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Understanding and Interpreting CDC Guidelines for Youth Sports

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The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented stoppage of all youth sports over the past few months. As the state begins to reopen and we start to settle into the new normal with COVID-19, there are many questions about when and how to resume participation in athletics.

The Sports Medicine programs at Children's Wisconsin and American Family Children's Hospital/UW Health believe participation in daily exercise, fitness or sports is important to support child and adolescent physical and mental well-being. We want our communities, state and activities to gradually and safely reopen; however, we should do so in ways that allow our communities to nimbly and effectively respond and adapt to the changing environment caused by COVID-19. Returning in a manner that does not negatively impact our community's public health is more important than *when* we return.

As of June 3, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends youth sports organizations [consult with state and local health officials](#) before resuming participation due to the many challenges of containing the virus in group settings. Additionally, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) recommends youth sporting events for the summer be postponed or cancelled, unless the sport or activity can be performed fully while complying with social distancing measures.

Children's Wisconsin and American Family Children's Hospital/UW Health support following DHS and CDC guidance to safely protect kids and our community from the spread and unknown risks of COVID-19. There remains much we do not know about COVID-19 and are beginning to see delayed diseases caused by COVID-19 may yet appear in different age groups. We strongly urge families to avoid large group gatherings and activities that involve kids being in close proximity with others outside the household.

The risk of transmitting COVID-19 cannot fully be eliminated, but steps should be taken to minimize that risk as much as possible. The risk of transmission increases with the more people an athlete interacts with, the closeness of that interaction, the length of that interaction, and the frequency of sharing of high touch equipment and surfaces. We acknowledge that each sport carries different risks based on the nature of the activity and will require unique considerations, modifications and accommodations. When developing guidelines, considerations should be made regarding transmission of the virus to the community at-large. There are individuals in

every community at very high risk of developing more serious illnesses related to COVID-19 and the capacity of the community's health care resources should be monitored given that local outbreaks are certain to occur.

The following is intended as a general guide for youth athletic teams and organizations to transition safely back into sports. Before considering resumption of athletics, consult with state and local health departments as their municipal and county regulations must be satisfied when developing a return to play protocol.

For return to high school sanctioned sports and training, please refer to the [Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association](#) (WIAA).

General Guidelines

The CDC currently offers recommendations on limiting the spread of coronavirus. They currently include:

- **Promoting behaviors to decrease spread**
 - Thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
 - Wear a cloth face mask that covers your nose and mouth in public settings.
 - Cover your mouth and nose with tissue when coughing or sneezing.

- **Maintaining healthy environments**
 - Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and exercise equipment (including balls).
 - Practice social distancing. Stay at least 6 feet away from non-household members. Heavy breathing with exercise or shouting likely increases the range of spread, so more distance with sport may be helpful.

- **Maintaining healthy operations**
 - Recognizing signs and symptoms of COVID-19 by implementing screenings methods for athletes, coaches and staff

- **Specific procedures if someone gets sick**
 - Stay home if you are sick. Contact and follow the advice of your medical provider.
 - Due to COVID-19 pandemic, it is very important to follow the recommendation of not participating with cold-like symptoms in hopes of decreasing the risk of transmission to others.
 - Do not return to activity without medical clearance.

Social distancing is not intended to stop the COVID-19 pandemic, but rather to slow it to avoid health care equipment shortages and allow time to develop tests, treatments and vaccines.

Unique Questions to Consider

Youth sports organizations, leagues, and teams may wish to consider these questions during their return to play discussion:

- Will my organization conduct athletics/activities if schools are closed to in-person learning?
- Will my organization conduct athletics/activities across the state if COVID-19 “hot spot” areas are closed while other regions of the state may be open (exclude athletes/teams from the closed counties/municipalities)?
- Will my organization conduct “lower-risk” activity while cancelling activity that is considered “higher-risk” (e.g., allow physically distanced non-contact individual drill practice while not allowing scrimmaging, games, or tournaments)?

