

# The Case for a 2 Tiered RTP Protocol

Prepared for USA Rugby by Rugby Arizona  
15 Oct 2020

## Introduction

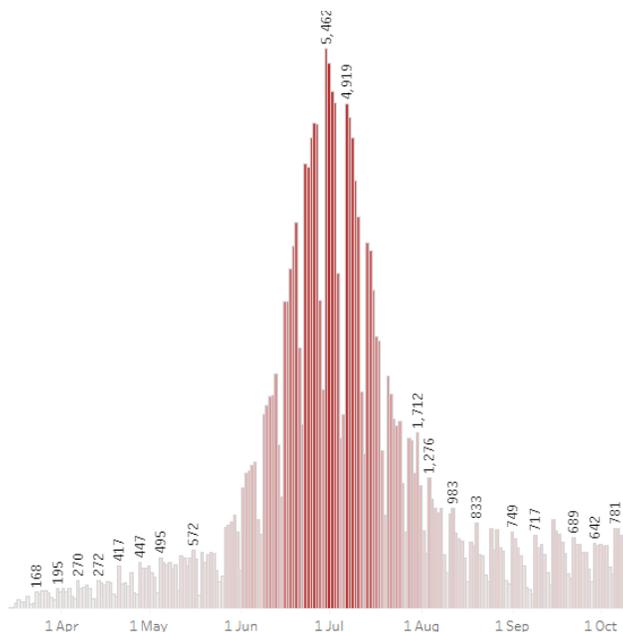
This memo outlines the circumstances and fact patterns that support a full return to play for youth and high school rugby players in Arizona and other similar-status states. This memo serves two purposes: first, to request the green light from USA Rugby for tackle youth and high school rugby in Arizona and second, to examine the Covid-19 risk for young people and draw a distinction between adult rugby and youth rugby. At present, USAR's RTP (Return to Play) protocol is "one size fits all," but as we have collectively learned more about Covid, gain access to many more statistics and studies to draw on, and observe counties where kids have been back at school for a while and several states where high school football has been played for some weeks now, the case can now be made for a Youth/High School RTP protocol that differs from the protocol for adults, to reflect the lower risks associated with this age group. This two tiered protocol, whereby youth and high school players are considered for full RTP independently from other groups, is what we propose to USA Rugby.

## 1 – The Current COVID Situation in Arizona

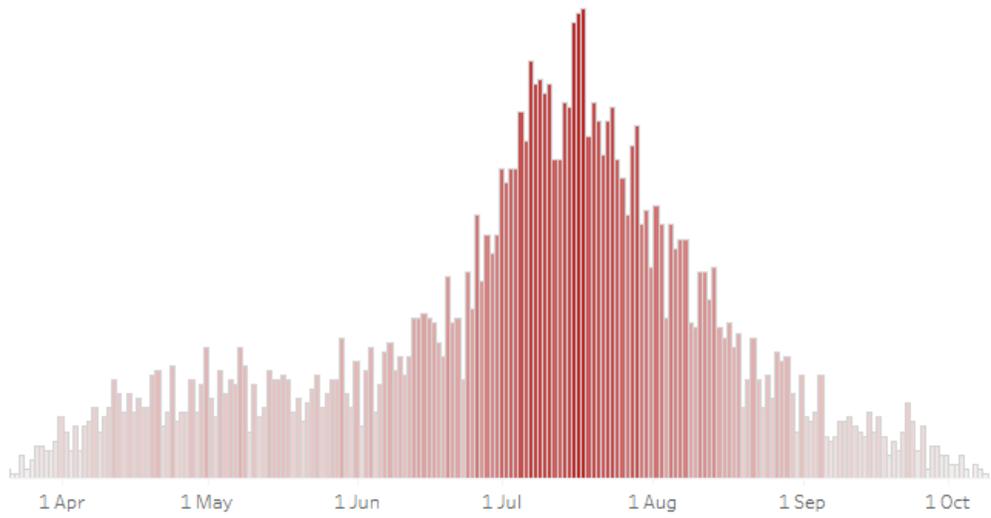
In June and July, the number of cases in Arizona (AZ) did climb alarmingly, and the state became something of a national media whipping boy. However in the last few months, there has been quite a steep downward trend across all the major measurements being tracked. All statistics presented below are from the *AZ Department of Health Services Covid-19 dashboard* as of today. In fact, the epi curves for AZ are some of the most dramatic in the whole of the US, and give evidence that Arizona has for the most part "righted the ship."

