



SOUTHWEST METRO
FOOTBALL LEAGUE

Southwest Metro Football League

Return to Competition Protocols

*Our plan to safely hold youth football
association games.*

Updated August 20, 2020

1. PURPOSE

In accordance with the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) COVID-19 Sports Guidance for Youth and Adults, SWML is following the recommendations set forth by MDH to allow participants to take part in SWML football organized activities, which exists to facilitate cross-association jamborees, scrimmages, games, and playoffs <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/sportsguide.pdf>

This Return to Competition document is meant to cover protocols in detail in order to safely hold association-to-association league youth football games. Our Southwest Metro Football League (*aka SWML – website www.swmlfootball.org*) is comprised of the following independent youth associations with teams and players in 3rd through 8th grades: Chanhassen, Chaska, Eden Prairie, Orono and Prior Lake, and for this year, Eagan. Each association within the SWML will establish and adhere to their Return to Play Guidelines in accordance with their city regulations and COVID-19 policies. Each association will establish their COVID-19 Return to Plan guidelines for practices and activities within their own associations, whereas the SWML guidelines are specifically established to address game guidelines.

These recommendations **do not supersede or replace any applicable local, state, regional or federal health guidelines or requirements**, which should be adhered to by all associations. These guidelines are subject to change based on changes to the trajectory of COVID-19 and associations should monitor these guidelines consistently and often.

2. PHASING

The phased approach to Return-to-Play are provided here for context:

Phase 1: Practice guidelines within each independent association, with specific protocols in place to reduce the spread of COVID-19 (***these are addressed within each association's COVID-19 plans***)

Phase 2: This phase allows for the return of league games between associations and the focus of the remainder of this document.

This Return-to-Competition document specifically addresses Phase 2.

3. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

General recommendations to **stop the spread of infection**, as outlined by [Minnesota Department of Health](#):

- Stay at least 6 feet from other people.
- Stay home if you feel sick and contact your health care provider.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Wash your hands often, with soap and water. Wash for at least 20 seconds.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze. Cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue. Throw used tissues in the trash and wash your hands afterwards.
- MDH recommends wearing a cloth face at all times in public settings whether indoor or outdoor. The current Minnesota Executive Order must be followed, which indicates that masks are required in the outdoor setting if social distancing (> 6 feet of distance) cannot be maintained (see “SPECTATORS” section).
- Clean and disinfect things that people touch a lot: counters and other surfaces; telephones, remote controls and other devices; doorknobs, stairway railings and other objects.
- Avoid contact with other individuals (shaking hands, for example).

4. MEMBER ASSOCIATION RESPONSIBILITIES

Each member association should develop and distribute to their members a specific written plan that documents practices to reduce risk of transmission of COVID-19. **Please note that it is the responsibility of the association members (coaches, players and parents) to adhere to the plan.** This refers to Phase 1 guidelines.

This plan must include:

- Specific guidelines and procedures that will be in place to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission among association members, including but not limited to players, staff, spectators as applicable, etc. These guidelines should be in accordance with Minnesota Department of Health then-current recommendations as well as guidelines contained with this Return to Competition Plan.

- The following details should be included in the Association Plan:
 - The individual at the Association responsible for matters relating to COVID-19, in terms of case reporting, dissemination of information, event planning, practice protocols, etc.

 - Symptom monitoring amongst Association participants and staff. As stated in the Return to Play Plan, the Minnesota Symptom Screener should be used prior to every association game engagement: <https://mn.gov/covid19/for-minnesotans/if-sick/is-it-covid/>

 - Methods and frequency by which information is disseminated to Association participants, to include information regarding proper hygiene expectations, social distancing, and disinfection practices.

 - Methods by which case reporting is to occur to association membership, staff and local health authorities. If a case of COVID-19 is reported to you and is a part of your organization, report the case to the Minnesota Department of Health at health.sports.covid19@state.mn.us

Associations should share their Association Plans on their website. Associations should also consider frequent reminders about proper hygiene and social distancing on their website and social media channels.

5. LEAGUE PROTOCOLS

- This Return to Competition Plan will be posted on our website (www.swmlfootball.org) and communicated to the member associations (consistently and often).