Critical Issues to Address

It is highly recommended that all organizations develop, communicate and enforce a COVID-19 protocol.

- **Point of contact:** Each organization should identify a point person for communication and questions.
 - This person will need to notify health officials of any athlete with COVID-19 positive test.
 - This person will need to effectively communicate, while maintaining respect for health privacy, the need for [certain groups to enter isolation](#) if there is contact with a COVID-19 positive person.
- **Pre-participation screening:** No athlete that is sick or who has household contacts with COVID-19 should participate.
 - Each athlete should have temperature taken asked about signs and symptoms. View our [printable form](#).
 - Any athlete with symptoms should not be allowed to participate and must receive medical clearance prior to participation.
- **Transportation to and from activity:** Parent drop-off and pickup strategies must be planned and staggered - to avoid families congregating or arriving at the same time.
 - Parents or caregiver should remain in the car.
 - If athletes have to walk across a park or parking lot, a parent or staff member should escort them to ensure physical distancing and safety.
 - Practices should not be scheduled immediately back-to-back. There must be time in between groups to allow for athletes to arrive/depart and to allow for staff to clean/disinfect all equipment.
- **Food and beverage:** Every athlete should have his/her own individual water bottle and snack. No drinking fountains/bubblers, shared drinks/snacks, nor families distributing snacks.
- **Masks:** Officials should be encouraged to wear masks.
 - Allow officials to use a noisemaker rather than a whistle if they choose to wear a mask.

- Athletes should be allowed to wear a soft, cloth mask if desired during play, and encourage wearing masks during educational or talking sessions.
- **Sportsmanship:** Avoid pre-game and post-game handshakes and in-game celebrations. Instead maintain sportsmanship with predetermined gestures like waving or “tipping a cap” with physical distancing.
- **Facility:**
 - Discourage on-site locker room use.
 - Bathroom policy of only one person in the bathroom at a time.

Other Considerations

Return to Physical Activity

Due to the recent pandemic, many athletes have become deconditioned (out of shape). This predisposes athletes to greater risk of injury upon return to sports. Appropriate time must be allowed for athletes to progressively work back safely to competition. This will be athlete and sport dependent.

Since athletics are beginning during warmer months, special attention should be paid to [preventing heat illness](#).

Transportation to and From Events

In addition to having well-defined strategies for athlete pickup and drop-off, certain organizations may need to consider alternative plans for transporting teams to events. This could involve an increased number of buses and/or transportation vehicles to meet social distancing standards. Riding in vehicles only with household members and avoiding carpooling as able.

Social Distancing During Competitions

- Young athletes should not be relied upon to maintain physical distancing or disinfecting practices without adult supervision.
- **Markings:** Placing markings, tape, or stickers to indicate proper social distancing can be helpful.
- **Sidelines/benches:** Must maintain social distancing guidelines despite not being involved in active competition.
- **Spectators:** Plans should be in place to determine the number of people allowed to attend and ensure social distancing. Spectators encouraged to observe outdoor events from their cars and if attend outside, should wear a mask. Individuals older than 64 years of age or people of any age with underlying medical conditions are encouraged to stay home and not attend. Larger teams will likely need to limit the amount of tier 2 people present during competition.
 - Tier 1 (Essential): athletes, coaches, officials, event staff, licensed athletic trainers, medical staff
 - Tier 2 (Non-essential): spectators, vendors

Concession Stands

Athletic parks should consider closing their concession stands, or at a minimum applying strict social distancing markings for customers and more intensified cleaning, disinfecting, and hygiene rules for workers.

Illness Prevention and Reporting

Before restarting any activity, it is advised to have communication with athletes, families and other personnel on new COVID-19 policies. Establish training for coaches and staff before any event. Organizations should monitor state and local health departments for new information.

