

*\*\*The letter below was submitted by Tennessee State Soccer Association (TSSA) to the TN Economic Recovery Group. This letter with enclosed research and data was likely instrumental in TN Governor's new Executive Order 55. This order states contact sports, including non-school athletics, may resume and should follow the Tennessee Pledge guidelines. An update to the Pledge guidelines will be forthcoming. This is in line with Davidson County 'Roadmap to Reopening'. Recreational soccer leagues have been allowed under Davidson County Modified Stage II plan per Metro and Metro Parks.*

July 22, 2020

To whom it may concern,

In recent Executive Orders, it has been announced that non-contact sports such as tennis, golf, volleyball and baseball would be allowed to have competitive play within our state. Thus far contact sports that include soccer, basketball, lacrosse or football have NOT been approved yet for competitive play. However we continue to investigate and work with government entities to explore viable options to return to play.

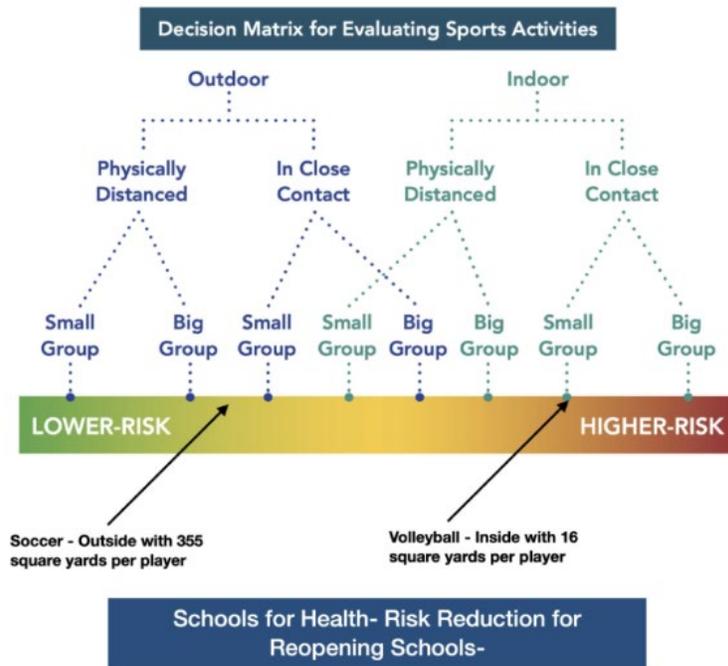
It is my understanding that sports such as tennis, golf, volleyball and baseball competitions was based on the Tennessee Pledge and specifically the definitions of [Noncontact Sports](#) within that document. This serves as a criterion for which sports are allowed to compete and which are not allowed to compete. This criterion is irrelevant in that surface contact is not a primary mechanism for COVID-19 transmission **(1)**. It is the risk of transmission that truly matters in determining whether or not a sport should be allowed to compete. Based on the preponderance of evidence and expert analysis, soccer should be grouped with the other sports that have been approved and is less of a transmission risk than volleyball.

First, let's look at whether soccer is really a high contact sport **(2)**. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines close contact sports as being within 6 feet of an individual having COVID-19 for 15 minutes. A recent study **(3)**, done in light of the pandemic, analyzed nearly 500 Dutch matches and found that only 0.2% of them were two players in close contact of within a single meter for more than 30 seconds. 50-80% of these extremely limited events were players convening during referee reviews, celebrating a goal or other game interruptions. The vast majority of the game provided a socially distanced arrangement of the players on the field. The report also concluded that in 98.2% of the matches, there was minimal to no risk for players to transmit the virus to one another.

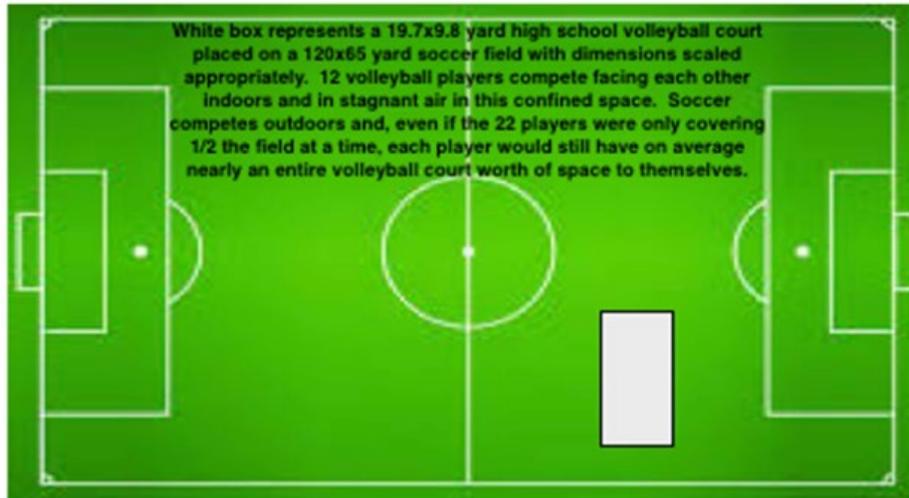
Soccer has the very large benefit of being an outdoor sport. It has been shown and a scientific consensus has been reached that transmission is greatly reduced outdoors as opposed to indoor or enclosed environments by at least a factor of 10. In a Chinese study of 318 outbreaks involving 1,245 cases, only one single outbreak involving two individuals occurred outdoors **(4)**. The remaining 317 outbreaks and 1,242 cases occurred indoors. A second study alone in Japan concluded the risk of transmission outdoors is 18.7 times lower than the risk of transmission indoors **(5)**. This is because in order to become infected, a sufficient number of aerosol particles to cause an infection must stay in place for long enough for someone to inhale them. As the average wind speed in Tennessee is roughly 17.43 MPH **(6)**, a sufficient number of

