-covid-19\)](http://www.ncaa.org/sport-science-institute/coronavirus-covid-19)
  - [United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee Coronavirus Updates \(www.teamusa.org/Coronavirus\)](http://www.teamusa.org/Coronavirus)  
Under the “Return to Training and Sport Event Planning” tab, select Sport Event Planning.
  - National Federation of State High School Association’s [Guidance for Opening up High School Athletics and Activities \(nfhs.org/media/3812287/2020-nfhs-guidance-for-opening-up-high-school-athletics-and-activities-nfhs-smac-may-15\\_2020-final.pdf\)](https://nfhs.org/media/3812287/2020-nfhs-guidance-for-opening-up-high-school-athletics-and-activities-nfhs-smac-may-15_2020-final.pdf)

### Know before you play

There may be an increased risk of COVID-19 when participating in sports, and COVID-19 activity may be different in different regions of the state, also contributing to a possible increase in risk.

Traveling out of state or to different regions of the state to participate in sports activities is strongly discouraged. However, if individuals or teams are considering traveling to other regions or states to participate in sports, they should be aware of COVID-19 activity in that area to inform their decision. Additionally, the Governor’s Executive Order recommends individuals quarantine upon return from out of state travel.

- ✓ For Minnesota:
  - [Situation Update for COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/situation.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/situation.html)
  - [Governor’s COVID-19 Dashboard \(mn.gov/covid19/data/covid-dashboard/index.jsp\)](http://mn.gov/covid19/data/covid-dashboard/index.jsp)
- ✓ For the broader United States:
  - [Johns Hopkins University of Medicine: COVID-19 United States Cases by County \(coronavirus.jhu.edu/us-map\)](https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/us-map)
  - [CDC: COVID Data Tracker \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/cases-in-us.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/cases-in-us.html)

---

## Recommendations for slowing the spread of COVID-19 during play

- ✓ Consider whether contact in the sport can be modified. For example, can contact be reduced among players during practice in order to limit close contact?
- ✓ Consider whether practices can occur outside, as in general, being outside reduces the risk of COVID-19 transmission.
- ✓ Minimize sharing of objects.
  - Do not share individual water bottles, community snacks, or towels.
  - Encourage use of dedicated personal equipment such as bats, mitts, rackets, etc.

---

## If a member of your team or organization has COVID-19

- ✓ If a case of COVID-19 is reported to you, notify MDH by email at [health.sports.covid19@state.mn.us](mailto:health.sports.covid19@state.mn.us). MDH will be available to answer questions you have and can provide guidance. MDH also has template notification letters for close contacts or others on the team who may have questions about their risk of COVID-19.
- ✓ MDH/LPH will interview the case or parent/guardian, determine the dates when the case was infectious, identify anyone that may have been exposed, and collect contact information for those individuals.
  - People identified as exposed (close contacts) are those who spent at least 15 minutes within 6 feet of the case while the case was infectious or who had direct physical contact with an infected person. See [CDC: When to Quarantine \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine.html).
  - A 14-day quarantine is recommended for people who have been exposed to COVID-19. In some circumstances, a shortened quarantine period may be possible.

- For more information, see [Close Contacts and Tracing: COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/close.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/close.html) and [Quarantine Guidance for COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/quarguide.pdf\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/quarguide.pdf).
- If necessary, MDH may contact your organization for information on close contacts.
- It is important to keep rosters of who was at practices and, when allowed, games each day so we can do contact tracing quickly. For more information on how we do contact tracing, see [Contact Tracing COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/tracing.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/tracing.html).
- You can find more information on what contacts need to do at [What to Do if You Have Had Close Contact With a Person With COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/contact.pdf\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/contact.pdf).
- People who are sick with COVID-19 will need to stay out for 10 days from symptom onset. You can find most up to date information on these recommendations at [If You Are Sick \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/sick.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/sick.html).
- ✓ In general, you do not need to cancel practice or, when allowed, games once you hear of a case on your team. If you are uncertain about how to proceed, reach out to MDH/LPH to determine next steps.
- ✓ If you know you have a case but haven't heard from MDH or LPH and you still have concerns or need notification resources, please email us at [health.sports.covid19@state.mn.us](mailto:health.sports.covid19@state.mn.us).