- Protocol for screening all athletes, coaches, officials and event staff prior to the activity should be developed.
- Signs indicating ill spectators should not attend event at entry points.
 - Spectator numbers and seating to maintain physical distancing should be established.
 - Routes of moving through fields/facilities should be identified and clearly marked (one-way lanes for entry, passage around a facility, and exit)
- Spectators and event staff should be limited in order to keep social distancing and encouraged to wear masks, for both indoor and outdoor events.
- Hand sanitizer should be readily available for staff and spectators at all events.
- Organizations should understand their risks and responsibility for managing social distance guidelines for spectators and develop a process for reporting sick individuals and instituting any ensuing changes and site cleaning based on a positive COVID-19 test.

Risk Level by Sport

While the risk of infection transmission from athletic participation is difficult to determine, we have categorized sports based on low, moderate and high in alignment with the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC) and the National Federation of High School Associations (NFHS) stratification. Moderate and high risk sports may modify training to reduce risk.

Higher Risk: Sports that have a high probability of respiratory droplet transmission and sports that involve close contact making it challenging to maintain appropriate social distancing.

Examples: Wrestling, football, lacrosse, competitive cheer, dance

Moderate Risk: Sports that have protective equipment in place to decrease respiratory droplet transmission OR intermittent close contact OR sports that use equipment between athletes that can't be cleaned. If equipment cannot be cleaned, it should not be used or shared.

Examples: Basketball, volleyball, baseball, softball, soccer, water polo, gymnastics, hockey, tennis, swimming relays.

Lower Risk: Sports that follow social distancing guidelines without the need to share or clean equipment.

Examples: Individual running events, throwing events (shot put, discus), individual swimming, golf, skiing, cross country, sideline cheer.

Return to Sports Activity Guidance

Consideration for Assessing Risk

The following guidance helps to summarize the CDC recommendations and provide more concrete examples. Organizations are encouraged to consider trends of the following metrics to help inform the level of activity and contact athletes should be participating in. As always, this should be done after consultation with local health departments.

- **Symptoms:** Downward trajectory of influenza-like illness reported within a 14-day period AND downward trajectory of COVID-19-like cases reported within a 14-day period
- **Cases:** Downward trajectory of positive tests as a percent of total tests within a 14-day period
- **Hospital:** Treat all patients without crisis care AND robust testing programs in place for at-risk health care workers, with decreasing number of infected health care workers with consideration of adequate capacity of local public health infrastructure and local health system to handle any surges or outbreaks for all in community

Initial Return to Youth Sports	
Small group training (<10)	
Pre-workout/Contest screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All coaches and athletes should be screened for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 prior to participating in any athletic activity. Upon arrival to train, coaches or staff should ask each athlete if they are experiencing any signs or symptoms of COVID-19 and take their temperature. If the athlete has any signs or symptoms of COVID-19, they should be sent home and instructed to contact their health care provider.• A log should be kept to record screening responses of all• Any person with positive symptoms reported, including temperature ≥ 100.3 °F, should not be allowed to engage in any athletic activity and should contact his or her primary care provider or other appropriate health-care professional for further guidance.
Limitations on gathering	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gatherings of more than 10 people at a time (inside or outside) are prohibited.• Common gathering areas (locker rooms, etc.) should be avoided during Phase 1. Athletes should arrive prepared in proper gear and immediately return home to shower at the end of the workout.• Sports activities should be conducted in small groups of athletes with <u>the same</u> 5-10 athletes, to help limit exposure if someone develops an infection...• As recommended by CDC guidelines, a minimum distance of 6 feet between each individual must be maintained at all times, even when outdoors. If needed, the maximum number of individuals allowed in the room must be decreased to meet this threshold. Per the CDC, should cancel events where social distancing cannot be maintained.• Outdoor training should be prioritized over indoor, individual training preferred over group training, and local events over those spanning multiple geographic areas.