aerosol particles to cause an infection existing in any one location in the 3-dimensional space on an outdoor soccer field almost never occurs.

Joseph Allen, of Harvard’s T.H. Chan School of Public Health, wrote a 62 page guide to reopening schools entitled Schools for Health – Risk Reduction Strategies for Reopening Schools (7). This report is considered by many to be the gold standard in reopening guidelines. In the last section of these guidelines, Allen provides a “Decision Matrix for Evaluating Sports Activities” to be used to evaluate the risk level of particular sports. The most important factor is whether the sports are physically distanced or in close contact and the third factor involved whether each was a big group or small group sport. Based on this matrix, Soccer exists in the lower to middle range of risk and lower in transmission than even volleyball.



Please consider the physical distancing of players, which is another key to risk of transmission. A soccer game is played between 22 players spread over a roughly 120 yard x 65 yard field. This results in an average of 355 square yards of space per player in an outdoor environment. By comparison, in a volleyball match has 12 players competing in a rectangle that is less than one quarter the size of a single soccer goal box (19.7 yards x 9.8 yards). This results in an average of 16 square yards of space per volleyball player in an indoor environment. Even if only half the soccer field was being used at a given time, soccer players would still have on average more than ten times as much space as a volleyball player and would be playing in an outdoor environment which is at least ten times less likely to transmit COVID- 19.



Lastly, the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) has recently released their own rankings of 25 different high School Sports for COVID-19 risk **(8)**. Soccer’s risk was related as moderate, along with both volleyball and tennis. Yet both volleyball and tennis have been approved to compete as noncontact sports and soccer has not.

### Moderate risk

- Baseball ← **Already Competing**
- Basketball
- Field hockey
- Girls lacrosse
- Gymnastics
- Ice hockey
- Soccer ← **Not Yet Approved by OHSAA for Fall Competitions**
- Softball ← **Already Competing**
- Swimming relays
- Tennis ← **Approved for Fall Competitions**
- Track -- certain events (high jump)
- Volleyball ← **Approved for Fall Competitions**
- 7 on 7 football

If the national entity that writes the rules for high school sports and provides guidance to high schools on a multitude of issues says soccer should be treated as having the same risk level as other sports approved for competitive play. It would then seem fair that soccer should be approved for fall competitions as well.

This information and footnotes have been researched and provided to TSSA through Charles Cerniglia. It was created on July 19, 2020.

FOOTNOTES:

- (1) Fortin, J. (2020, May). Surfaces are 'Not the Main Way ' Coronavirus Spreads, C.D.C. Says. Retrieved from <https://tinyurl.com/ya29ffjq>
- (2) McCaskill, S. (2020, May). Soccer May Not Be As Much Of A Contact Sport As You Think; Will That Impact Coronavirus Risk? Retrieved from <https://tinyurl.com/y2ofk5om>
- (3) Only 'minor risk' of COVID-19 transmission in football (soccer) match. (2020, June 17). Retrieved from <https://tinyurl.com/y5mpw9ro>
- (4) Qian, H. et al. (2020, April 7). Indoor transmission of SARS-CoV-2. Retrieved from <https://tinyurl.com/y7goghlo>
- (5) Nishiura, H. et al. (2020, April 16). Closed environments facilitate secondary transmission of Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Retrieved from <https://tinyurl.com/yd4v2m2m>
- (6) US Average Wind Speed Rank (2020, July 18). Retrieved from <https://tinyurl.com/y23oms9o>
- (7) Jones, E. et al. (2020, June). Schools For Health: Risk Reduction Strategies For Reopening Schools. Retrieved from <https://tinyurl.com/ycn7j2p8>
- (8) NFHS Guidance for Opening Up High School Athletics and Activities. (2020, July) Retrieved from <https://tinyurl.com/yd9a28g6>

Sincerely,

**Hans Hobson**

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***Please note, due to the COVID-19 virus, the TSSA Staff will be working remote for the foreseeable future. Please utilize email as the primary method of communication as our phone system will not be available to us. We will be available via email during normal business hours (M-F 8-4 CT).***