- Given the protocols in each of the Appendices and the possibility of players and/or staff needing to quarantine, our League will provide flexibility to reschedule games throughout the fall season.

- SWML are available to help the state of Minnesota with any contact tracing efforts.

- Following are a list of key protocols the SWML will follow for games (Refer to Appendix D for more detail)
 - **Consideration of contact:**
 - Reduced contact between players as much as possible
 - Athletes must stay in their cars or the parking lot until 30 minutes before the game and then go immediately to their team sideline and “warm-up” area when it’s time to start.
 - Athletes must bring their own water bottles and any other required personal items with them and near their station at all times throughout participation.

- Athletes must NOT share water bottles, community snacks, towels, etc.
- Coaches and volunteers will encourage athletes adhere to social distancing recommendations when participants are not actively participating.
- Athletes will be encouraged to find new ways to show sportsmanship – air high fives, 'tip of the hat', etc. vs. handshaking, fist bumps, etc.
- Athletes, coaches, and parents must leave the facility, without congregating as soon as their game is over.
- **Expected athlete, coach, referee, EMT, volunteer, and parent behavior:**
 - If a person is showing any symptoms of being sick they are expected to STAY HOME
 - All athletes on sidelines and drills must maintain six feet distance, whenever possible, from any other person (this is to minimize exposure)
 - Wear a mask when not on the field of play
 - Cover your mouth with your elbow if you must cough or sneeze
 - Avoid touching your face
 - No spitting
 - Wash/sanitize your hands before and after each session.
 - SWML association teams will make hand sanitizers available prior to and after each game.
- **Minimize crowding:**
 - If spectators are present for games they are expected to:
 - Follow the guidelines for a public gathering space; they must follow social gathering guidance and maintain at least 6 feet of physical distance from each other.
 - Follow the guidelines outlined by the hosting facility in terms of capacity and other social distancing measures.
 - Follow facility requirements regarding wearing cloth face coverings. Cloth face coverings are encouraged even if not required by the facility, especially when 6 ft of social-distancing cannot be maintained by spectators.
- **Use of cloth face coverings or facemasks:**
 - SWML encourages (but does not require) wearing of cloth face coverings or facemasks to reduce risk of COVID-19 transmission, including when arriving at the sports facility.
 - Athletes, volunteers, and coaches must follow facility requirements regarding wearing cloth face coverings or facemasks. Even if not required by the facility, athletes, volunteers, and coaches are encouraged (but not required) to wear cloth face coverings or facemasks as much as possible when not in games.
 - We recognize cloth face coverings or facemasks may be challenging to wear while participating in athletic events.
- **Illness Reporting:**
 - If any participant during any SWML activity:
 - Experiences symptoms of COVID-19, including, without limitation:
 - Fever (≥ 100.4 degrees F)
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath
 - Less common symptoms that may still be evidence of COVID-19 infection include:
 - Sore throat
 - Congestion
 - Nausea and vomiting
 - Diarrhea
 - Headache
 - Muscle / joint pain

- Sudden loss of taste or smell
- Chills
- Has a suspected or diagnosed/confirmed case of COVID-19
 - Persons with a lab-confirmed case of COVID-19 should quarantine immediately and notify their home association SWML administrator (see list of contacts at end of this document), and can leave isolation and return to normal activities 10 days after symptom onset so as long as:
 - The individual has not had a fever in the past 24 hours.
 - Symptoms are resolving.
- Has exposure to any person who has a suspected or diagnosed/confirmed case of COVID-19 a member of the participants family shall notify their home association SWML administrator (see list of contacts at end of this document) immediately.
- If you are confident an individual had 15+ minutes of close (< 6 feet) contact with a lab-confirmed case of COVID-19, please ensure that individual self isolates for 14 days from last contact with the aforementioned case.

