



The Northern Illinois Hockey League wants you to know that we are as eager for hockey to commence as you are. Our ability to do so is dictated by the various COVID-19 regulations and guidelines on COVID-19 health and prevention emanating from Federal, State and Local Governments. The implementation of these protocols is also impacted by local ice rink policies which can vary depending on whether or not the ice rink is a publicly (Municipal or Park District) or privately owned facility. Understanding what is or is not allowed is complicated by the fact that COVID-19 guidance, by design, is constantly developing and changing so that it may adapt to any positive or negative changes in public health at any given moment.

The fluid nature of COVID-19 guidance has caused widespread confusion within the Illinois Hockey community with many conversations beginning with, "Well I heard the rumor that....." Rumors are not facts and rumors do not provide clarity. Without clarity there can be no guidance. Lack of guidance equals a lack of leadership. With these thoughts in mind, what follows is the present state of youth hockey in Illinois together with a road map for how it will move forward.

PRIMARY GOVERNING COVID-19 REGULATIONS AND GUIDELINES

As noted above, there are many COVID-19 regulations and guidelines that have been issued by various levels of government. Ironically, though the regulations and guidelines were presumably designed to simplify the issue and provide answers on how to proceed in the face of COVID-19, the multitude of regulations and guidelines has had the opposite effect of sowing confusion and generating more questions.

Within Illinois, the primary guidelines impacting Youth Hockey include, but are not limited to, the All Sports Policy, Youth Sports Guidance, and Indoor/Outdoor Recreation Facilities Guidance from the State of Illinois. These policies and

guidelines must be read in conjunction with the 11 Emergency Medical Services (EMS) health regions recently designated by Governor Pritzker as part of his "Restore Illinois" COVID-19 health plan.

Illinois All Sports Policy (effective August 15, 2020)

Please see <https://dceocovid19resources.com/assets/Restore-Illinois/businessguidelines4/youthsports.pdf> for the complete Illinois State "All Sports Policy" document which goes into effect on August 15, 2020. The policy is jointly issued by the Illinois State Board of Education (schools) and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (private operators). In a nutshell, the "All Sports Policy" separates youth sports into three separate risk categories (Higher, Medium, and Lower) and creates four levels of play within each risk category which are dictated by current public health conditions. The four levels of play are as follows:

Level 1 No-contact practices, and trainings only;

Level 2 Intra-team scrimmages allowed, with parental consent for minors; no competitive play;

Level 3 Intra-conference or Intra-EMS-region or intra-league play/meets only; state- or league-championship game/meet allowed for low-risk sports only

Level 4 Tournaments, out-of-conference/league play, out-of-state play allowed; championship games allowed

Current Conditions Allow for the Following Types of Play per Sport Risk Level:

- Low-risk sports can currently play at Levels 1, 2, and 3;
- Medium-risk sports can currently play at Level 1 and 2;
- High-risk sports can currently play at Level 1.

EMS Regions are the 11 regions IDPH uses for the Restore Illinois boundaries

11 Emergency Medical Services (EMS) health regions



- **Chicago.**

- **Suburban Cook County (excludes Chicago).**

- **North: Boone, Carroll, DeKalb, Jo Daviess, Lee, Ogle, Stephenson, Whiteside and Winnebago counties.**

- **North-Central: Bureau, Fulton, Grundy, Henderson, Henry, Kendall, Knox, La Salle, Livingston, Marshall, McDonough, McLean, Mercer, Peoria, Putnam, Rock Island, Stark, Tazewell, Warren and Woodford counties.**

- **West-Central: Adams, Brown, Calhoun, Cass, Christian, Greene, Hancock, Jersey, Logan, Macoupin, Mason, Menard, Montgomery, Morgan, Pike, Sangamon, Schuyler and Scott counties.**

- **Metro East: Bond, Clinton, Madison, Monroe, Randolph, St. Clair and Washington counties.**

- **Southern: Alexander, Edwards, Franklin, Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Jackson, Jefferson, Johnson, Marion, Massac, Perry, Pope, Pulaski, Saline, Union, Wabash, Wayne, White and Williamson counties.**

- **East-Central: Champaign, Clark, Clay, Coles, Crawford, Cumberland, De Witt, Douglas, Edgar, Effingham, Fayette, Ford, Iroquois, Jasper, Lawrence, Macon, Moultrie, Piatt, Richland, Shelby and Vermillion counties.**

- **South Suburban: Kankakee and Will counties.**

- **West Suburban: DuPage and Kane counties.**

- **North Suburban: Lake and McHenry counties.**

ILLINOIS YOUTH HOCKEY - LEVEL 1 (Present status - effective August 15, 2020)

According to the Illinois COVID-19 2020 ALL SPORTS POLICY released on July 29, 2020 and effective August 15, 2020, Youth Hockey has been classified as a Higher Risk sport, and the State's assessment of Current Conditions restrict our sport to "Level 1: No-contact practices and trainings only." No competitive play or games of any sort are allowed. At this level, NIHL, and any other Youth hockey league in Illinois, will not be allowed to have a season.

ILLINOIS YOUTH HOCKEY AT LEVEL 2

The decision to move Illinois Hockey to Level 2 will be both determined and made by the State of Illinois. The decision can not be made by NIHL nor by AHAI or USA Hockey. Any contrary assertion is false. The ALL SPORTS POLICY specifically indicates that, "Guidance will be regularly updated as public health conditions change and new information becomes available." There are no specific benchmark statistics or "measureables" available so that the general public will know when a move to Level 2 will be allowed to take place.