<p>Facilities cleaning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All athletic facilities should create and implement thorough cleaning strategies and staggered schedules to avoid overlap between groups to decrease spread of communicable diseases. • Facilities should be wiped down and sanitized prior to an individual or groups of individuals entering a facility. This includes all hard surfaces (chairs, furniture in meeting rooms, bathrooms, etc.) as well as all equipment (balls, weights, etc.). • Athletes should wash their hands for a minimum of 20 seconds with warm water and soap before and after any participation. • Athletes should have access at all times to hand-sanitizer, including inside, outside and during transfer from one location to the next. • Damaged equipment including benches, athletic pads, etc. having holes with exposed foam should be covered.
<p>Physical activity and athletic equipment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Athletes should refrain from sharing athletic equipment (towels, clothing, shoes, or sports specific equipment). If needed, an athlete should label or uniquely identify his or her own equipment so others do not use it. • All athletic equipment, including balls, should be cleaned before and after each use and prior to the next workout. • Individual drills requiring the use of athletic equipment are allowed, however the equipment should be thoroughly cleaned prior to use by the next individual. • Athletes should return home immediately after activity and take a shower. Clothes should be washed immediately, as well as separately from other clothes in the household.
<p>Hydration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All athletes should bring and label their own water bottle. Water bottles must not be shared. • Hydration stations (water cows, water trough, water fountains, etc.) are prohibited.

Examples of initial return to youth sports activity

- A basketball player may dribble and shoot, but should not practice or pass a single ball among the team allowing multiple players to touch the same ball.
- Softball and baseball players should not share gloves, bats, or throw a single ball that will be tossed among the team. A single player may hit in cages, throw batting practice (with netting as backstop, no catcher). Prior to another athlete using the same balls, they should be collected and cleaned individually.
- Runners and dancers should maintain at least 6 feet of physical distance between individuals.
- Tennis players may do individual drills, serves, and wall volleys.

Expanded Return to Youth Sports

Larger group training <50 people

Consider competition for low risk sports

Continue modified practice for moderate- and high-risk sports

Pre-workout/Contest screening

- All coaches and athletes should be screened for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 prior to participating in any athletic activity. Upon arrival to train, coaches or staff should ask each athlete if they are experiencing any signs or symptoms of COVID-19 and take their temperature. If the athlete has any signs or symptoms of COVID-19, they should be sent home and instructed to contact their health care provider.
- A log should be kept to record screening responses of all
- Any person with positive symptoms reported, including temperature ≥ 100.3 °F, should not be allowed to engage in any athletic activity and should contact his or her primary care provider or other appropriate health-care professional for further guidance.

Limitations on gathering

- Gatherings of more than 10 people at a time inside are prohibited. Outdoor gatherings of 50 individuals or fewer are permissible as long as social distancing is maintained.
- Athletes using common gathering areas (locker rooms, etc.) must maintain a minimum distance of 6 feet between each athlete at all times.
- Sports activities should be conducted in small groups of athletes with the same 5-10 athletes, to help limit exposure if someone develops an infection.
- As recommended by CDC guidelines, a minimum distance of 6 feet between each individual must be maintained at all times. If needed, the maximum number of individuals allowed in the room must be decreased to meet this threshold. Social distancing on the sidelines and benches should be enforced.

Facilities cleaning

- All athletic facilities should create and implement thorough cleaning strategies and staggered schedules to avoid overlap between groups to decrease spread of communicable diseases
- Facilities should be wiped down and sanitized prior to an individual or groups of individuals entering a facility. This includes all hard surfaces (chairs, furniture in meeting rooms, bathrooms, etc.) as well as all equipment (balls, weights, etc.).
- Shared equipment is permissible, however it should be cleaned between each use.
- Athletes should wash their hands for a minimum of 20 seconds with warm water and soap before and after any participation.
- Athletes should have access at all times to hand-sanitizer including inside, outside and during transfer from one location to the next.
- Damaged equipment including benches, athletic pads, etc. having holes with exposed foam should be covered.
- Athletes should return home immediately after activity and take a shower. Clothes should be washed immediately, as well as separately from other clothes in the household.