Source: <https://www.azdhs.gov/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/infectious-disease-epidemiology/covid-19/dashboards/index.php>

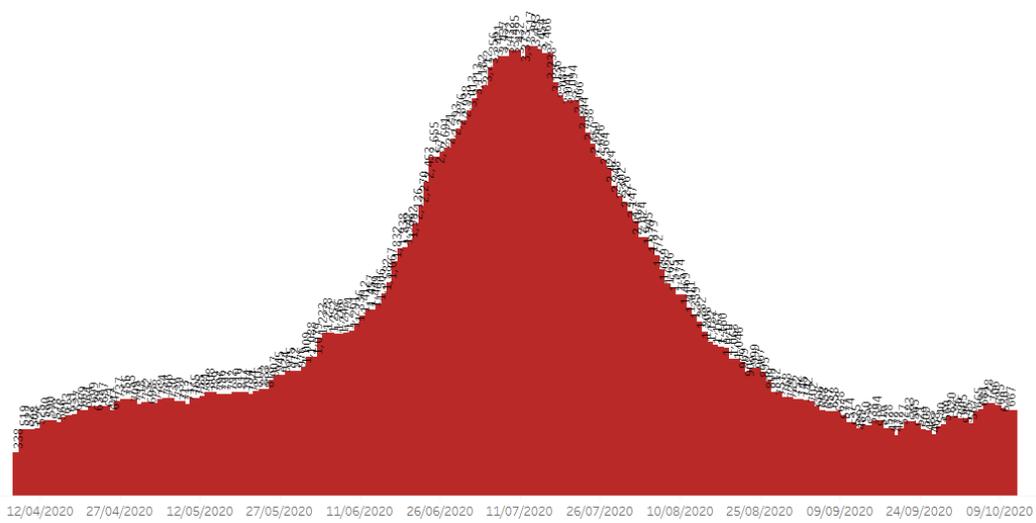
Daily Covid-19 positive cases in Arizona



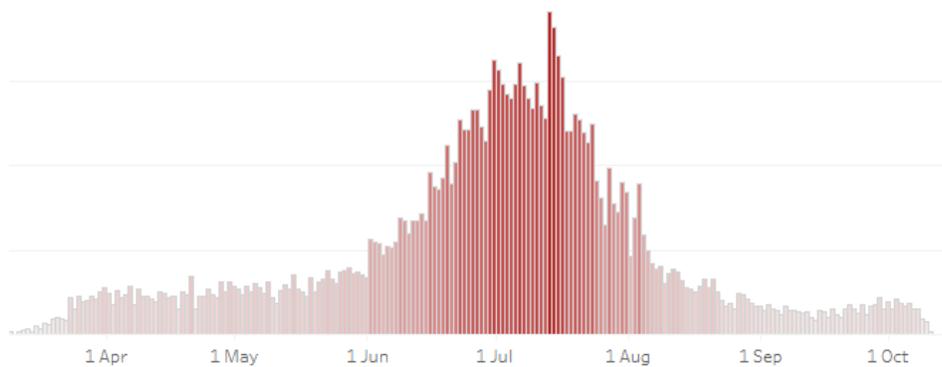
### Daily deaths in Arizona



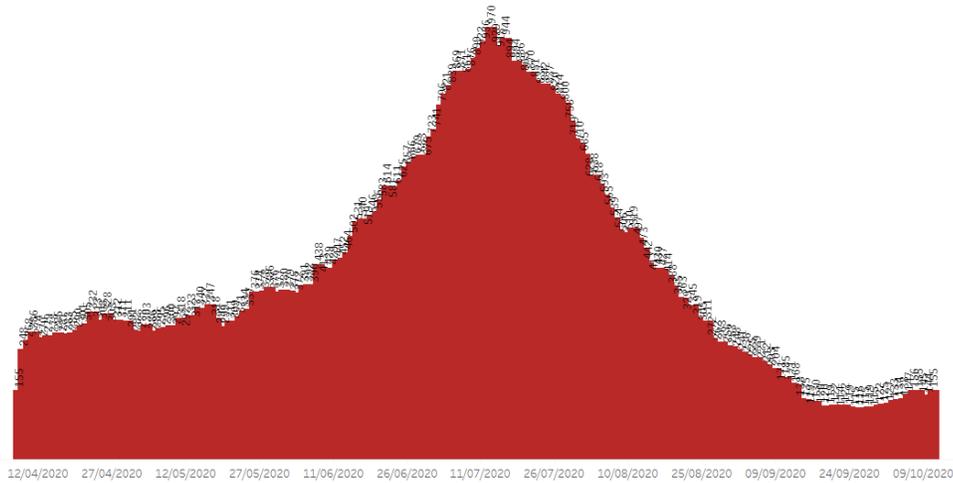
### In-patient Covid-19 positive tests *(all people tested in hospital – many asymptomatic)*