## Team photography

- Standing close together is a high-risk activity, even when it is a shorter period of time. Consider taking individual photos and using editing software to combine them into a group photo.
- Consider using a longer lens to increase distance between the photography staff and the people being photographed.
- Group photos should be taken outside if at all possible.
- If indoors, use a space where people can be separated to allow for as much social distancing as possible.
- Prepare for the photos before people arrive. For example, identify the site (i.e., bleachers) and pre-mark the spots where people should stand for a group photo to minimize crowding together while coming into the area.
- People should face forward in the same direction.
- People should wear masks as they get into position and keep the mask on until the photographer provides a command to remove masks and take the picture. Time without masks should be very brief. People should replace their masks as soon as photos are done.
- When the photo has been taken, people should quickly separate from others.



## Sport-specific resources for return to play

**Note: MDH is not promoting any resources but is including links here for your reference.**

- ✓ CDC guidance has considerations for youth sports. These principles can be applied to all ages: [Considerations for Youth Sports \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/youth-sports.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/youth-sports.html)
- ✓ Strategies provided by the [National Collegiate Athletics Association: Core Principles of Resocialization of Collegiate Sport \(www.ncaa.org/sport-science-institute/core-principles-resocialization-collegiate-sport\)](https://www.ncaa.org/sport-science-institute/core-principles-resocialization-collegiate-sport)
- ✓ Guidance and support at the [Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission \(www.mnsports.org/\)](https://www.mnsports.org/)
- ✓ [USA Wrestling COVID-19 Update \(www.teamusa.org/USA-Wrestling/Features/2020/March/14/COVID-19-Special-Section\)](https://www.teamusa.org/USA-Wrestling/Features/2020/March/14/COVID-19-Special-Section)
- ✓ [USA Wrestling Return to the Mat Guidelines \(content.themat.com/covid-19/USAW-Return-to-the-Mat-Guidelines.pdf\)](https://content.themat.com/covid-19/USAW-Return-to-the-Mat-Guidelines.pdf)
- ✓ [USA Hockey Player Safety & Health \(www.usahockey.com/playersafety\)](https://www.usahockey.com/playersafety)
- ✓ [Minnesota Ice Arena Managers Association COVID-19 Reference Page \(miami.org/members/covid-19-reference-page/\)](https://miami.org/members/covid-19-reference-page/)
- ✓ [US Lacrosse: Return-to-Play Recommendations for Lacrosse \(www.uslacrosse.org/sites/default/files/public/documents/safety/return-to-play-final-1.pdf\)](https://www.uslacrosse.org/sites/default/files/public/documents/safety/return-to-play-final-1.pdf)
- ✓ [USATF Coronavirus 2019 \(COVID-19\) Information Page \(www.usatf.org/covid19\)](https://www.usatf.org/covid19)
- ✓ [USA Volleyball Return to Play Guidelines \(www.teamusa.org/usa-volleyball/features/-/media/A455B89BE0094BDC96EFEC89BFD324D6.ashx\)](https://www.teamusa.org/usa-volleyball/features/-/media/A455B89BE0094BDC96EFEC89BFD324D6.ashx)
- ✓ [USA Ultimate Return to Play Guidance \(www.usultimate.org/assets/1/Page/ReturnToPlayGuidance-June2020.pdf\)](https://www.usultimate.org/assets/1/Page/ReturnToPlayGuidance-June2020.pdf)
- ✓ [USA Swimming Coronavirus Resources \(www.usaswimming.org/utility/landing-pages/coronavirus\)](https://www.usaswimming.org/utility/landing-pages/coronavirus)
- ✓ [USTA Tennis Playing Tennis Safely \(www.usta.com/en/home/stay-current/national/usta-statement-on-safety-of-playing-tennis-during-the-covid-19-v.html\)](https://www.usta.com/en/home/stay-current/national/usta-statement-on-safety-of-playing-tennis-during-the-covid-19-v.html)
- ✓ [USA Soccer Recommendations Guides \(www.ussoccer.com/playon/guides/phase-1-grassroots\)](https://www.ussoccer.com/playon/guides/phase-1-grassroots)
- ✓ [USGA Guidance in Applying Golf's Rules and Posting Scores \(www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/rules-hub/rulesarticles/covid-19-rules-and-handicapping-faqs.html\)](https://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/rules-hub/rulesarticles/covid-19-rules-and-handicapping-faqs.html)
- ✓ [Minnesota Softball Coronavirus Guidelines/Resource Page \(fastpitch.mnsoftball.com/coronavirus\)](https://fastpitch.mnsoftball.com/coronavirus)



Minnesota Department of Health | [health.mn.gov](https://health.mn.gov) | 651-201-5000  
625 Robert Street North PO Box 64975, St. Paul, MN 55164-0975

Contact [health.communications@state.mn.us](mailto:health.communications@state.mn.us) to request an alternate format.