



## CAYUGA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

*"We promote and protect the health and well-being of the individuals, families and the community we serve."*

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### Cayuga County Health Department High Risk Sports for K-12 and Organized League Sports and Recreation January 28, 2021 (rev 3/16/21)

The World Health Organization defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." Regarding COVID-19 and participation in sports, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has indicated that re-engaging in sports activities has physical and psychological health benefits. Participating in sports allows youth to improve their cardiovascular health, strength, body composition, and overall fitness. Mentally, youth may experience benefits from increased socialization and from a more structured routine. Both the psychological and physical benefits support developmental growth and can have immune system benefits.

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 State's decision to permit higher-risk sports and recreation activities does not mean that their risk has changed. Any time people are gathered, there is a risk of exposure to COVID-19, which can lead to serious medical conditions. Symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals can spread the virus. Masking, distancing, and other mitigation measures reduce, but do not eliminate risk. Further, there is a risk of transmission to those in the home of an infected student-athlete.

At present, it cannot be predicted who will become severely ill, although older people and those with underlying health conditions are at higher-risk. The long-term effects of COVID-19 are not known; even people with mild cases may experience long-term complications.

After much discussion with public health colleagues, the New York State Association of County Health Officials, School Administrators, and local health care providers, the Cayuga County Health Department has decided to allow higher-risk school sports and organized league sports to resume. The resumption of these activities does not mean that they are safe or without risk. However, schools districts and sport organizations must meet sport-specific minimum requirements and communities must meet COVID-19 metrics for high risk sports to proceed and continue. This approach is consistent with CDC

guidance for school decision-makers, which recommends that high-contact athletic activities be postponed during periods with substantial or high levels of COVID-19 transmission in the community.

Schools districts, sport organizations, players, parents, and coaches should understand that social interactions outside of an actual practice or competition (e.g., not wearing cloth face coverings in locker rooms or during transportation) are also potential pathways of transmission among athletes. Regarding clusters of COVID-19 cases among athletes, at this time, there is insufficient data to determine whether transmission is more likely to have occurred because of the nature of a given sport or because of the social factors and environment surrounding the athletes and teams. One recent study summarized COVID-19 transmission associated with a [high school wrestling tournament](#), in which masks were not worn (consistent with AAP guidance since a mask may become a choking hazard). While another recent study summarized the experience of the [National Football League](#) and found that indoor unmasked activities, ridesharing in personal vehicles, and eating and drinking in close proximity were of particular risk. Ultimately, the decision falls on parents/guardians to decide whether they will allow their children to participate.

## **METRICS**

In order for participation in high risk sports to begin and continue, the following community COVID-19 metrics must be met:

- The 7-day rolling average percent positivity in the Central New York (specifically Cayuga, Cortland, Madison, Onondaga and Oswego counties) county, [as calculated by NYSDOH, https://forward.ny.gov/early-warning-monitoring-dashboard](#) must be at or below 5%. If the 7-day rolling average percent positivity is above 5% but less than 8%, then activities must be restricted to individual or distanced group training or organized no/low-contact group training. If the 7-day rolling average percent positivity is above 8% regionally or individually within Cayuga County, high risks sports will be suspended.

It is the responsibility of the school district or sport organization to review this data daily. It is the responsibility of the school district or sport organization to review the positivity rate in counties outside of the aforementioned counties to make informed decisions related to health and safety of their participants.

- The county and region's rate of hospital admissions must not be unacceptably high as determined by the public health and hospital administration officials of those sites or New York State Department of Health.
- A more transmissible COVID-19 variant has not be determined to be predominating in the area. The Cayuga County Health Department and NYSDOH monitor and evaluate COVID-19 data daily. This approval for higher risk sports may be withdrawn based on an increase in the positivity rate and/or the presence of more transmissible variants of the COVID-19 virus.

## **MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR HIGHER-RISK K-12 SCHOOL, ORGANIZED LEAGUE SPORTS and RECREATION**

Effective February 1, 2021, and until otherwise indicated, athletes are permitted to participate in K-12 and organized league sponsored higher-risk sports, provided that the requirements below are met. Districts/ schools can choose to enact stricter requirements.

School districts and sport organizations must meet the following minimum requirements:

- The school district or sport organization must follow the requirements outlined in the NYS Department of Health's INTERIM GUIDANCE FOR SPORTS AND RECREATION DURING THE COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY.
- 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 and sport organization leader must oversee the creation of a sport-specific preparedness plan that includes at a minimum the following:
  - 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/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, etc. 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 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, 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.
- 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 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 must sign a district/school/ sport organization developed COVID-19 informed consent. While the content of the informed consent must be determined by the district/school/sport organization in consultation with their medical director, if applicable, 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 persons.
  - Older people and people with [underlying health conditions](#) are at higher risk of serious disease.
- Each district/school must obtain a medical clearance from the student-athlete's healthcare provider.
- Each district/school/sport organization must provide the NYS complaint hotline phone number 1-833-789-0470 to all community members 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/ organized league must keep a log of all complaints received and investigate all complaints of non-compliance. School/districts must report findings to the school district's Board of Education or non-public school's Board of Directors or their

designee and to the Cayuga County Health Department. Sport organizations must report their findings to their oversight agency and to the Cayuga County Health Department.

- Cloth face coverings/masks that conform to recommendations from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) must be worn at all times by all athletes, coaches, managers, referees/officials, spectators, individuals dropping off or picking up athletes, etc. except as mentioned below.
  - 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 school employees must monitor proper use of cloth face coverings/masks and correct improper use.
  - Have additional cloth face coverings/masks on hand in case a athlete player forgets or needs to replace one
  - If a face cover becomes displaced, activity should be paused to properly reposition the face covering.
  - 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 and sport association's oversight agencies 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.
    - Individuals with a medical condition that would be complicated by wearing a cloth face covering/mask can apply to the district/school medical director or sport organization oversight agency for an exemption by providing appropriate documentation that the condition will be present throughout the length of the sports season.
- Districts/schools and organized leagues must limit attendees to only those necessary for the sporting event to occur such as athletes, coaches, referees, score keepers, etc. A maximum of two spectators per athlete may be allowed at indoor sporting events. Spectators must comply with proper mask wearing and social distancing.
- Tournaments are not allowed.
- Sports related travel for practice is prohibited outside of the Central New York region and contiguous counties/regions.
- Vaccination status does not alter any 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.

- Superintendents/school leaders/sports organization must stipulate to the host of the sporting event 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 host site to participate in a practice or competition.
- Failure to comply with all requirements will result in the approval for the given district/school/sports organization team being rescinded.
- Each district/school/sports organization 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 sports.

### **ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

- When and where feasible, districts/schools/sport organizations 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 and/or conducted by the district/school/sport organization.
  - The district/school/sport organization must report patient-specific results (positive or negative) to the local health department where the individual resides and follow any other required reporting documentation.
  - The host team should be responsible for arranging for and reporting of results from officials/referees.
- Districts/schools/sport organizations 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 sports season.
- Consider creating pod/bubble leagues to minimize contact. For example, if ten teams are in a league, have two mini leagues of five that only play one another.
- Districts/schools/sports organizations may be more restrictive in COVID-19 virus preventive measures than stated in this document.
- Consideration of livestreaming events may provide an option for spectators to visualize the activity