

Winter Sports Programs for the 2020-2021 School Year

Rev. November 3, 2020

Background

The following guidance provides direction on school-sponsored winter sports programs for students K-12. This guidance is applicable to both public and independent schools. It was developed with input from public health experts and educators.

All players, coaches, officials, staff and spectators should complete a health check before arriving at school-sponsored practice sessions, scrimmages, games, meets or competitions.

The daily monitoring for COVID-19 exposure and symptoms schools conduct consistent with the Agency of Education's [Strong and Healthy Start](#) guidance is sufficient for student athletes. At a minimum, a temperature screening should be conducted for all people present and they should be asked to consider the following questions:

1. Have you been in close contact with a person who has COVID-19? If yes, have you been directed by the Department of Health to quarantine?
2. Have you travelled outside the State of Vermont in the past 14 days? If yes, have you complied with Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) and Department of Health guidance around quarantine?
3. Do you feel unwell with any symptoms consistent with COVID-19? For example, have you had fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, congestion or runny nose, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell, nausea or vomiting, or diarrhea?

Should data emerge that indicate evidence of COVID-19 transmission resulting from interscholastic games, meets or competitions, additional restrictions may become necessary, including but not limited to the widespread cancellation of games, meets and competitions. Such decisions will be made by the Department of Health after consultation with the Agency of Education (AOE), and may be made independent of any changes related to academic instruction under the AOE's [Strong and Healthy Start](#) guidance.

General Guidance

Practices and Scrimmages

School-based winter sports programs may initiate coach-led practice sessions (e.g., skills and drills work) and inter-squad scrimmages (within a school program) no earlier than November 30, 2020. Students traveling out-of-state over the Thanksgiving holiday, or at any other point in time, must follow ACCD and Department of Health guidance around quarantine before returning to school; the same quarantine requirements also apply to participating in any school-based activity, including sports. **Out-of-state travel to participate in any recreational sports activity currently requires a mandatory quarantine upon return.** More information is

available on the [Vermont Department of Health's COVID-19 travel site](#) and in the [Agency of Commerce and Community Development's Phased Restart guidance](#).

Facial coverings are required to be worn by all players, coaches, officials, staff and spectators at all times, including during active play. Students who have a medical or behavioral reason for not wearing a facial covering should not be required to wear one; these decisions should be made in partnership with the health care provider and school nurse.

An exception is provided for participants in outdoor sports during interscholastic meets/competitions, as long as a minimum of six feet of physical distancing can be maintained between individual participants at all times using staggered starts or other means, and for gymnasts engaged in activities that require inversion (i.e., tumbling, vaulting, bars, etc.).

Any officials working indoor games or competitions must properly mask at all times and use an electronic, handheld whistle. For outdoor sports, referees and other game officials are exempt from wearing a mask during active play if masking inhibits their ability to officiate (i.e., blow a whistle). Referees and other game officials must have a mask on their person at all times and are required to wear a mask during arrival, departure, warm-ups, half-time, etc., and anytime there is need to approach a player or coach to explain a call or manage the game when six feet of physical distance cannot be maintained.

When schools are operating under Step I of the AOE's [Strong and Healthy Start](#) guidance or if a decision is made by the local superintendent to restrict or eliminate in-person instruction as a result of confirmed COVID-19 illness in student(s) or staff, all school-based athletic activities shall cease until at least such time as the decision to resume academic instruction under Step II of the AOE guidance is made by the local superintendent after consultation with the Department of Health.

Understanding that team-based social events are often considered an integral component of school-sponsored sports programs – and also that more frequent, extended physical or close contact increases the risk of COVID-19 transmission between team members should an outbreak occur – team-based social gatherings are strongly discouraged until all other COVID-19-specific restrictions regulating school-based sports are fully lifted.

Competitions

If permitted under [Guidance for Specific Types of Sports](#) (below), **school-sponsored winter sports programs may initiate interscholastic games, meets and competitions when Vermont schools no earlier than January 11, 2021**, as long as the school is operating under Step III of the Agency of Education's [Strong and Healthy Start](#) guidance. Again, students traveling out-of-state during the holidays must follow ACCD and Health Department guidance around quarantine before returning to school or participating in school-based or recreational sports.

Games and meets may only occur between or involve Vermont-based teams and interstate teams where the school fully adheres to the AOE [Strong and Healthy Start](#) guidance.

Parents/caregivers or other designated adults should be encouraged to transport participants to off-site, interscholastic games to minimize the number of participants requiring bus transportation. Anyone utilizing shared transport (i.e., bus or carpooling with anyone outside their immediate household unit) is required to wear facial coverings and comply with all other relevant guidelines in the most current health guidance published by the Agency of Education related to buses and transportation. Regardless of weather conditions, steps must be taken to maintain constant airflow through the vehicle, including wearing appropriate clothing during cold weather so that windows may remain open.

Concerns related to compliance with these guidelines are best addressed to school administration or the local facility manager; on-going concerns may also be submitted via the Executive Order Reporting Tool on the [Department of Public Safety website](#).

Guidance for Specific Types of Sports

The risk associated with different types of sports programs is a function of the degree of contact between participants and the type of setting or venue in which the contest is held. The following requirements reflect these differences and create a framework that appropriately limits risk.

In all cases, athletes should arrive for practices, games, meets and competitions dressed to play to the maximum extent practicable in order to minimize or eliminate time spent in locker rooms. Avoid congregating before, during and after practice; promote an “arrive, play and leave” mentality. Any locker room use must adhere to all physical distancing and masking requirements.

Teams should prioritize non-contact activity, such as conditioning and drills where physical distance can be maintained.