PRIOR TO ARRIVING:

- Players should disinfect their equipment, especially football helmets, prior to the game.
- Coaches should disinfect team equipment (footballs and kickoff tees) prior to the game.
- It is recommended that players from different households do not drive/carpool together.
- All participants should use the Minnesota Symptom Screener: <https://mn.gov/covid19/for-minnesotans/if-sick/is-it-covid/>
- Each player, coach, and referee should check his/her temperature at home, and refrain from participation if he or she has a fever (≥ 100.4 degrees F).
- All coaches, players, referees and others (i.e. spectators) should be monitoring their symptoms at home to ensure that:
 - He/she is not currently demonstrating or suffering from any ill symptoms (see Appendix A);
 - He/she has not had a suspected or documented case of COVID-19 in the last 14 days (see Appendix B);
 - He/she has not had any close contact with a sick individual or anyone with a confirmed case of COVID-19 (see Appendix C);
 - Any individual who is unable to confirm the above criteria should not participate and contact both their Association and healthcare provider.

AT THE FIELD BEFORE THE GAME:

- Any player or coach that does not meet the above gating criteria should be restricted from participation and sent home.
- It is not the responsibility of the referee to enforce these criteria or aspects of the association's plan. The coaches, players and parents are responsible for assessing their criteria and restricting their participation.
- Athletes, Coaches, Referees, EMTs, and Volunteers (i.e. "Chain Gang") should have temperatures checked and if they have a fever (≥ 100.4 degrees F) must leave the competition facility.

DURING THE GAME:

Football may be conducted “as usual” with the following exceptions:

- Any team pre and post-game handshakes should not occur.
- Social distancing should occur between players and coaches on the sideline both during play and during any individual or group discussions during the game (see **FIELD LAYOUT** section).
- No player, coach, or spectator should violate social distancing guidelines with a referee at any time.
- Celebrations should avoid physical contact.
- Players on the sideline/bench should remain socially distanced (6 feet minimum) at all times.
- Players do not need to be masked, but staff and players on the sideline (whom are not currently playing) should have a face covering if it does not restrict breathing.

AFTER THE GAME:

- All attendees should maintain social distancing guidelines after the game is completed.
- Teams should not congregate, post-game debriefs should be kept to a minimum, and teams and supporters should depart the premises immediately.

REPORTING OF POSITIVE COVID-19 INFECTION:

- Any individual with a confirmed case of COVID-19 should notify their respective Associations immediately.
- Any referee with a confirmed case of COVID-19 should notify their respective Association who assigned the game immediately.
- Any Association notified of a confirmed case of COVID-19 in a player, staff member, or referee should notify any other organization involved in competition (see list of home association contacts at the end of this document) with that individual in the 2 days prior to symptom onset or 2 days prior to the individual being tested for COVID-19.
- Associations should report any cases of players/staff/referees to Minnesota Department of Health at health.sports.covid19@state.mn.us.
- Regarding the need to quarantine, review Appendices B & C about suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection.

EQUIPMENT:

- Players and referees should bring their own equipment (hand sanitizer, water bottle, towels, etc.) that should not be shared between individuals.
- Equipment should be disinfected before and after games, equipment should be provided by the association. Where possible, communal equipment should only be handled by the coach.

- Footballs and kicking tees will be provided by each member association for games and will be disinfected after each series of play, or if there is a change of possession.
- Players, coaches, and referees will be encouraged to wear gloves.
- Shared “hydration stations” should be eliminated to the extent possible and players and staff should bring their own water or other hydration.

FIELD LAYOUT

Fields should be utilized with appropriate social distancing measures always in place:

- The player and coach space will be expanded to add social distancing space from the 20 yard line to the 20 yard line.
- Players and coaches, and the yardage marker crews (e.g. – “Chain Gang”), will be at least 6 feet from the sideline and maintain social distancing (between the 20 yard lines).
- If there is a stadium at the field, spectators are required to be in the stadium and practice social distancing (6 feet apart).
- If there is not a stadium at the field, spectators are required to be at least 6 feet behind the Players and Coaches on the sideline and maintain social distancing. If the field space does not allow that, then spectators need to move between the 20 yard line and the goal lines, and remain at least 6 feet behind the sideline. At no time should spectators be near or behind the end zones.
- Home and Away teams will be on opposite sidelines to minimize social contact between associations and communities (i.e. – cities).