### Arizona hospitalizations strictly for Covid-19



**ICU bed numbers**  
*(all cases including Covid)*



Arizona’s Covid-19 rules have been relatively light and general at the state level and, when it comes to youth sport, the conditions on the ground are left to local municipalities to determine. This seems a wise and prudent approach, because AZ’s total numbers have been skewered by 5 major hot spots (prisons, Indian reservations, border towns of Yuma and Nogales, south and west Phoenix, and south Tucson). Rural AZ, Phoenix’s “East Valley” (comprising the cities of Mesa, Gilbert, Chandler, and Queen Creek), and north Tucson have had very low comparative numbers of positive cases and even fewer deaths. This has meant that cities in the most affected areas have stricter rules and have eased them more slowly, and cities/towns in the areas hit lightest had less strict initial protocols and lifted them sooner.

In terms of the USAR 5 Stage RTP approach, in terms of what City Parks and Recreation staff tell us is permissible under each municipality’s guidelines, the below table is a summary of where each key city we have in our Arizona catchment stands in terms of the USAR five stages as best as we can apply them. We will cover on-field protocols at the end.

Estimated Stage Level	General Allowance	Arizona Cities
Stage 5	Full contact sport allowed, albeit with some restrictions on spectators	Mesa, Queen Creek, Chandler, Gilbert, Maricopa, Anthem, Marana, Tempe, Oro Valley
Stage 4	Limited contact – informal scrimmages only	Scottsdale, Surprise, Paradise Valley
Stage 3	Non-contact training only	Phoenix, Avondale, Peoria, Tucson
Stage 2	All parks and facilities closed to bookings	There are no cities left in this stage now

Rugby Arizona has made bookings for Fall 7’s and Spring 15’s youth events for fields only in cities in the Stage 5 category.

## 2 – Children get Covid in smaller numbers; Covid deaths in children are also fewer

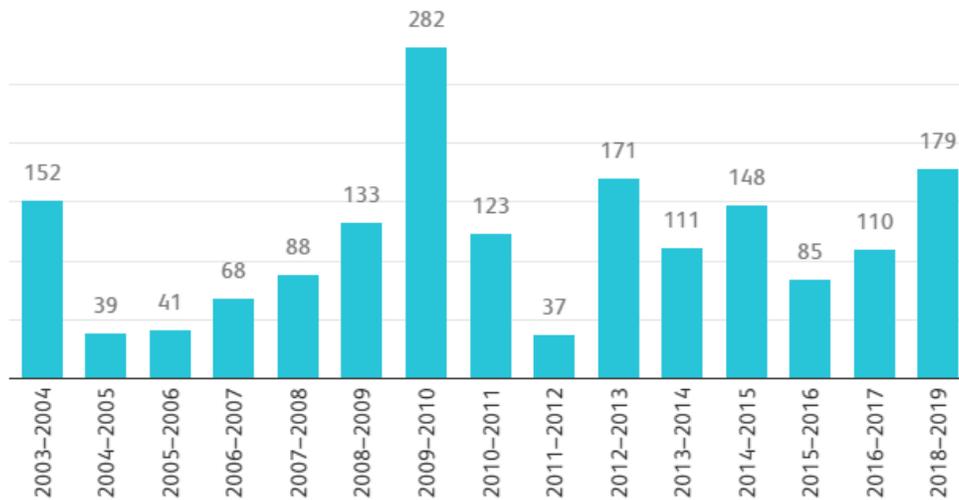
According to the statistical information available, it has surfaced that children contract Covid-19 in smaller numbers compared to other demographic groups, and the number of children who have died from Covid-19 is less than the seasonal flu, and even fewer than those who die in traffic accidents.

