

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

Issued June 10, 2020, last updated June 22, 2020

Intent

The virus that causes the Coronavirus 2019 Disease (“COVID-19”) is easily transmitted, especially in group settings, and it is essential that the spread of the virus be slowed to safeguard public health and safety.

COVID-19 can be transmitted from infected individuals even if they are asymptomatic or their symptoms are mild, such as a cough. It can also be spread by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes. This guidance document addresses the procedures sports organizations and teams must follow to limit the spread of COVID-19 to the extent they are permitted to conduct in-person operations.

This guidance is preliminary and will be updated as more public health data and other information is available.

Organizations Subject to This Guidance

The Commonwealth is employing a regional and industry-specific approach to reopening non-life sustaining businesses. For more information, and up to date county designations, please refer to the Commonwealth’s Phased Reopening website.

All sports in Pennsylvania, including professional, collegiate, Pre-K to 12 school athletics, and amateur and recreational sports, are covered by this guidance.

Sports organizations and teams may only conduct in-person operations if they are able to do so in accordance with all applicable guidance. They are not required to reopen per this guidance.

Significance of Red-Yellow-Green Phases for Sports in Pennsylvania

No sports (professional, collegiate, Pre-K to 12, recreational or amateur) are allowed in counties designated as being in the Red phase.

Professional Sports

Professional sports is defined as any sporting event at which the participants are paid by a league or team, or at which individuals or teams receive prizes or purse.

Effective immediately, professional sports teams may practice and play in counties designated in the Yellow phase of reopening provided the team, the team's governing body, or league, on behalf of the team, has a COVID-19 safety plan approved by Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH). The plan must include, at minimum, a process for testing or screening for COVID-19, and monitoring all on-premises attendees. In the Yellow phase, no fans or spectators are allowed in or directly outside of the site or venue.

Professional sports organizations in counties designated in the Green phase are permitted to practice or play on site with fewer than 250 people, provided they follow orders issued by the Secretary of Health and recommendations issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other health or athletics-based organizations. The sports organization is not required to submit a safety plan for approval to DOH if fewer than 250 people are present on site or directly outside of the site.

Professional sports organizations in counties designated in the Green phase that want to play or practice with more than 250 people on site or directly outside of the site must submit a plan to DOH for approval. At this stage of reopening, the administration strongly discourages the attendance of spectators or fans in or directly outside of the site or venue.

Collegiate Sports

All collegiate sports sanctioned by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), as well as intramural and club sports, may resume in-person activities in counties designated in the Yellow and Green phases, in alignment with the PA Department of Education (PDE) [Preliminary Guidance for Resuming In-Person Instruction at Post Secondary Higher Education Institutions and Adult Basic Education Providers](#), guidance issued by DOH, the CDC, NCAA, and the team's relevant collegiate athletic conference. Postsecondary institutions must develop and post online an Athletic Health and Safety Plan for resuming sporting activities. The plan does not need to be submitted to DOH or PDE for approval.

While institutions may resume in-person sports-related activities in counties designated in the Yellow and Green phases, the decision to do so is at the discretion of the institution, and such events may only occur in compliance with the Phased Reopening Plan and this Guidance. All sports-related gatherings must conform with the gathering limitations set forth by the Governor's Plan for Phased Reopening (25 in yellow, 250 in green), and the facility as a whole may not exceed 50% of total occupancy otherwise permitted by law. Gatherings' occupancy counts include student athletes, coaches, athletic staff, officials, spectators, site staff, and any other individuals on site during the event. All event attendees, except for the athletes and coaching staff, are expected to maintain social distancing when arriving, attending, and departing the facility.

This guidance is preliminary; as more public health information is available, the administration may work with impacted entities to release further guidance which could impact fall, winter, or spring seasons.

Pre-K to 12 School Sports

Pre-K to 12 (PK-12) school sports under the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA) and the Pennsylvania Independent Schools Athletic Association (PISAA) are permitted to resume in counties designated in the Yellow and Green phases, in alignment with the [PDE Preliminary Guidance for Phased Reopening of Pre-K to 12 Schools](#) and the [CDC Considerations for Youth Sports](#). This also applies to amateur high school boxers under the authority of the State Athletic Commission (SAC).