SPECTATORS

- It is strongly recommended that players have a minimal number of supporters on site whenever possible. Capacity limits are to follow MN Stay Safe Guidance.
- Everyone is expected to cover their mouth when coughing or sneezing (into the nape of the elbow).
- Anyone feeling sick should leave the facility immediately, go home and if needed, seek medical guidance from a healthcare provider.
- Avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth with their hands whenever possible.
- Tents, tarps or large group structures will not be permitted in the spectator areas of the sidelines.
- It is strongly recommended that people over the age of 65 and/or people with pre-existing conditions do not attend.
- MDH recommends wearing a cloth face at all times in public settings whether indoor or outdoor. The current Minnesota Executive Order must be followed, which indicates that masks are required in the outdoor setting if social distancing (> 6 feet of distance) cannot be maintained.

TIMING CONSIDERATIONS

- Associations are to, as much as possible, stagger home game start times to avoid mass congregating before or after games. *For example, if a game typically would be scheduled in a 1.5 hour block, consider using a 2-hour block.*
- Associations are to, as much as possible, configure field layouts consistent with the goal of avoiding mass congregation and social distancing protocols.

Appendix A – Symptoms of COVID-19 Infection:

Individuals with COVID-19 can exhibit symptoms ranging from the following:

The most common symptoms associated with infection include:

- Fever (≥100.4 degrees F)
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

Less common symptoms that may still be evidence of COVID-19 infection include:

- Sore throat
- Congestion
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Headache
- Muscle / joint pain
- Sudden loss of taste or smell
- Chills

Note: Some people do not have symptoms, or have very mild symptoms. Persons with COVID-19 may be infectious two days prior to symptom onset.

What to do if you are waiting for COVID-19 test results

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/waiting.pdf>

Appendix B - Return to Play Following Confirmed COVID-19 Infection

These recommendations are intended to provide an outline for decision-making as it relates to protocols for navigating a confirmed case of COVID-19.

Persons with a lab-confirmed case of COVID-19 should quarantine immediately, and can leave isolation and return to normal activities 10 days after symptom onset so as long as:

- The individual has not had a fever in the past 24 hours.
- Symptoms are resolving.

Athletes may want to contact their health care provider prior to a return to football.

Appendix C - Exposure to a Suspected or Diagnosed Case of COVID-19:

These recommendations are intended to provide an outline for decision-making as it relates to protocols for navigating a possible exposure to a suspected or diagnosed case of COVID-19.

Any player or staff who has been **exposed** to a COVID-19 case shall self-quarantine for 14 days from the last contact with the case.

In this case, **exposure** means any one of the following:

- Caring for a sick person with a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection.
OR
- Living in the same household as an individual with a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection.
OR
- Individual who has had close contact (> 6 feet) for greater than or equal to 15 minutes with known or suspected COVID-19 or possible COVID-19 infection.*

In the cases of the first two bullets above, Associations should consider these quarantine criteria “automatic”. In the case of the third bullet above, this determination of close contact can either be made by the association/organization or by contact tracers at MDH.

*If you are absolutely sure an individual had 15+ minutes of close (< 6 feet) contact with a lab-confirmed case of COVID-19, please ensure that individual self isolates for 14 days from last contact with the aforementioned case.

If you have questions about whether an individual needs to self-isolate, follow the below steps:

1. Have that individual self-isolate (No on-site/in-person team activities)
2. Email health.Sports.Covid19@state.mn.us and explain your exposure story. It's ok to reach out to your local health officials instead, if you prefer.
3. Don't allow that individual return to team activities until you've received a recommendation from a state or local health official.
4. Follow their recommendation.