- AZ has 2.3 million children under 20, or 32% of the population
- A total of 499 individuals in this age group have been hospitalized with Covid, or 0.04%
- 10 total have died from Covid, or 0.0004%

CDC figures show that between 2 and 3 times as many children in the US have died of the seasonal flu in prior years (depending on the year) than of Covid-19 (source: <https://data.cdc.gov/NCHS/Provisional-COVID-19-Death-Counts-by-Sex-Age-and-S/9bhg-hcku/data>). Bearing in mind we as a nation have access to vaccines for the flu, and no vaccine for Covid to date, without a vaccine one could rationally presume seasonal flu deaths would be considerably higher (see graph below) (source: <https://www.verywellhealth.com/deaths-from-flu-2633829>).

### Number of Pediatric Flu Deaths in the U.S.

From recent flu seasons 2003–2019



verywell

Source: Centers For Disease Control And Prevention

To ask the blunt question, did we as a nation cancel youth sport in previous years because of the seasonal flu, which kills more kids than Covid-19 despite the existence of a vaccine?

Last year, 13.4 per 100,000 15-19 year-olds in Arizona died in car accidents, and to date 0.43 per 100,000 children under 20 have died of Covid. That's a fatality rate that is 35 times higher than Covid. To ask another candid question in the spirit of reflection, do we stop our older teenagers from driving because they might be killed in a crash? No. Instead, we assess and mitigate the risks.

## 3 – Children are now proven NOT to be vectors of the virus to other adults

The evidence on this is mounting with new studies coming each week from a variety of countries across the world, all echoing essentially the same conclusion: children do not spread the virus. Below is a selection, and the first one (from Iceland) is particularly profound because researchers tracked every virus case across their whole society:

## Iceland

[www.decode.com/iceland-provides-a-picture-of-the-early-spread-of-covid-19-in-a-population-with-a-cohesive-public-health-response/](http://www.decode.com/iceland-provides-a-picture-of-the-early-spread-of-covid-19-in-a-population-with-a-cohesive-public-health-response/)

In one of the most comprehensive studies performed globally, Icelandic authorities tested every Covid patient, every *suspected* Covid case, and everyone that all these individuals came in contact with, and gave them serology *and* genome tests to track precisely how the virus moved in their society. The head of the study (published in the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine*) gives an informative 3 minute summary of the work they performed. In an interview, Dr Kari Stefansson relays, “Children under 10 are less likely to get infected than adults and if they get infected, they are less likely to get seriously ill. What is interesting is that even if children do get infected, they are less likely to transmit the disease to others than adults. **We have not found a single instance of a child infecting parents.**”

## Australia

<http://ncirs.org.au/covid-19-in-schools>

A study by the *New South Wales Health Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance* (NCIRS), examined the spread of 18 coronavirus cases (nine students and nine staff) from 15 schools. The report’s preliminary findings were that only one elementary school student and one high school student “may have contracted Covid-19 from the initial cases at their schools.” Further, “no teacher or staff member contracted Covid-19 from any of the initial school cases,” the report added. The low transmission rate was despite 735 students and 128 staff being “close contacts” of the initial 18 cases.

## The Netherlands

<https://www.rivm.nl/en/novel-coronavirus-covid-19/children-and-covid-19>

Data from the *Netherlands National Institute for Public Health and the Environment* (in Dutch the RIVM) also confirms the current understanding, that children play a minor role in the spread of the coronavirus. The virus is mainly spread between adults and from adult family members to children. The spread of the virus among children or from children to adults is less common.

## Germany

<https://tu-dresden.de/med/mf/die-fakultaet/newsuebersicht/immunisierungsgrad-geringer-als-erwartet-schulen-haben-sich-nicht-zu-hotspots-entwickelt>

A study of 2,000 children and teachers at a school in the German state of Saxony has found very few coronavirus antibodies among them, suggesting that schools and young people do not play as big a role in transmission as previously feared.

## France

<https://www.pasteur.fr/en>

Scientists at *Institut Pasteur* studied 1,340 people in Crepy-en-Valois, a town northeast of Paris that suffered an outbreak in February and March, including 510 students from six primary [elementary] schools. They found three probable cases among children that didn’t lead to more infections among other pupils or teachers.

## United Kingdom

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/no-known-case-of-teacher-catching-coronavirus-from-pupils-says-scientist-3zk5g2x6z>

Mark Woolhouse, a prominent British epidemiologist of the University of Edinburgh, reported in *The Times*: “Children of school age are minimally involved in the epidemiology of this virus. There is increasing evidence that they rarely transmit. For example, it is extremely difficult to find any instance anywhere in the world as a single example of a child transmitting to a teacher in school.”

