



## **2020-21 Softball Rules Considerations: 3/3/21 (subject to change)**

In support of the Guidance for Opening Up High School Athletics and Activities, the NFHS Softball Rules Committee and the NJSIAA staff offers this document to consider whether any possible rules could be altered for the 2020-21 softball season. The considerations outlined in this document are meant to decrease potential exposure to respiratory droplets by encouraging social distancing, limiting participation in administrative tasks to essential personnel and allowing for appropriate protective equipment.

Note: This is not an exhaustive list and there might be additional steps in each school, city, and state to help prevent the spread of virus. Even when taking all precautions, there will still be risk of transmitting illnesses. Everyone should stay vigilant about the health of members of their teams. Lastly, the situation with Covid-19 is rapidly changing. These considerations may quickly become outdated. Please keep up with the latest from the CDC and other health officials in New Jersey.

### **Return to Competition**

#### **General Considerations:**

- Social distancing of at least 6 feet should always be maintained. No hugging, shaking hands, or fist bumps for support/encouragement.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and exercise equipment including balls.
- 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 face covering that covers your nose and mouth in public settings unless doing so would inhibit the individual's health.
- Cover mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Discard the tissue.
- Stay at home if you are sick.
- Local school protocols must be communicated effectively with all parties.
- ***Pre and Post Game Ceremony:*** Establish softball specific social distancing game protocols including the elimination of handshakes before and after the match.
- Spectators and media personnel are required to wear face coverings, unless doing so would inhibit the individual's health.

### Considerations for Coaches:

- Communicate your guidelines in a clear manner to students and parents.
- Consider conducting workouts in “pods” of same students always training and rotating together in practice to ensure more limited exposure if someone develops an infection.
- Keep accurate records of those athletes and staff who attend each practice in case contact tracing is needed.
- Coaches are required to wear face coverings, unless doing so would inhibit the coach’s health.
- Coach your team and limit interaction with officials to key questions at the appropriate time. This season is all about participation and an opportunity for the students to engage in educational athletics.
- Establish dugout and or bench protocols to remain socially distanced.
- Players are to be instructed there will be no plate celebrations after a big hit, home run etc.
- Pitchers must be instructed to avoid placing fingers in their mouth or blowing on their hands, but rather instructed on the use of a rosin bag.
- There will be no tolerance for confronting umpires and may result in a game ejection.

### Considerations for Students:

- Consider making each student responsible for their own supplies.
- If protective equipment is used, it must be labeled and not shared.
- Each catcher should use their own equipment.
- The sharing of helmets, gloves and bats shall be determined by the school.
- Students should wear their own appropriate workout clothing (do not share clothing), and individual clothing/towels should be washed and cleaned after every workout.
- Hand sanitizer should be plentiful at all contests and practices.
- Athletes should tell coaches immediately when they are not feeling well.
- Student-athletes are required to wear face coverings, unless doing so would inhibit the student’s health, the student is in extreme heat outdoors, the student is engaged in high intensity aerobic or anaerobic activities.
- Face coverings are required when meeting with officials, unless doing so would inhibit the student’s health. (Pre-game meeting)
- All players on the bench and anyone in the dugout must wear face coverings, unless doing so would inhibit the student’s health.
- **PITCHERS: may not wear optic yellow face coverings. PITCHERS** are encouraged to use a rosin bag and **should not put their fingers in their mouth or blow on their hands** prior to pitching.
- Bring your own water bottle.
- Students are expected to handle the game ball, not the officials. Recommendation is to avoid hand contact if possible.
- Hands should be cleaned periodically with hand sanitizer.
- There will no tolerance for confronting officials and may result in a game ejection.
- If you are not feeling well, please stay home. Be a role model and a selfless teammate.

### **Considerations for Parents**

(A family's role in maintaining safety guidelines for themselves and others):

- Make sure your child and immediate household members are free from illness before participating in practice and competition (if there is doubt stay home),
- Provide personal items for your child and clearly label them.
- Disinfect your student's personal equipment after each game or practice.
- Parents are required to wear face coverings, unless doing so would inhibit the individual's health.
- Reminder to all this season is about participation so let the players play, let the coaches' coach, and let the officials officiate while you enjoy watching your child's team participate in educational athletics.