CDC Public Health Guidance for Community-Related Exposure (Definition Above):

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/public-health-recommendations.html>

- Stay home until 14 days after last exposure and maintain social distance (at least 6 feet) from others at all times
- Self-monitor for symptoms
- Check temperature twice a day
- Watch for fever*, cough, or shortness of breath, or other [symptoms](#) of COVID-19
- Avoid contact with [people at higher risk for severe illness](#) from COVID-19
- Follow [CDC guidance](#) if symptoms develop

Appendix D – COVID-19 Protocols Details

Known Exposures/ illness/positive test:

• Mandatory	• Recommended Best Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individuals who have had close contact to someone who tests positive are required to self-isolate for 14 days beginning from the date of exposure and immediately contact the designated individual within their “home” member SWML association as detailed at the end of this document.• Individuals who test positive for COVID-19 infection shall immediately contact the designated individual within their “home” member SWML association and will be required to self-isolate and avoid sports participation for a variable duration of time. Prior to returning to or attending any football activities they need to provide a note from their health care provider releasing them to full participation. THIS INCLUDES ATHLETES, COACHES, OFFICIALS, PARENTS/GUARDIANS, FANS AND SPECTATORS.• Review What to do if you’re waiting for COVID-19 test results.• See Appendix C for Definition of Close Contact and Exposure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• n/a

Arriving and Leaving the Venue

- All participants must maintain six feet distance from any other person.
- Whenever possible, everyone should enter and exit through designated areas that are different from each other.
- Prohibit gathering and congregating on and around fields.
- Participants should enter and leave the field in a timely fashion and not congregate.
- Team meetings should occur virtually or over the phone, rather than a team huddle.
- Hand washing or hand sanitizing, when soap and water is not available, is strongly recommended when arriving to and leaving the venue.
- Ridesharing should be kept at a minimum.

Games

• Mandatory

- [Pre-Activity self-screening Per USA Football Return to Youth Football 2020 guidelines.](#)
- Return to game activities as scheduled with consideration to [USA Football Return to Youth Football 2020 guidelines consistent with section 11. FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS](#) as applicable.
- All athletes on sidelines must maintain six feet distance, whenever possible, from any other person.
- Each team must provide their own footballs when they are the offensive team on the field, and they must be sanitized or swapped out for a sanitized ball in at each change of possession.

• Recommended Best Practices

- Each team should sanitize equipment before, during, and after each game.
- Hand sanitizing is strongly recommended during games.

Athletes

• Mandatory

- Must conduct (with parent/guardian aid) a daily [Pre-Activity self-screen](#) and stay home and away from all football activities if they are experiencing symptoms.
- Clearly label water bottle, towels, and other personal equipment to eliminate sharing.
- Must maintain six feet distance, whenever possible, from any other person.
- No spitting, chewing gum or eating sunflower seeds.
- No sharing of food or drinks.
- No touch rule – players must refrain from high fives, handshake line, and any other physical contact with teammates, opposing players, coaches, umpires, and spectators.

• Recommended Best Practices

- Keep Helmet, pads, gloves, uniforms, etc. in a plastic bag during the ride home from any venue and until such equipment can be cleaned and/or sanitized per instructions. Recommend immediately wash all items upon returning home and to use sanitizing products and wipe down any equipment that cannot be washed in a washing machine.
- Full finger gloves should be considered and worn by all players.
- Hand sanitizing is strongly recommended during practices and games.
- Wearing a face covering, when not actively participating in the field of play, is recommended. Players may have the option of wearing a cloth face covering/mask during activities as preferred and indicated by their parents/guardians.

Coaches

• **Mandatory**

- Must conduct a daily [Pre-Activity self-screen](#) and stay home and away from all football activities if they are experiencing symptoms.
- Coaches shall wear a face covering /mask during football activities where social distancing (i.e. maintaining physical distance of at least 6 feet from other individuals) cannot be maintained. Coaches may temporarily remove their mask when they can maintain 6 feet physical distance from any athlete.
- Coaches must maintain six feet distance, whenever possible, from any other person.
- Repeatedly remind players not to touch their faces and discourage them from removing and re-inserting mouthguards.
- No spitting, chewing gum or eating sunflower seeds.
- No sharing of food or drinks.
- No touch rule – coaches must refrain from high fives, handshake line, and any other physical contact with fellow coaches, opposing coaches, players, umpires, and spectators.

• **Recommended Best Practices**

- For Grades 4th-5th consider calling plays from the sidelines rather than in a team huddle
- Coaches should remind players of social distancing sidelines and other seating areas and encourage wearing face coverings while not actively participating on the field of play.
- Hand washing or hand sanitizing, in the absence of soap and water, is strongly recommended during the games.
- Try to limit close contact of the entire team to less than 15 minutes of practice by splitting into smaller PODs within the team for practices.