<p>Physical activity & athletic equipment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitions involving low risk sports could resume with appropriate safety protocols in place. • Increase intensity and duration of activity during modified practices for moderate to high risk sports. • Athletes should refrain from sharing athletic apparel (towels, clothing, shoes, etc.). If needed, an athlete should label or uniquely identify his or her own apparel so others do not use it. • All athletic equipment, including balls, should be cleaned before and after each use. They should also be cleaned periodically during training/competition as well. • Athletes should have access at all times to hand-sanitizer during participation in sports. • Shared athletic equipment is permissible, however it should be cleaned between each use. • Athletes should return home immediately after activity and take a shower. Clothes should be washed immediately, as well as separately from other clothes in the household.
<p>Hydration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All athletes should bring and label their own water bottle. Water bottles must not be shared. • Hydration stations (water cows, water trough, water fountains, etc.) are prohibited.

Examples of expanded return to youth sports activity

- A soccer team doing passing and shooting drills without aggressive/close defense.
- Runners and dancers should maintain at least 6 feet of physical distance between individuals.
- Tennis players may participate in singles practice.

New Normal Return to Youth Sports

Large group training; moderate- and high- risk sports may gradually begin to increase practice and competition

Pre-workout/Contest screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All athletes, coaches and associated personnel should be screened prior to participation. If an individual has had a fever or cold symptoms in the previous 24 hours, he or she should not be allowed to participate. He or she should contact his or her primary care provider or other appropriate health-care professional for further guidance. • A log should be kept to record screening responses of all athletes
Limitations on gathering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gatherings of 50 individuals or fewer are allowed both indoors and outdoors. • Social distancing of 6 feet should be practiced when not directly engaged in competition.
Facilities cleaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All athletic facilities should create and implement thorough cleaning strategies and schedules to decrease spread of communicable diseases. • Facilities should be wiped down and sanitized prior to an individual or groups of individuals entering a facility. This includes all hard surfaces (chairs, furniture in meeting rooms, bathrooms, etc.) as well as all equipment (balls, weights, etc.). • Athletes should wash their hands for a minimum of 20 seconds with warm water and soap before and after any participation. • Athletes should have access at all times to hand-sanitizer including inside, outside and during transfer from one location to the next. • Damaged equipment including benches, athletic pads, etc. having holes with exposed foam should be covered.
Physical activity & athletic equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitions with modifications involving moderate- to high- risk sports may begin. This may include fewer games in season, local events only, smaller rosters, inter-club games rather than outside clubs, etc. • Modified practices may begin for high-risk sports. Pre-screening guidelines as in Phases 1 and 2 should be followed. • Athletes should refrain from sharing athletic apparel (towels, clothing, shoes, etc.). If needed, an athlete should label or uniquely identify his or her own apparel so others do not use it. • Athletes should have access at all times to hand-sanitizer during participation in sports. • All athletic equipment, including balls, should be cleaned before and after each use. They should also be cleaned periodically during training/competition as well. • Athletes should return home immediately after activity and take a shower. Clothes should be washed immediately, as well as separately from other clothes in the household.
Hydration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All athletes should bring and label their own water bottle. Water bottles must not be shared. • Hydration stations (water cows, water trough, water fountains, etc.) are allowed for use but must be cleaned after every practice and contest.

These guidelines are a general informational resource current as of June 3, 2020 and should not be considered medical or expert advice for participation in any activity. Readers are urged to consult the most up-to-date recommendations of federal, state and local public health officials and to consult their own qualified health providers about any specific issues or circumstances they may have. Neither the authors, American Family Children's Hospital/UW Health nor Children's Wisconsin warrant that the information contained in these guidelines is in every respect accurate or complete, and they are not responsible for any errors in, omissions from, or results obtained from the use of these guidelines.

Contact us at ktase@chw.org or uwhealth.org/51964 for sport specific guidance or any additional questions.

Further Resources

"Opening up America Again." *The White House*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/>. Accessed: 5/6/2020.

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