The decision to resume sports-related activities, including conditioning, practices and games, is the discretion of a school entity's governing body. Each school entity must develop and adopt an Athletics Health and Safety Plan aligning to the [PDE Preliminary Guidance for Phased Reopening of Pre-K to 12 Schools](#) prior to conducting sports-related activities with students. The plan must include the provisions of this guidance, be approved by the local governing body of the school entity, and be posted on the school entity's publicly available website. The plan does not need to be submitted to DOH or PDE for approval.

Any sports-related activities in Yellow or Green phased counties must adhere to the gathering limitations set forth by the Governor's Plan for Phased Reopening (25 in yellow, 250 in green) and the facility as a whole may not exceed 50% of total occupancy otherwise permitted by law. During the Yellow and Green phases of reopening, sports-related activities at the PK-12 level are limited to student athletes, coaches, officials, and staff only. The addition of visitors and spectators will be contingent upon future health conditions within the state and local communities.

This guidance is preliminary; as more public health information is available, the administration may work with impacted entities to release further guidance which could impact fall, winter, or spring seasons.

Recreational and Amateur Sports

Recreational and amateur sports organizations and teams (not affiliated with a public or private PK-12 school), including, but not limited to, basketball, hockey, field hockey, football, soccer, swimming, baseball, softball, lacrosse, gymnastics, and kickball, are permitted to conduct in-person activities, including games and practices, in counties designated as being in the Green phase only if they strictly adhere to the requirements of this guidance, including the limits on total occupancy outlined below. For youth sports, refer to the CDC guidance on youth sports as well.

Boxing Under State Athletic Commission

Amateur boxing is permitted to resume in counties designated in the Yellow and Green phases in alignment with [PDE Preliminary Guidance for Phased Reopening of Pre-K to 12 Schools](#) and the [CDC Considerations for Youth Sports](#), as well as the general guidance detailed on this page.

Guidance Applicable to All Sporting Events

Local political units and school districts may impose more stringent requirements than those contained in this guidance. In such instances, businesses must adhere to this guidance as well as any other requirements imposed by the local political units. Teams and organizations should contact their local political subdivision to discuss their plan to resume play and to notify them of their intention to resume play.

To conduct games and practices, organizations and teams authorized to conduct in-person activities pursuant to this guidance **must adhere to the following**:

- Coaches and league officials must review and consider the CDC guidance on consideration for youth sports to modify practices and games to mitigate the risk of spreading the virus. This includes focusing on individual skill building versus competition and limiting contact in close contact sports.
- The community, league, or team must designate a primary point of contact for all questions related to COVID-19, and all parents, athletes, officials, and coaches must be provided the person's contact information.

- The community, league, or team must develop a plan of action in the event an athlete, coach, or official falls ill, make the plan publicly available, and explain it to the entire sport community.
- The community, league, or team must educate all athletes, staff and families about the symptoms of COVID-19 and when to stay home. Athletes also should be educated on proper hand washing and sanitizing.
- Coaching staff and other adult personnel should wear face coverings (masks or face shields) at all times, unless doing so jeopardizes their health.
- Coaches and athletes must maintain appropriate social distancing at all times possible, including in the field of play, locker rooms, sidelines, dugouts, benches, and workout areas. During down time, athletes and coaches should not congregate.
- Coaches and athletic staff must screen and monitor athletes for symptoms prior to and during games and practices. If individuals participating in sporting activities show symptoms, have a temperature of 100.4 degrees or higher, or are sick, they must be sent home.
- All athletes, coaches, and officials must bring their own water and drinks to team activities. Team water coolers for sharing through disposable cups are not allowed. Fixed water fountains should not be used.
- Activities that increase the risk of exposure to saliva must not be allowed including chewing gum, spitting, licking fingers, and eating sunflower seeds.
- Avoid shaking hands, fist bumps, or high fives before, during or after games and practices. Limit unnecessary physical contact with teammates, other athletes, coaches, officials, and spectators.
- Whenever possible, equipment and other personal items should be separated and not shared. If equipment must be shared, all equipment should be properly disinfected between users.
- If multiple games are to be held at the same facility, adequate time shall be scheduled between contests to allow for facilities to be cleaned and disinfected, and to minimize interaction between athletes. Sports complexes with multiple fields may operate simultaneous games or practices on fields within a complex only if social distancing can be maintained. Each individual game or practice at a complex must adhere to the gathering occupancy limits (25 in yellow, 250 in green), and the facility as a whole may not exceed 50% of total occupancy otherwise permitted by law.
- Concession stands or other food must adhere to the [Guidance for Businesses in the Restaurant Industry](#).

