# Considerations for Youth Sports Administrators

Updated Dec. 31, 2020

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h[[\*sk1\*]]ttps://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/youth-sports.html

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As some communities in the United States begin or continue to hold youth sports activities, CDC offers the following considerations to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Administrators of youth sports organizations can consult with state and local health officials to determine whether and how to put the following considerations into place. Each community may need to make adjustments to meet its unique needs and circumstances. It’s important to note that safely hosting a large event, including sporting events, in areas where there are high levels of COVID-19 within the community will be challenging. Consult with your state and local health officials to discuss the particular situation in your community before considering holding such an event and make sure you are following limits on gathering sizes. The following considerations are meant to supplement – **not replace** – any state, local, territorial, or tribal health and safety laws, rules, and regulations with which youth sports organizations must comply.

## Assessing Risk

The way sports are played and the way equipment is shared can influence the spread of COVID-19 among players. When you are assessing the risk of spread in your sport, consider:

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• **Community levels of COVID-19**: High or increasing levels of COVID-19 cases in the local community increase the risk of infection and spread among youth athletes, coaches, and families. Administrators should consider the number of COVID-19 cases in the community when deciding whether to resume or continue youth sporting activities. Information on the number of cases in an area can often be found on the local health department website or on CDC’s COVID Data Tracker County View.

• **Physical closeness of players**. Sports that require contact or close proximity (within 6 feet) between players may make it more difficult to maintain physical distancing, compared to sports where players are not close to each other. For close-contact sports (e.g., wrestling, basketball), play may be modified to safely increase distance between players.

\_ For example, players and coaches can focus on individual skill building versus competition.

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Coaches can also modify practices so players work on individual skills, rather than on competition. Coaches may also put players into small groups (cohorts) that remain together and work through stations, rather than switching groups or mixing groups.

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• **Level of intensity of activity**. Activities that are high intensity or require a high level of exertion (such as full competition) present a higher level of risk of getting and spreading COVID-19 than lower intensity activities (such as discussing strategy and rules, walking through plays), particularly when indoors. Higher intensity activities are safer when done outdoors.

• **Length of time that players are close to each other or to staff**. Activities that last longer pose more risk than shorter activities. Being within 6 feet of someone who has COVID-19 for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more in a 24-hour period greatly increases the risk of becoming sick and requires quarantine. Limit the time players spend in close contact to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread.

\_ For example, players and coaches can:

• play full contact only in game-time situations;

• decrease the number of competitions during a season.

• **Setting of the sporting event or activity**. Indoor activities pose more risk than outdoor activities. Minimize the amount of time spent indoors. If it is necessary to be inside, ensure the facility has proper ventilation and filtration systems and open windows and doors to increase airflow throughout the space.

• **Amount of necessary touching of shared equipment and gear (e.g., protective gear, balls, bats, racquets, mats, or water bottles)**. The virus is thought to spread mainly from person to person, but it is also possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it, and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes. Minimize equipment sharing, and clean and disinfect shared equipment between use by different people to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread.

• **Ability to engage in physical distancing while not actively engaged in play (e.g., during practice, on the sideline, or in the dugout)**. During times when players are not actively participating in practice or competition, attention should be given to maintaining physical distancing by increasing space between players on the sideline, dugout, or bench. Additionally, coaches can encourage athletes to use downtime for individual skill-building work or cardiovascular conditioning, rather than staying clustered together.

• **Age of the player**. Older youth might be better able to follow directions for physical distancing and take other protective actions like not sharing water bottles. If feasible, a coach, parent, or other caregiver can assist with making sure that athletes maintain proper physical distancing. For younger athletes, youth sports programs may ask parents or other household members to monitor their children and make sure that they follow physical distancing and take other protective actions (e.g., younger children could sit with parents or caregivers, instead of in a dugout or group area).

• **Players at higher risk of developing severe illness**. Parents and coaches should assess level of risk based on individual players on the team who may be at higher risk for severe illness, such as children who may have asthma, diabetes, or other health problems.

• **Size of the team**. Sports with a large number of players on a team may increase the likelihood of spread, compared to sports with fewer team members. Consider decreasing team sizes, as feasible.

• **Nonessential visitors, spectators, volunteers**. Limit any nonessential visitors, spectators, volunteers, and activities involving external groups or organizations.