### **Considerations for Umpires:**

- Bring personal hand sanitizer, tissues, towels etc. Wash hands frequently.
- Don't share equipment.
- Bring your own water bottle (filled).
- Players should always handle the game ball.
- Umpires should not handle bats, helmets, gloves, or other equipment.
- Follow social distancing guidelines. Consider six feet minimum distance when talking to players, coaches, other umpires.
- The NJSIAA Sportsmanship Statement will be read to one coach and one captain from each team, maintaining social distancing.
- Meeting with coaches and captains should be conducted maintaining social distancing and face masks should be worn by all at the meeting. Limit the attendees in the pregame conference to officials, head coach and one captain from each team.
- Do not shake hands and follow pre- and post-game ceremony guidelines established by state associations.
- Umpires are required to wear face coverings, unless doing so would inhibit the official's health, or the umpire is in extreme heat outdoors, or the umpire is engaged in high intensity aerobic or anaerobic activities.
- School protocols will dictate temperature checks, questionnaires, and the like.
- Umpires should not expect a changing area. Bathrooms will be at the discretion of the site, again following all protocols in place by that school.
- Umpires not feeling well should turn back their assignment and contact the school and assignor immediately.

### **Softballs:**

- The home team should have available 8 game balls. The visiting team will be given 4 game balls.
- The defensive team is responsible for game ball use which should include foul ball retrieval and periodic replacement or sanitizing as needed.
- After the game, the visiting team will return any remaining game balls to the home team.

## **NFHS Softball Rules:**

### **1. Softball Rule Considerations**

**Face Shields (1-7-1, 1-8-4)** - Per guidance from the NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC), plastic shields covering the entire face (**unless integrated into the face mask and attached to a helmet and clear without the presence of any tint**) shall not be allowed during contests. Their use during practices increases the risk of unintended injury to the person wearing the shield or to teammates.

**Additional Equipment (1-8):** Student-athletes are required to wear face coverings, unless doing so would inhibit the student's health, the student is in extreme heat outdoors, the student is engaged in high intensity aerobic or anaerobic activities.  
Pitchers may not wear optic yellow cloth face coverings.

**Pregame Conference (2-14-2):** Limit attendees to one coach and one captain from each team plus the umpires. Coaches should stay outside the width of the batter's box at home plate, maintaining 6 feet of distance between each person.

**Substitutions: (3-3-3):** The verbal exchange should occur 6 feet from the coach to scorer and opposing team when making lineup changes.

**Coaching (3-5-1 NOTE):** Umpires do not handle equipment on the field during play. Contact with the game balls should be as limited as possible. There are several strategies to protect the student-athlete from cross contamination due to exposure to game balls. See note above.

**Coaching (3-5-3, 3-6-14):** Coaches who wish to discuss a rule or a ruling on the field must maintain at least 6 feet of distance from the umpire.

**Coaching (3-5-2):** Base coaches should always stay 6 feet from a runner after suspension of play.

**Bench and Field Conduct (3-6-6):** Players are not permitted to leave the dugout area to congratulate players when scoring or after home runs. The number of individuals in the dugout is dependent on the size of dugout. Players and coaches must maintain 6 feet of social distance.

NFHS rules allow for dugouts/designated warm-up areas to be extended to provide for social distancing.

**Charged Conferences (3-7-1, 3-7-2, 3-7-3):** Coaches holding defensive conferences must stay on the home plate side of the pitcher's circle, and the player or players must be on the opposite side of the pitcher's circle maintaining 6 feet of distance. No more than two players plus the pitcher are allowed. Only one coach is permitted during the conference. If a coach visits the pitcher, all other players should stay outside the pitching circle.

**Exchange of Lineup Cards (4-2-1b):** Lineups should be handed to the umpire, and the umpire will verbally approve or ask any questions about the lineup. It is recommended that lineup cards be exchanged team to team and teams to scorekeeper to be shared via photo or text.

**Plate Umpire (10-2-1):** The plate umpire may stand deeper than normal to call balls and strikes.

**Equipment and Apparel (10-4-2):** Umpires are required to wear face coverings, unless doing so would inhibit the official's health, or the umpire is in extreme heat outdoors, or the umpire is engaged in high intensity aerobic or anaerobic activities. The umpire may wear disposable gloves.

## **2. Softball Umpires Manual Considerations**

### **Mechanics Sections 3, 4b and c**

Base umpires should maintain 6 feet of distance from any player as a starting position when rotated and/or counter rotated.

### **Section 2E**

The catcher and batter should be 6 feet apart when the umpire is dusting off the plate.