To operate games or practice, organizations and teams that are otherwise permitted to conduct in-person activities pursuant to this guidance **are encouraged to do the following:**

- In counties in the Yellow Phase of Reopening, indoor training or sports may only be conducted by organizations subject to supervision or regulation of the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association or National Collegiate Athletic Associations, and only in accordance with guidance provided by those governing bodies. Start by limiting games, scrimmages, and matches to teams in your region first. Expand beyond regional play if cases continue to stay low.
- Adult athletes are encouraged to wear face coverings when they are not engaged in a sporting activity, unless doing so jeopardizes their health.
- Coaches should create a back-up staffing plan which should include cross-training staff and coaches and training all coaches and officials on safety protocols.
- Limit cash transactions to the extent possible; find alternative ways to charge admission and pay for concessions.
- Create protocols to limit entrance and exit traffic, designating specific entry to and exits from facilities. Establish protocols to ensure staggered pick up and drop off for practice and events and ensure that athletes are not congregating while awaiting pick up and to ensure congregation or crowding does not occur on drop off. Pickups and drop offs should remain outside. Parents should not enter the facility.

Guidance for Caregivers and Spectators

- Seating areas, including bleachers, must adhere to social distancing requirements of at least 6 feet of spacing for anyone not in the same household. To assist with proper social distancing, areas should be clearly marked. Adults should wear face coverings (masks or face shields) at all times.
- Caregivers or spectators should not enter the field of play or bench areas.
- Nonessential visitors, spectators, and volunteers should be limited when possible, including activities with external groups or organizations. Parents should refrain from attending practices, or volunteering to assist with coaching.
- Caregivers and coaches should assess levels of risk based on individual athletes on the team who may be at a higher risk for severe illness.
- Caregivers should monitor their children for symptoms prior to any sporting event. Children and athletes who are sick or showing symptoms must stay home.

Further Guidance and Support

In addition to this guidance, communities and organizations should also review the [CDC's Considerations for Youth Sports](#).

See answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs) involving [application of the business safety order](#).

Help is available for people who are struggling with their mental or emotional health or feeling anxious or overly stressed. Contact the Crisis Text Line by texting PA to 741-741.

The Administration recognizes the difficulty of procuring materials businesses need to safely resume operations. If assistance is needed to locate masks and other supplies to carry out these required safety procedures, please visit [DCED's Business2Business Interchange](#).

Enforcement

Law enforcement officers should refer to [Pennsylvania State Police Enforcement Guidance](#).

If employees or customers want to report possible health and safety violations related to COVID-19:

1. File a complaint with a local health department or a law enforcement agency.
2. [Submit this web form](#) to the PA Department of Health.
3. Review OSHA guidance and, if appropriate, [file a complaint at OSHA.gov](#).

Reminders to Contain the Spread of COVID-19: Social Distancing and Other Requirements

When people need to leave their places of residence in connection with allowable individual activities, allowable essential travel, or by virtue of exemption from this policy, the Department of Health strongly encourages individuals to abide by the following social distancing requirements to:

- Maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from other individuals;
- Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds as frequently as possible, or use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available;
- Cover coughs or sneezes with a sleeve or elbow, not hands;
- Do not shake hands;
- Regularly clean high-contact surface areas; and

- When sick, stay at home.

Additional Information

For the most up-to-date, reliable information, please continue to refer to the [Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's website for Responding to COVID-19 in Pennsylvania.](#)