• **Travel outside of the local community**. Traveling outside of the local community may increase the chances of exposing players, coaches, and fans to COVID-19, or unknowingly spreading it to others. This is the case particularly if a team from an area with high levels of COVID-19 competes with a team from an area with low levels of the virus. Youth sports teams should consider competing only against teams in their local area (e.g., neighborhood, town, or community).

• **Behavior of the athletes off the field**. Athletes who do not consistently adhere to social distancing (staying at least 6 feet apart), mask wearing, handwashing, and other prevention behaviors pose more risk to the team than those who consistently practiced these safety measures.

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If organizations are not able to keep in place safety measures during competition (for example, maintaining physical distancing by keeping children at least 6 feet apart at all times), they may consider limiting participation to within-team competition only (for example, scrimmages between members of the same team) or team-based practices only. Similarly, if organizations are unable to put in place safety measures during team-based activities, they may choose individual or at-home activities, especially if any members of the team are at high risk for severe illness.

## Promoting Behaviors that Reduce Spread

Youth sports organizations may consider implementing several strategies to encourage behaviors that reduce the spread of COVID-19.

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• **Staying Home when Appropriate**

­\_ Educate staff and player families about when they should stay home and when they can return to activity.

• Advise staff, families, and players to stay home if they have tested positive for COVID-19, are showing COVID-19 symptoms, or if they have had a close contact with a person who has tested positive for or who has symptoms of COVID-19.

• Develop policies that encourage staff who are sick to stay at home without fear of reprisal, and ensure staff are aware of these policies.

• CDC’s criteria can help inform when it is okay to end isolation or quarantine.

\_ If they have been sick with COVID-19

\_ If they tested positive for COVID-19 but had no symptoms

\_ If they have recently had a close contact with a person with COVID-19

• **Physical Distancing**

\_ The size and type of a sporting event should be determined based on the ability of athletes and spectators from different households to stay at least 6 feet (2 arm lengths) apart.

\_ Encourage players to wait in their cars with guardians until just before the beginning of a practice, warm-up, or game, instead of forming a group.

\_ Remind athletes and their families upon arrival at the facility or field to maintain at least 6 feet of distance between themselves and people they don’t live with.

\_ Discourage athletes, coaches, staff, and families from greeting others with physical contact (e.g., handshakes). Include this reminder on signs about physical

\_ Identify adult staff members or volunteers to help maintain physical distancing among youth, coaches, umpires/referees, and spectators (if state and local directives allow for spectators).

\_ Space players at least 6 feet apart on the field (e.g., during warmup, skill building activities, simulation drills, while explaining rules)

\_ If keeping physical distance is difficult with players in competition or group practice, consider relying on individual skill work and drills.

\_ Increase distance for high-intensity activities.

\_ Limit the use of carpools or van pools. When riding in an automobile to a sports event, encourage players to ride to the sports event with persons living in their same household.

• **Masks**

\_ Require the consistent and correct use of masks, by making sure that staff, athletes, and spectators are covering their noses and mouths.

\_ Provide everyone with information on proper use, removal, and washing of masks prior to the sporting event.

\_ Consider having additional masks on hand in case player forgets one or needs to replace a moist mask with a dry one. Higher-intensity sports: People who are engaged in high-intensity activities, like running, may not be able to wear a mask if it causes difficulty breathing. Limit high-intensity sports when indoors.

\_ Risk often increases when players are not actively engaged in activity, for instance when they are taking a break or socializing. Ensure that masks are used at all times.

\_ Advise staff and coaches that masks should **not** be placed on:

• Babies or children younger than 2 years old

• Anyone who has trouble breathing

• Anyone who is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance

• **Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette**

\_ Encourage athletes and coaches to wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

\_ If soap and water are not readily available, hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol can be used (for staff and older children who can safely use hand sanitizer).

\_ Do not allow spitting and encourage everyone to cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing and sneezing. Used tissues should be thrown in the trash and hands washed immediately with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

\_ Encourage athletes, coaches, and spectators to avoid singing, chanting, or shouting, especially indoors.

• **Adequate Supplies**

\_ Ensure adequate supplies to support healthy hygiene Supplies include soap, water, hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol, paper towels, tissues, disinfectant wipes, masks (as feasible), and no-touch trash cans.