Outdoor Sports Involving No or Low-Contact

Nordic skiing, downhill skiing and snowboarding may hold team practice sessions and interscholastic meets and competitions. The number of participants in any meet or competition may not exceed current limits on event size – currently 150 for outdoor events; event sites may choose to implement additional restrictions or requirements that school-sponsored sports programs will need to observe.

A meet may involve multiple groupings through the day if the groups do not interact with one another. For example, meet organizers may consider staggered starts and departures to ensure the number of participants on-location at a single point in time does not exceed limits on event size. Meet organizers must maintain lists of participants in each grouping for 30 days to assist in contact tracing.

Spectators at Outdoor Sports Events

The number of spectators should be limited as much as possible and measures should be put in place to ensure social distancing between households. Interactions between spectators and

participants should be minimized before, during and after events. At no time shall the total number of spectators exceed current limits on event size – currently 150 for outdoor events.

Indoor Sports Involving No or Low Contact

Bowling, dance and gymnastics may hold team practice sessions and interscholastic meets and competitions. The number of participants in any meet or competition may not exceed current limits on event size – currently no more than 1 person per 100 square feet to a maximum of 75 people in any indoor space 17,100 square feet or smaller in size. Large indoor spaces with more than 17,100 square feet and 10' ceilings may have up to 150 people indoors. Events should be structured in a manner that ensures a minimum of six feet of physical distance is maintained between individual participants for all non-essential activities (e.g. spotting a routine is allowed). A meet or competition may involve multiple groupings through the day if the groups do not interact with one another. For example, meet organizers may consider staggered starts and departures to ensure the number of participants on-location at a single point in time does not exceed limits on event size. Meet organizers must maintain lists of participants in each grouping for 30 days to assist in contact tracing.

Indoor track will not be sanctioned during the Winter 2020-21 season due to concerns related to training and restrictions on meet venues.

Indoor Sports Involving Close Proximity or Moderate Contact

Cheerleading squads may hold practice sessions and competitions. Stunt groups should be kept together in their cohort; refrain from mixing and matching bases and tops from different groups. Six feet of physical distance should be maintained between individual stunt groups when possible (i.e., when not building pyramids). Modifications to skills (i.e., stunting and lifts) should be considered to ensure participant safety while wearing face coverings, such as limiting inversions, twisting, and tosses. Because of the increased risk of transmission associated with vocalization, cheerleading squads may not perform vocal routines in practice sessions or competitions during the Winter 2020-21 season.

Basketball and hockey programs may hold team practice sessions, inter-squad scrimmages and interscholastic competitions. Teams must implement measures to ensure six feet of physical distance is maintained between players not actively involved in game play.

Indoor sports teams engaged in interscholastic competition in sports that involve close proximity or moderate contact are limited to no more than two games in any seven-day period and allow a minimum of at least three days between competitions.

Indoor Sports Involving High Contact

Wrestling will not be sanctioned during the Winter 2020-21 season.

Spectators at Indoor Sports Events

Consistent with the Agency of Education's Strong and Healthy Start guidance, and to limit unnecessary exposure, only "key personnel" – players, coaches, officials, time and scorekeepers, and person(s) providing a live video stream – will be allowed to attend school-sponsored

indoor sports events. This requirement is in effect regardless of whether the venue is owned or controlled by the school.

Weight Rooms and Other Indoor Training Facilities

Prioritize outdoor training sessions as much as possible for all sports programs. Use of indoor training facilities, such as weight rooms, must adhere to the most current guidance published by the [Agency of Commerce and Community Development for fitness centers](#) and similar exercise facilities, which currently limits use to 25% of approved fire safety occupancy or one person per 200 square feet. Usage must be structured in a manner that ensures six feet of physical distance between individuals for any activity that will occur for more than a few moments (e.g. spotting a lift).

Return to Play After Illness

Consistent with the most current guidance available from the American Academy of Pediatrics, all children and adolescents (through age 22) diagnosed with COVID-19 infection, regardless of symptom severity, may not return to play until asymptomatic for at least 14 days **and** cleared by their primary care physician.

Adult athletes or others (e.g., referees) who exercise vigorously during an athletic event diagnosed with COVID-19 infection should not return to play or vigorous exercise until asymptomatic for two weeks and cleared by their physician.

Additional Safety Precautions

Facial coverings are required to be worn by all players, coaches, officials, staff and spectators at all times, but for the limited exemptions provided above.

During times when athletes are not actively participating in practice or competition, appropriate physical distancing should be maintained. Teams should structure team meetings to limit congregation and ensure physical distancing between players on the sidelines or benches.

During competition, alter spacing of players, coaches, officials and staff to achieve physical distancing to the greatest extent possible.

Discourage unnecessary physical contact, such as high fives, handshakes, fist bumps or hugs.

School campuses and other venues with multiple facilities (such as multi-rink locations, multi-court gyms) may have more than one unit of the maximum event size as long as those units are in distinct portions of the facility (a different gym, unique and distinct rinks) and the distinct gatherings have no interaction with one another (for example, a basketball team and a cheer squad should not have access to the same locker room at the same time).

Equipment and other supplies touched by participants must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected regularly. Limit sharing equipment as much as possible.

No spitting or expulsion of bodily fluids of any sort on the playing service (field, court, ice, etc.), or anywhere in or around the playing service or in the facility.

No sharing of water bottles.

If restroom facilities (including portalets) will be provided for spectators, they should be cleaned and disinfected regularly, consistent with CDC guidance. If restroom facilities will not be available for public use, notify spectators ahead of time so they can prepare appropriately.

Concession operations must adhere to the most current guidance published by the Agency of Commerce and Community Development for food service operations.

Guidance for Spring Sports

These guidelines will be reviewed on or about January 1, 2021, and guidelines for school-based spring sports programs will be published by March 1, 2021.