



Guidance for Sports Activities

May 28, 2021

Summary

This “Guidance for Sports Activities” published by the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) is intended to guide organizations that oversee sports activities as they resume operations to ensure the health and safety of staff, participants, and their families. The Guidance address skill-building drills and team-based practices as described in the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) Guidance on Youth Sports](#).

This guidance document does not apply to professional or collegiate sports activities or US national team activities.

High school sporting activities under the jurisdiction of the New Jersey Interscholastic Athletic Association (NJSIAA) must abide by NJSIAA protocols, which shall consider NJDOH guidance. Club, recreation, and travel teams must follow NJDOH guidance to ensure the safety of athletes and others involved in the sport.

The public health data on which this document is based can and do change frequently. Organizers should check back frequently for updates. NJDOH also encourages organizers to keep informed of guidance from the CDC, which may change regularly.

Note that this document does not apply to sports-related activities during school hours, such as physical fitness classes, which continue to be guided by Executive Order No. 175 and related guidance materials from the Departments of Education and Health. This document, including the revised policy on masking, does apply to extracurricular sports activities, even where they are performed on school property.

Youth and Adult Sports Interstate Restrictions

All interstate outdoor games and tournaments for youth sports, up to and including high school, are permitted as of March 19, 2021, and indoor interstate youth competitions are permitted as of May 19, 2021. Interstate youth sports competition includes any sports game, scrimmage, tournament, or similar competition that is conducted outdoors with opposing teams or individuals from different states competing against each other and which would require an opposing team or individual to travel from a state outside of New Jersey.

Indoor competitions are subject to the gatherings limit for non-professional, non-collegiate sports activities, as most recently laid out in Executive Order No. 239. Effective June 4, 2021, these events will not be subject to any numerical limit in indoor settings. Social distancing is encouraged for all athletes (when not actively participating in activity), coaches, referees, trainers, and spectators, in both indoor and outdoor settings, regardless of vaccination status. Individuals are not required to wear masks at indoor or outdoor events, unless the operator imposes its own requirements. Unvaccinated individuals are encouraged to wear masks.

While New Jersey’s Travel Advisory is no longer in effect, individuals are encouraged to review CDC guidance regarding travel before participating in interstate activities, available here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/travel-during-covid19.html>.



Sports program operators must abide by the following risk assessment chart:

Risk Level	Examples	Permissible Activities	Prohibited Activities
High risk - Sports that involve close, sustained contact between participants	Rugby, boxing, judo, karate, taekwondo, wrestling, pair figure skating, football, group dance, group cheer.	All activities are permitted	None
Medium Risk - Sports that involve some close, sustained contact, but with protective equipment in place between participants OR intermittent close contact OR group sports OR sports that use equipment that cannot be cleaned between participants.	Lacrosse, hockey, multi-person rowing, multi-person kayaking, multi-person canoeing, water polo, swimming relays, fencing, cycling in a group, running in a close group, group sailing, volleyball, soccer, basketball, baseball/softball, short track.	All activities are permitted	None
Low Risk - Sports that can be done individually, do not involve person-to-person contact and do not routinely entail individuals interacting within six feet of one another	Archery, shooting/clay target, individual running events, individual cycling events, individual swimming, individual rowing, individual diving, equestrian jumping or dressage, golf, individual sailing, weightlifting, skiing, snowboarding, tennis, individual dance, pole vault, high jump, long jump, marathon, triathlon, cross country, track and field, disc golf, badminton.	All activities are permitted	None



Guidance for Operations

Outdoor and Indoor Sports and Athletic Facilities Organizations, businesses, schools, and government entities that operate outdoor and indoor sports facilities, such as athletic fields, courts and other playing surfaces, pools, and sailing and boating facilities that are permitted to reopen their premises and facilities to adult sports and supervised youth sport leagues, summer sports camps, and other athletic activities should follow the safety measures outlined below. As a reminder, municipalities retain the discretion to open or close municipal fields or facilities.