• **Signs and Messages**

\_ Post signs in highly visible locations (e.g., at entrances and exits, in restrooms) that promote everyday protective measures and describe how to stop the spread of germs such as by properly washing hands, properly wearing a mask, and physical distancing.

\_ Broadcast regular announcements on the public announcement system.

\_ Include COVID-19 prevention messages (for example, videos) about behaviors that prevent spread of COVID-19 when communicating with staff, volunteers, officials, and families. This could include links, videos, and prevention messages in emails, on organization websites, and through the team and league’s social media accounts.

\_ Consider developing signs and messages in multiple languages spoken in the community and formats (e.g., large print, braille, American Sign Language) for people who have limited vision or are blind or people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

\_ Find freely available CDC print and digital resources on CDC’s communication resources main page.

## Maintaining Healthy Environments

Youth sports organizations may consider implementing several strategies to maintain healthy environments.

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**• Cleaning and Disinfection**

\_ Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces on the field, court, or play surface at least daily, or between uses as much as possible.

\_ Clean and disinfect shared objects and equipment (e.g., balls, bats, gymnastics equipment) between uses.

\_ Consider closing areas such as drinking fountains that cannot be adequately cleaned and disinfected during a sporting event.

\_ Develop a schedule for increasing routine cleaning and disinfection.

\_ Ensure safe and correct use and storage of disinfectants, including storing products securely away from children. Always read and follow label instructions for each product.

\_ Use EPA-approved disinfectants against COVID-19external icon.

\_ Identify an adult staff member or volunteer to ensure proper cleaning and disinfection of objects and equipment, particularly for any shared equipment or frequently touched surfaces.

\_ Cleaning products should not be used near children, and staff should ensure that there is adequate ventilation when using these products to prevent children or themselves from inhaling toxic vapors.

\_ Use disposable gloves when removing garbage bags or handling and disposing of trash.

• After using disposable gloves, throw them out in a lined trash can.

• Do not disinfect or reuse the gloves.

• Wash hands after removing gloves.

**• Shared Objects**

\_ Discourage people from sharing items that are difficult to clean, sanitize, or disinfect. Recommend players bring their own equipment such as bats, helmets, water bottles, etc. Do not let players share towels, clothing, or other items they use to wipe their faces or hands.

\_ Ensure adequate supplies of shared items to minimize sharing of equipment to the extent possible (e.g., protective gear, balls, bats); otherwise, limit use of supplies and equipment to one group of players at a time and clean and disinfect between use.

• Keep each player’s belongings separated from others’ and in individually labeled containers, bags, or areas.

• If food is offered at any event, have pre-packaged boxes or bags for each attendee instead of a buffet or family-style meal. Avoid sharing food and utensils and be sure to have players sit at least 6 feet apart from one another. Offer hand sanitizer or encourage handwashing.

**• Ventilation**

• If playing inside, ensure ventilation systems operate properly. If feasible, adjust system when sports are played to increase outdoor air exchange. Increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible, for example by opening windows and doors. Do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety or health risk (e.g., risk of falling or triggering asthma symptoms) to players or others using the facility.

• If portable ventilation equipment like fans are used, take steps to minimize air blowing from one person directly at another person to reduce the potential spread of any airborne or aerosolized viruses. Fans should be used to push air outside, not across the room.

\_ For additional information on increasing ventilation, visit CDC’s Information on Cleaning, Disinfection, and Ventilating your home or Guidance for Businesses and Employers.

• **Water Systems**

\_ To minimize the risk of Legionnaires’ disease and other diseases associated with water, take steps to ensure that all water systems and features (e.g., sink faucets, drinking fountains, decorative fountains) are safe to use after a prolonged facility shutdown. If they are used, drinking fountains should be cleaned and sanitized. But encourage staff and players to bring their own water to minimize touching water fountains.

**• Communal Spaces**

\_ If practices or competition facilities (e.g., locker rooms) must be shared, stagger practice times and consider increasing the amount of time between practices and competitions to allow for one group to leave before another group enters the facility. Allow time for cleaning and disinfecting between use.

\_ Limit the number of players sitting in confined player seating areas (e.g., dugouts) by allowing players to spread out into spectator areas if more space is available (e.g., if spectators are not allowed).

\_ Add physical barriers, such as plastic flexible screens, for example between bathroom sinks, especially when they cannot be at least 6 feet apart.