## Switzerland

<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/146/2/e20201576>

Since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, children have been less affected than adults in terms of severity and frequency, accounting for <2.0% of the cases. Unlike with other viral respiratory infections, children do not seem

to be a major vector of SARS-CoV-2 transmission, with most pediatric cases described inside familial clusters and no documentation of child-to-child or child-to-adult transmission. The aim of this work was to describe the clinical presentation of the first 40 pediatric cases of COVID-19 in Geneva, and the dynamics of familial clusters.

#### **4 – Tackle high school football is under way in various states with minimal Covid**

A sizeable 36 of 50 states (+ Washington, DC) have opted to play tackle football in fall 2020. A few states began tackle football in August, so there is over a month of playing in the Covid-19 environment to draw on in terms of experience, which will help inform USAR and SGBs in how to move forward with youth/HS rugby. Arizona only began HS tackle football in early October, so it is too soon to tell trends locally, but the experience of three early-starting states with a full contact sport like football is instructive:

**Florida** (Frank Beasley, Coordinator of Athletics – Football at the *Florida High School Athletic Association*)

350 out of 400 high school football teams began playing in late August, and less than 5.0% of games had to be postponed and/or rescheduled due to players testing positive for Covid. The remaining 50 teams all started last weekend.

**Indiana** (Robert Faulkens, Assistant Commissioner - Football at the *Indiana High School Athletic Association*)

After 8 weeks of games across the state, over 90% of games were played without delays or postponements over players on teams testing Covid-19 positive.

**Utah** (Brenan Jackson, Assistant Director - Football at the *Utah High School Activities Association*)

Utah also has completed 8 weeks of full tackle games, averaging 50 games a week, so some 400 games have been played. So far, only 8 games have had to be cancelled or postponed due to Covid positive tests of players, or around 2.0%.

There are a couple of additional AZ datapoints that are of instructive value. One is that the *Queen Creek Unified School District* (QCUSD) was the only one in the metro Phoenix area to return to school from Day 1 of their usual fall semester at the beginning of August, and they did so with 100% in-person learning every day (whereas other school districts either began later, and/or had online learning for a few weeks and returned to 2-3 days of in-person learning). QCUSD has reported no Covid cases originating from a school in the district. Another datapoint from the largest school district in the state, *Mesa Public Schools* has had only 4 Covid cases (at one high school only), out of 64,000 total students.

#### **5 – Proposed protocols for training and games**

Return to play should be supplemented by common sense approaches to mitigating Covid-19 risk. With measures like the below in place, RTP for youth and high school rugby is further strengthened:

- Players are temperature tested before commencement of training/games – any players with any symptoms of cold/flu to stay at home
- All players must sanitize hands before and after training
- All balls are cleaned with an approved sanitizing agent before and after training/games
- Coaches and players not playing or training must wear masks
- Where spectators are allowed, they must socially distance 6' from other family groups and at-risk populations are encouraged to wear masks or watch proceedings via social media
- All games can be broadcast live on social media platforms such as Facebook or Instagram

- State High School Athletic Associations adopted the recommendations of their National body and their medical advisors for high school football, recommending that teams suspend games when 3 or more players on the same team test positive for Covid-19, and that the teams refrain from practice or games for 10 days after a third player tests positive; youth and high school rugby could adopt a similar platform

## 6 – Conclusion

Rugby Arizona is ready to play tackle rugby for Fall 7's (as soon as November) and Spring 15's (beginning mid January). To cement this step, we are asking that USAR consider a two tier RTP protocol whereby we (and other states in similar scenarios) can be given explicit clearance to begin tackle rugby activities at the youth and high school level. In support of this proposal and to summarize:

- All key Covid metrics are now very low (and still falling) after a summer of very high numbers, even after many school districts have had kids back at in-person learning.
- Children and teenagers are at very low risk of contracting Covid and the few that do, experience no or mild symptoms. More children/teens have died in each previous year of the seasonal flu than of COVID since the outbreak of the pandemic, despite the presence of a flu vaccine.
- Various reputable medical studies from 9 countries all point to children not being major vectors of the virus.
- High school tackle football has been under way for 2 months now in a handful of states, and all report minimal Covid disruptions to games due to positive tests from players of the game. **If football players and teams can keep safe and still play, so can rugby players.**

Thank you for your time and consideration as USA Rugby reflects on this important decision in allowing our young rugby players to again step on the pitch and resume an integral part of their lives that builds physical fitness, mental health, and moral character.