1. Preparing a Sports Program for Practices

- a. Each sports program should create a plan (“program preparation plan”) to ensure the following:
 - i. Identify adult staff members or volunteers to help remind coaches, players and staff of social distancing. Use of signs, tapes or physical barriers can be used to assist with guiding social distancing requirements.
 - ii. Within the program, consider creating consistent groups of the same staff, volunteers, and athletes, and avoid mixing between groups.
 - iii. Individuals shall remain 6 feet apart from one another whenever possible. This applies to athletes, coaching staff, and referees, as well as parents/guardians and other spectators to the extent they are permitted.
 - iv. Unvaccinated individuals are strongly encouraged to wear face masks, subject to the conditions outlined above, particularly where social distancing cannot be maintained. Face masks should **not** be worn when engaged in activities that may cause the cloth face covering to become wet, like when swimming, or when doing so may endanger the individual’s health. When face masks are not worn, efforts should be made to maintain at least 6 feet from others
 - v. Create staggered schedules to limit contact between groups and/or players.
 - vi. 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.
 - vii. All staff should be educated on COVID-19 health and safety protocols prior to the resumption of athletic activities, including:
 1. Revised practice rules and regulations in place during COVID-19;
 2. The importance of staying home when experiencing symptoms of COVID- 19 or residing with someone experiencing symptoms of COVID- 19;
 3. Social distancing and facecoverings;
 4. Proper hand hygiene;
 5. How to address a situation in which an athlete presents with symptoms of COVID-19; and



6. How do address situations in which social distancing or other necessary requirements are challenged by athletes or parents/guardians/visitors.
- viii. Educate athletes and coaching staff about when they should stay home and when they can return to activity.
 1. Actively encourage sick staff, families, and players to stay home. Develop policies that encourage sick employees to stay at home without fear of reprisal, and ensure employees are aware of these policies.
 2. [Individuals, including coaches, players, and families, should stay home](#) if they have tested positive for or are showing COVID-19 [symptoms](#).
 3. Individuals, including coaches, players, and families, who have recently had a [close contact](#) with a person with COVID-19 should also [stay home and monitor their health](#).
 4. Immediately separate coaches, staff, officials, and athletes with COVID- 19 symptoms at any sports activity. Individuals who have had close contact with a person who has symptoms should be separated and sent home as well, and follow [CDC guidance for community-related exposure](#).
 5. Establish procedures for safely transporting anyone who is sick to their home or to a healthcare facility.
 - ix. All athletes, coaches, and staff should bring their own water and drinks to practice activities. Team water coolers for sharing through disposable cups and other types of shared water sources should not be permitted
 - x. Encourage athletes to use their own equipment to the extent possible.
 - xi. Discourage sharing of equipment as much as possible. If equipment is shared, coaching staff should be aware of the sanitation procedures for team equipment (balls, bats, etc.) and sufficient disinfecting wipes or similar products should be made available. Consult CDC guidance for cleaning and disinfection.
 - xii. Locker rooms are permitted to open.
 1. Only individually partitioned showers or communal showers with installed barriers/partitions (at least 6 feet apart) are permitted.
 2. Close or mark lockers to enforce 6 feet social distancing. Ensure signage is in place to reminding athletes to maintain proper physical distancing of 6 feet in locker room.
- b. Communicate applicable details of the plan to parents/guardians and/or participants before commencing practices.
 - c. Organizers should further consult and implement, as appropriate, recommendations listed in the CDC guidance regarding assessing risk, promoting healthy behaviors, and maintaining a healthy environment during youth sports.



2. Preparing an Indoor or Outdoor Facility for Sports Practices

- a. Each facility that will be used for practices should:
 - i. Post signage in highly visible locations with reminders regarding social distancing protocols, face covering requirements, and good hygiene practices (e.g., hand hygiene, covering coughs);
 - ii. Reduce crowding around entrances, exits, and other high-traffic areas of the facility;
 - iii. Ensure routine and frequent cleaning and disinfecting, particularly of high-touch surfaces in accordance with CDC recommendations;
 - iv. Limit occupancy in restrooms that remain open to avoid overcrowding, maintain social distancing through signage and, where practicable, utilize attendants to monitor capacity; and
 - v. Have hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, soap and water, or other sanitizing materials readily available at entrances, exits, benches, dugouts, and any other area prone to gathering or high traffic.
 - vi. On any given field or space, provide for sufficient space between designated groups to prevent interaction.
- b. Indoor facilities should ensure appropriate indoor air/ventilation by:
 - i. Keeping doors and windows open where possible and utilize fans to improve ventilation.
 - ii. Inspect and evaluate the heating, ventilation and conditioning (HVAC) unit to ensure that the system is operating within its design specifications and according to existing building code standards.
 - iii. Conducting routine maintenance as recommended by the manufacturer or HVAC professional.
 - iv. Within the design specification of the HVAC unit:
 1. Increasing the volume of outdoor air to the maximum capacity while the gym is occupied.
 2. Reducing the volume of recirculated air being returned to the indoor spaces
 3. Increasing the volume of air being delivered to the indoor spaces to the maximum capacity
 4. Selecting maximum filtration levels for the HVAC unit.
 5. Ensuring that the HVAC unit runs continuously while the facility is occupied.
 6. Ensuring that the HVAC unit runs for at least two hours before and two hours after the facility is occupied.
 7. Considering installing portable air cleaners equipped with a high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter to increase the amount of clean air within the facility.
 8. Reviewing and following the latest CDC guidance for ventilation requirements.