## Maintaining Healthy Operations

Youth sports organizations may consider implementing several strategies to maintain healthy operations.

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**• Regulatory Awareness**

Be aware of state or local regulatory agency policies related to group gatherings to determine if events can be held.

**• Protections for Staff and Players at Higher Risk for Severe Illness from COVID-19**

\_ Offer options for individuals at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 (including older adults and people of any age with underlying medical conditions) that limit exposure risk (such as virtual coaching and in-home drills).

\_ Consider limiting youth sports participation to staff and youth who live in the local area (e.g., community, city, town, or county) to reduce risk of spreading the virus from areas with higher levels of COVID-19. If attendance is open to youth from other communities, cities, town or counties, provide their families with information about local COVID-19 levels so they can make an informed decision about participation.

\_ Put policies in place to protect the privacy of people at higher risk for severe illness regarding their underlying medical conditions.

**• Identifying Small Groups and Keeping them Together (Cohorting)**

\_ Keep players together in small groups with dedicated coaches or staff, and make sure that each group of players and coach avoid mixing with other groups as much as possible. Teams might consider having the same group of players stay with the same coach or having the same group of players rotate among coaches.

\_ Consider staging within-team scrimmages instead of playing games with other teams to minimize exposure among players and teams.

**• For Facility Staff to have Limited, Staggered, or Rotated Shifts and Attendance Times** Stagger arrival and drop-off times or locations by cohort (group) or put in place other protocols to limit contact between groups as much as possible. One example is increasing the amount of time between practices and competitions to allow for one group to depart before another group enters the facility. This also allows for more time to clean the facility between uses.

\_ Use flexible worksites (e.g., telework) and flexible work hours (e.g., staggered shifts) to help establish policies and practices for physical distancing between facility staff and others.

**• Designated COVID-19 Point of Contact**

\_ Designate a youth sports program staff person or office to be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. All coaches, staff, officials, and families should have information about who this person or office is and how to contact them.

**• Communication Systems**

\_ Put systems in place to:

• Encourage coaches, staff, and athletes to self-report to the youth sports organization or a COVID-19 point of contact if they have symptoms of COVID-19, a positive test for COVID-19, or were exposed to someone with COVID-19 in accordance with health information sharing regulations for COVID-19 (e.g. see “Notify Health Officials and Close Contacts” in the **Preparing for When Someone Gets Sick section below**), and other applicable laws and regulations.

• Advise coaches, staff, and athletes prior to the sporting event that they should not attend if they have symptoms of, a positive test for, or were recently exposed to COVID-19.

• Notify staff, officials, families, and the public of youth sports facility closures and restrictions in place to limit COVID-19 exposure (e.g., limited hours of operation).

• Identify and address potential language, cultural, and disability barriers associated with communicating COVID-19 information to coaches, staff, and athletes. Tailor information so that it is easily understood by various audiences and is available in multiple languages and accessible formats (e.g., braille or larger print)

• You can learn more about communicating to staff in a crisis at Crisis Communications Plan.

• **Leave (Time Off) Policies**

\_ Implement flexible sick leave policies and practices for coaches, officials, and staff that are not punitive and enable employees to stay home when they are sick, have been exposed, are caring for someone who is sick, or who must stay home with children if schools or child care centers are closed.

• Examine and revise policies for leave, telework, and employee compensation as needed.

• Ensure that any relevant policies are communicated to staff.

\_ Develop policies for return-to-play after COVID-19 illness. CDC’s criteria to discontinue home isolation and quarantine can inform these policies.

**• Back-up Staffing Plan**

• Monitor absenteeism of coaches and officials, cross-train staff, and create a roster of trained back-up personnel.

• **Coach and Staff Training**

• Train coaches, officials, and staff on all safety protocols. Consider using CDC’s Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers as a guide.

• Conduct training virtually, or ensure that physical distancing is maintained during training.

• If training needs to be done in person, maintain physical Virtual training is optimal when feasible.

• **Recognize Signs and Symptoms**

If feasible, conduct daily health checks (e.g., temperature screening and/or symptom checking) of coaches, officials, staff, and players safely and respectfully, and in accordance with any applicable privacy and confidentiality laws and regulations.

Youth sports program administrators may use examples of screening methods found in CDC’s supplemental Guidance for Child Care Programs that Remain Open as a guide for screening children, and CDC’s General Business FAQs for screening staff.