What happens when Illinois Youth Hockey moves to Level 2? At Level 2, in addition to all Level 1 permitted activities, teams will also be able to have intra-team scrimmages. No competitive play or games of any sort are allowed. At this level, NIHL, and any other Youth hockey league in Illinois, will not be allowed to have a season.

ILLINOIS YOUTH HOCKEY AT LEVEL 3 (Limited game play may begin)

The decision to move Illinois Hockey to Level 3 will be both determined and made by the State of Illinois. The decision can not be made by NIHL nor by AHAI or USA Hockey. Any contrary assertion is false. The ALL SPORTS POLICY specifically indicates that, "Guidance will be regularly updated as public health conditions change and new information becomes available." There are no specific benchmark statistics or "measureables" available so that the general public will know when a move to Level 3 will be allowed to take place.

What happens when Illinois Youth Hockey moves to Level 3? At Level 3, in addition to all Level 1 and Level 2 permitted activities, limited game play may begin on an Intra-EMS-region or Intra-league play basis; however no league or State Championships will be allowed to take place. Given the large geographic footprint of NIHL teams both within the State of Illinois and in four of the five bordering States (Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri, and Indiana), present guidance is that game play would be allowed on an Intra-EMS-region basis. Based on the 11

presently existing Illinois EMS regions, game play would be extremely limited as clubs would only be able to play other clubs which are also within the same EMS region. For example, the Jets and the Stallions could play one another because they are both in the Chicago EMS region, but they could not play the Express which is in the suburban Cook County EMS region. The EMS region approach lends itself to some likely unintended results due to geography. For example, the Chargers could play the Vikings (45 miles between rinks) because they are both in the suburban Cook County EMS region, but the Chargers could not play the Bruins (15 miles between rinks) because the Bruins are in a different (West Suburban) EMS region. In short, each club would only be able to play games against other clubs within their designated EMS region.

In addition, at Level 3, out-of-state game play is not allowed for Illinois teams. As such, regardless of the public health status in neighboring States which could possibly permit inter-state competition, Illinois teams would be prohibited from traveling to those States based on the presently existing Illinois COVID-19 2020 ALL SPORTS POLICY. As such, the Vikings could play the Chargers (45 miles between rinks) because they are both in the suburban Cook County EMS region, but the Vikings could not play the Midwest Blackbirds (35 miles between rinks) because the Blackbirds are an out-of-state (Indiana) based team. This is true, even if the State of Indiana allows out-of-state teams to come to Indiana to play competitive games.

At Level 3, NIHL could put together an Intra-EMS region based season, albeit one where our end of the year NIHL BLACKHAWKS TOURNAMENT would not be allowed.

ILLINOIS YOUTH HOCKEY AT LEVEL 4 (Return to Normal)

The decision to move Illinois Hockey to Level 4 will be both determined and made by the State of Illinois. The decision can not be made by NIHL nor by AHAI or USA Hockey. Any contrary assertion is false. The ALL SPORTS POLICY specifically indicates that, "Guidance will be regularly updated as public health conditions change and new information becomes available." There are no specific benchmark statistics or "measureables" available so that the general public will know when a move to Level 4 will be allowed to take place.

Stated simply and succinctly, Level 4 is the level at which Illinois Youth Hockey will return to normal and function as it did prior to the onset of the COVID-19

virus. Only at this level could NIHL, or any other Youth Hockey league in Illinois, put together an unrestricted season.

NIHL'S GO FORWARD PLAN

NIHL will adhere to all state guidance issued by the Illinois Department of Health with regard to youth sports with the goal of beginning our season as soon as we are permitted to do so. We are hopeful that the State will re-evaluate the Sport Risk Level they have assigned to Hockey. You may be aware that multiple organizations, leagues and governing bodies are in communication with the State; advocating for Hockey to be re-categorized to the Medium Risk level. We are also anxious to hear the State's plans for the timing of updates to their Current Conditions as it relates to the four Levels of Play within each Risk Level category. NIHL will inform you of changes to the Risk Level and Current Conditions as soon as we are advised.

Presently, in order for league play to begin, we need the State to place Youth Hockey at Level 3 status. Until Hockey achieves Level 3 status, there can be no NIHL games played. Together, with you, we want to make all necessary preparations so that we can begin our season the minute the ILLINOIS COVID-19 2020 ALL SPORTS POLICY impacting youth hockey allows. To ensure that NIHL's clubs and teams are ready to start as soon as the State allows:

- August Preliminary Team Declarations will be collected by August 17.
- Clubs will conduct their Tryouts and input their teams' rosters for AHA certification no later than Labor Day Week.
- The Club Presidents will participate in a September 14 NIHL Meeting at which time they will make their Final Team Declarations and pay their league fees.
- NIHL will prepare credentials for each team's manager that will allow them to sign into and register within StatMGR. Credentials will be emailed to club Presidents on September 21.
- Club Presidents will ensure that every teams' manager signs into and registers within NIHL StatMGR no later than 6:00pm on September 29.
- Team managers will not Schedule with other managers until 2 weeks before games are allowed to begin. NIHL will send a communication to all Team Managers when we are ready for that step.

For NIHL divisions that will start the season with Seeding Rounds, NIHL will make an effort to group those teams based on proximity (regionalization) to each other. This is a change from the normal random assignment of teams to

their Seeding Round groups. The league will be in contact with clubs who are registered outside of the State of Illinois to be sure that all are in sync with the Illinois (City of Chicago too), Indiana, Wisconsin, Iowa and Missouri policies that could impact NIHL's season.

By following this plan our league will be in a position to begin play as soon as the ILLINOIS COVID-19 2020 ALL SPORTS POLICY permits. Let's all do our part so that we can quickly arrive at a situation where we can start to play Hockey!

**Executive Board
Northern Illinois Hockey League**