Officials & Sideline Personnel ('chain gang' for example)

• **Mandatory**

- Must conduct [Pre-Activity self-screen](#) prior to attending any football related activities and stay home and away from all football activities if they are experiencing symptoms.
- Must maintain six feet distance, whenever possible, from any other person.
- Must avoid exchanging documents or equipment with any other person.
- No touch rule – umpires must refrain from physical contact with coaches, players, and spectators.
- Sideline Personnel ('chain gang' for example) shall wear a face covering /mask during football activities where social distancing (i.e. maintaining physical distance of at least 6 feet from other individuals) cannot be maintained. Individuals may temporarily remove their mask when they can maintain 6 feet physical distance from any athlete.

• **Recommended Best Practices**

- Face coverings are strongly recommended.
- The CDC currently recommends that coaches, officials, on-field/sideline staff and other similar individuals wear cloth face coverings/masks during activities.

Parents/Guardians, Fans and Spectators

- Must conduct [Pre-Activity self-screen](#) prior to attending any football related activities (including practice drop off or pick-up) and stay home and away from all football activities if they are experiencing symptoms.
- Review USA Football "[PREP KIT CHECKLIST – FOR PARENTS](#)"
- Must maintain six feet distance from any other person not living in the same household and stay in the designated spectator area outlined by the venue.
- Parents/Guardians must ensure their athlete(s) have a well-fitting mouth guard and discourage their athletes from removal and re-insertion during football activities.
- No spitting, chewing gum or eating sunflower seeds.

- Face coverings are **strongly recommended** for all parents/guardians, fans and spectators.
- Keep Helmet, pads, gloves, uniforms, etc. in a plastic bag during the ride home from any venue and until such equipment can be cleaned and/or sanitized per instructions. Recommend immediately wash all items upon returning home and to use sanitizing products and wipe down any equipment that cannot be washed in a washing machine.
- Hand washing or hand sanitizing, in the absence of soap and water, is strongly recommended during the games.

**SWML and
Member
Association
Administrators**

- Adhere to all mandatory items listed under “Coaches” above.
- Must conduct [Pre-Activity self-screen](#) prior to attending any football related activities and stay home and away from all football activities if they are experiencing symptoms.
- Must enforce all Mandatory guidelines.
- Must encourage all Recommended Best Practices
- Must ensure all gatherings are in accordance with State, Local, and municipal regulations and as dictated by facilities agreements
- Must communicate the guidelines for to all organizations, coaches, officials, and parents.
- **In the case of a positive COVID-19 test affecting any athlete, coach, official and/or other category of individual, the designated SWML administrator (list of contacts below) shall immediately contact the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) to allow them to begin the process of contact tracing and other possible actions/steps.**
- **Administrators shall immediately notify those on the contact list across the league of any individual COVID-19 positive test, respecting Personal Health Information so as not to publicize any individual’s name.**
- Post these guidelines at all SWML facilities.
- Encourage venue operators to post signage to promote physical distancing including foot traffic and spectator areas.
- Regularly communicate to coaches, officials, players, parents/guardians, fans and spectators that they should stay home should they be experiencing any symptoms.

List of Home Association Contacts:

- Chanhassen/Chaska Football Association
 - Eagan Football Association
 - Eden Prairie Football Association
 - Orono Football Association
- Henry Whitney - henrywhitneylax@gmail.com
Josh Anderson - jja1887@yahoo.com
Dan Feely - danfeelyaz@gmail.com
Darrin Rosha - drosha@roshalegal.com

List and links to Resources:

[Minnesota Department of Health COVID-19 Website](#)

[Minnesota Department of Health COVID-19 Sports Guidelines for Youth and Adults](#)

[Minnesota Department of Health COVID-19 Youth and Adults Sports FAQ](#)

[USA Football Return to Youth Football 2020](#)

[USA Football Return to Youth Football for Parents](#)

[USA Football Pre-Screen Self Check Questionnaire](#)

[USA Football Prep Kit Checklist for Parents](#)

[MDH Testing Locations](#)