**• Sharing Facilities**

• Encourage any organizations that share or use the youth sports facilities to also follow these considerations and limit shared use.

• **Support Coping and Resilience**

• Promote staff and coach ability to eat healthy foods, exercise, get enough sleep, find time to unwind, and cope with stress.

• Encourage staff to talk with people they trust about their concerns and how they are feeling.

• Consider posting signs for the national distress hotline: 1-800-985-5990, or text TalkWithUs to 66746; The National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233 and TTY 1-800-787-3224; and The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

• **Protect Your Health This Flu Season**

• It’s likely that the flu and COVID-19 will both spread this winter. Consider encouraging staff to get a flu vaccine.

## Preparing for When Someone Gets Sick

Youth sports organizations should consider implementing several strategies to prepare for when someone gets sick.

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• **Advise Sick Individuals of Home Isolation Criteria**

\_ Communicate with sick coaches, staff members, umpires/officials, or players that they should not return until they have met CDC’s criteria to discontinue home isolation.

• **Isolate and Transport Those Who are Sick**

\_ Immediately separate coaches, staff, officials, and players with COVID-19 symptoms (i.e., fever, cough, shortness of breath) at any youth sports activity. Individuals who are sick should go home or to a healthcare facility, depending on how severe their symptoms are, and follow CDC guidance for caring for themselves.

\_ Individuals who have had close contact with a person who has symptoms should be separated, sent home, and advised to follow CDC guidance for community-related exposure (see “Notify Health Officials and Close Contacts” below). If symptoms develop, individuals and families should follow CDC guidance for caring for themselves who are sick.

\_ Establish procedures for safely transporting anyone who is sick to their home or to a healthcare facility. If you are calling an ambulance or bringing someone to the hospital, call first to alert them that the person may have COVID-19.

• **Clean and Disinfect**

\_ Close off areas used by a sick person and do not use these areas until after cleaning and disinfecting them (for outdoor areas, this includes surfaces or shared objects in the area, if applicable).

\_ Wait at least 24 hours before cleaning and disinfecting. If 24 hours is not feasible, wait as long as possible. Ensure safe and correct use and storage of cleaning and disinfection products, including storing them securely away from children.

• **Notify Health Officials and Close Contacts**

\_ In accordance with state and local laws and regulations, youth sports organizations should notify local health officials **immediately** of any case of COVID-19 .

\_ Advise those who have had close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19 to stay home and self-monitor for symptoms, and to follow CDC guidance if symptoms develop.

\_ Maintain careful rosters of which players, family members, coaches, and ancillary staff attend each practice and game, and have current contact information for everyone. If a COVID-19 exposure occurs, timely notifications are critical, and this information will help contract tracing activities occur more smoothly.

• **What to do if anyone becomes sick after participating in a youth sports activity**

\_ If someone develops symptoms consistent with COVID-19, such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath, or if they test positive for COVID-19, follow steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and the Public Health Guidance for Community-Related Exposure.

• This person(s) should self-isolate if they have tested positive for COVID-19 or self-quarantine if they are a close contact.

• Immediately contact and notify the people they were in close contact with, the league organizers, and/or the local health department.

• Youth sports league organizers may need to inform staff, parents, and other people about their possible exposure to the virus, while maintaining confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other applicable laws and regulations.

\_ If you, a staff member, or a participant is waiting for your COVID-19 test results, follow these important steps to help stop the spread of COVID-19:

• Stay home and monitor your health.

• Think about the people you have recently been around and places where you have been and write down any information you can remember.

• Answer the phone call from the health department.

\_ If you, a staff member, or a participant has been diagnosed with COVID-19, a public health worker may contact you to check on your health and ask you who you have been in contact with and where you’ve spent your time. Your information will be confidential. Learn more about what to expect with contact tracing.

• **Contact Tracing**

\_ Contact tracing is key to slowing the spread of COVID-19 and helps protect the community by:

• Letting people know they may have been exposed to COVID-19 and should monitor their health for signs and symptoms of COVID-19.

• Helping people who may have been exposed to COVID-19 get tested.

• Asking people to self-isolate if they have COVID-19 or self-quarantine if they are a close contact.

\_ Learn more about contact tracing and what to expect at CDC’s Contact Tracing website.

Content source: National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD), Division of Viral Diseases