3. Conducting Sports Practices

- a. All athletes, coaches, staff and others participating in practices and competitions should be screened, via temperature check and/or health questionnaire¹, at the beginning of each session. Players, coaches, staff, and volunteers showing symptoms of COVID-19 should not be permitted to participate. If any individual develops symptoms of COVID-19 during the activity, they should promptly inform organizers, be removed from the activity and instructed to return home.
- b. Coaches, staff, visitors and athletes will be required to abide by the gatherings/ limitations as set forth in Executive Orders and/or Administrative Orders in effect at the time of competition.
- c. Encourage practice activities that do not involve sustained person-to-person contact between athletes and/or coaching staff and limit such activities in indoor settings. For example, focus on individual skill-building activities.
- d. Adhere to precautions outlined in the program preparation plan.
- e. Ensure that athletes and coaches adhere to social distancing while not actively involved in practice activities (on the bench, in the dugout, etc.). Consider assigning coaching staff to monitor sideline social distancing.
- f. If any equipment is provided by the operator, operators should minimize equipment sharing and clean and disinfect shared equipment at the end of a practice session using a product from the list of disinfectants meeting EPA criteria for use against the novel coronavirus. Do not permit athletes to share food, beverages, water bottles, towels, pinnies, gloves, helmets or any other equipment or materials that is involved in direct bodily contact.
- g. Consider dividing larger teams into smaller groups and staggering practices at different times or across different days.
- h. Unvaccinated individuals are strongly encouraged to wear masks, particularly where social distancing cannot be maintained.
- i. Where they are permitted, operators are encouraged to mark off spectator/chaperone viewing sites to allow for social distancing. Visitors showing symptoms of COVID-19 should not be permitted to attend.
- j. Restrict spitting, handshakes, high-fives, team huddles, and any other close- contacting activities.

¹ Examples of appropriate screening documents can be accessed at <https://www.cdc.gov/screening/paper-version.pdf> (CDC screener), or https://www.njsiaa.org/sites/default/files/documents/2020-10/covid-19-screening-questions_0.pdf (NJSIAA screener).



4. Preparing for games and tournaments

Competitions, tournaments, invitationals, and other activities or events that involve interaction between athletes from the same team or between teams, while permitted, carry [significant risks](#) that operators, towns, coaches, parents and others should carefully consider before proceeding. If participating in or organizing a competition, tournament, or invitational:

- a. Follow protocols listed above under “conducting sports practices.”
- b. Coaches, staff, visitors and athletes will be required to comply with the gathering limitations, as set forth in Executive Directives and Administrative Orders, in effect at the time of competition.
- c. Concession stands should meet the requirements for indoor and outdoor dining outlined in the applicable Executive Orders and Executive Directives.
- d. Consider social distancing requirements when scheduling contests and events. Social distancing will need to be maintained on buses/vans. Thus, multiple buses/vans and/or individual parent/guardian transportation will likely be required. Games should be scheduled at intervals that allow for proper sanitation of facilities and equipment following each game.

Additional notes:

- **Contract Tracing/Public Health Investigation:** Operators, coaches, participants, and others engaging in sports activities must cooperate with local health departments (LHDs) on contact tracing. Contact tracing is the process used to identify those who have come into contact with people who have tested positive for many contagious diseases, including COVID-19. It is a long-standing practice and is an integral function of LHDs. Given that club sports teams and recreational sports teams are comprised of students enrolled in local school districts, it will be necessary for both club/recreational youth sports staff and school district staff, including but not limited to administrators, school nurses, school safety specialists, counselors, and any other staff deemed appropriate by the school district, to collaborate with and assist LHDs with contact tracing in the event of illness of a player, coach, referee, athletic trainer, and/or anyone else involved with a sports team/group. Additionally, all school districts and club/recreational youth sports staff should collaborate with LHDs to develop contact tracing policies and procedures, as well as identify the best methods to educate the broader school and youth sports community on the importance of the public health investigation and contact tracing.
- **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. Operators and coaches should encourage all participants to abide by applicable infection control protocols outside of the sports activity.
- **Testing of participants.** Testing is recommended if an athlete, coach, or other team member is sick, was exposed to a person who has COVID-19 or had “close contact” with an individual. Any further testing recommendations are dependent on the re-evaluation of the state’s testing priorities.