

**PENNSYLVANIA INTERSCHOLASTIC HOCKEY LEAGUE
SAFETY POLICY REQUIRING FACE COVERINGS**

Revised and Effective 11-21-20

In response to the Updated Order of the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health Requiring Universal Face Coverings, effective and enforceable as of November 18, 2020 at 12:01 a.m., the Guidance for All Sports Permitted to Operate During the COVID-19 Disaster Emergency to Ensure the Safety and Health of Employees, Athletes and the Public, updated November 19, 2020, and the Updated Order of the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health Requiring Universal Face Coverings Frequently Asked Questions, updated November 20, 2020, the PIHL is now implementing the following Safety Policy Requiring Face Coverings, effective immediately:

Every individual who participates in a PIHL sanctioned practice or game, including coaches, athletes and referees, must wear a face covering at all times, including in the locker room, on the bench and during game play, unless subject to an exception as set forth below.

A “face covering” shall mean a piece of material covering the nose and mouth and secured to the head with ties, straps, or loops over the ears. It shall also include fabric wrapped around the lower face, covering the nose and mouth, in the form of what is commonly known as a neck gaiter.

The following are exceptions to the requirement to wear a face covering which may arise relative to a PIHL sanctioned practice or game, as set forth by the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health:

- When necessary to confirm the individual’s identity.
- If an individual is communicating or seeking to communicate with someone who is hearing-impaired or has another disability, where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication.
- If wearing a face covering would either cause a medical condition, or exacerbate an existing one, including respiratory issues that impede breathing, a mental health condition or a disability.

The Secretary has provided the following guidance to help athletes assess whether the medical exception to face coverings applies in their case:

Can an athlete remove their mask during play if the mask causes a medical condition, including respiratory issues that impede breathing?

Yes, the Order provides an exception in Section 3 that provides that if wearing a face covering would either cause a medical condition, or exacerbate an existing one, including respiratory issues that impede breathing, a mental health condition or a disability. The Order indicates all alternatives to wearing a face covering, including the use of a face shield, should be exhausted before an individual is excepted from this Order.

Using football as an example, wearing a mask in addition to a mouth guard and a helmet would likely create a medical issue for the athlete whether the athlete is a professional or youth player even if a previous medical issue was not present. For example, the CDC says that “wearing a mask with these types of protective equipment is not safe if it makes it hard to breathe.”

There are other sports where there are similar concerns that a mask would create a medical issue where one would otherwise not exist in an athlete. For example, it should also be obvious that wearing a mask while swimming presents an imminent health issue.

According to Section 3, the athlete would be asked to work through the alternatives that would reduce or eliminate the respiratory droplets that would impact others in proximity. If the sport, equipment, or exertion level does not allow for face covering to be worn safely then the athlete should not wear a face covering.

There are no exemptions for specific sports, leagues, teams, or levels. We know that some people don't like masks. We are asking everyone to please give this their best effort so we can continue these activities and others as well all unite to fight COVID-19.

Under this Guidance issued from the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health, if wearing a helmet, mouth guard and face covering would cause a medical condition, exacerbate an existing one, or make it hard for an athlete to breathe, then the exception applies.

It is each Member Association's responsibility to make sure its players and coaches are aware of this Safety Policy Requiring Face Coverings and to disseminate within its organization any changes in this policy.

It is also each Member Association's responsibility to require compliance with this Safety Policy Requiring Face Coverings at all PIHL sanctioned events by its coaching staff and players to ensure the safety of the players, coaches, their families and the general public.

This Safety Policy Requiring Face Coverings is subject to change and may be updated as more information becomes available or as further laws, orders, policies, or procedures are issued by local, state, or federal authorities.