

Return to Competition: General Considerations for All Sports



Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA)
National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)
Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC)

The Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA), drawing on the expertise of the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) and PIAA Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC), offers this document as guidance on how PIAA member schools may consider approaching the “Return to Competition” for high school athletics in Pennsylvania. While we all remained concerned about the dangers of COVID-19, PIAA believes it is essential to the physical and mental well-being of high school students across the Commonwealth that efforts be made to return to physical activity and athletic competition where that can occur in a reasonably safe environment.

With that goal in mind, PIAA offers these considerations for the 2020-2021 school year on “Return to Competition”. The considerations outlined in this document are meant to decrease potential exposure of COVID-19 to a degree that competition can occur. As we continue to gain more information about the virus and receive continued feedback from the Governor’s Office, Department of Health, and Department of Education, these documents may be adjusted or even suspended to adapt to an ever-changing environment.

PIAA is committed to maximizing the athletic opportunities for student-athletes across the entire Commonwealth and will remain flexible in considering that certain sports may be impacted differently and post-season play may need to be modified.

Based on currently known information, the PIAA Sports Medicine Advisory Committee believes that **STRICT ADHERENCE** by schools and teams to their school-adopted plans and the Governor’s School Sports Guidance should provide a reasonably safe environment for student-athletes to participate in interscholastic athletics as currently scheduled. Participation in High School sports is voluntary for both the individuals and the schools.

Protect Yourself, Protect Others, Protect the Season

NFHS Update on Risks of COVID-19 during High School Sports – January 27, 2021

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS (APPLY TO ALL SPORTS):

- Individuals (student-athletes, coaches, officials, and other athletic personnel) should complete a personal health assessment daily.
 - If your temperature is 100.4 or higher, individual is showing symptoms or is sick, stay home.
 - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
 - Adhere to school adopted plans if you begin to show symptoms.
- Regularly and thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
 - Make sure to emphasize to all participants the importance of washing hands or using hand sanitizer before, during, and after competitions.
- Schools are recommended to ensure that your facilities have been properly sanitized and have hand sanitizer and disposable masks readily available for practices and contests.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and equipment including balls. (Please use recommendations by the ball manufacturer)
- Social distancing of at least 6 feet should be maintained at all times, where feasible. Encourage teams to limit hugging, high fives, shaking hands, or fist bumps for support/encouragement.
 - Social distancing should be maintained during the National Anthem and on sidelines.
 - Outdoor sports may need to extend bench areas to permit social distancing. Indoor sports may need to use bleachers or multiple levels of seating to ensure social distancing.
- Individuals are required to wear face coverings in accordance with the [Secretary of Health's Order](#) effective November 18th, 2020. ([FAQ's on Order](#))
 - Schools are encouraged to evaluate the order and consult with your school solicitor and physician to determine if individuals meet the exception under Section 3 of the order.
 - According to Section 3, the athlete would be asked to work through 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 color restrictions on face coverings (except if listed specifically in individual sport considerations); however, face coverings must adhere to the Restriction on Advertisements or Sponsors Names on Uniforms policy, as adopted by the PIAA Board of Directors.
- **Have a hydration plan and ability to provide water to student-athletes and coaches in a safe manner. Coordinate with visiting Teams to ensure that they have safe access to water for their participants.**
- If a positive COVID-19 case is determined, follow their school safety plans, Department of Health, CDC, and local health guidelines in determining the plan of action.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENT-ATHLETES:

- Teams should consider making each student responsible for their own supplies.
- Students should wear their own appropriate workout clothing and not share clothing. Individual clothing/towels should be washed and cleaned after every workout.
- Hand sanitizer should be plentiful at all contests and practices.
- Athletes should tell coaches immediately when they are not feeling well.
- Student-Athletes should keep their mouth guards in their mouth throughout the competition. If the mouth guard is taken out proper disinfection of the mouth guard should be performed prior to reinsertion. Hands should also be washed or disinfected before doing so.
- Student-athletes are encouraged to develop healthy habits including, but not limited to, a balanced diet, adequate sleep, and proper hydration.
 - Healthy eating and attention to hydration is especially important for student-athletes to enhance training capacity and reduce the risk of illness and injury.
- Bring and use your own water bottle.
 - High school athletes are at increased risk for dehydration. It is important that you drink enough fluid before, during and after practice and competition.
 - Student-athletes should follow established guidelines for hydration.
 - Please see National Athletic Trainer Association (NATA) Resource:
 - [Healthy Hydration For Young Athletes](#)
- Student-athletes are encouraged to shower as quickly as possible after practice and games.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR COACHES:

- Communicate your guidelines in a clear manner to students and parents.
- Consider conducting workouts in “pods” of same students always training and rotating together in practice to ensure more limited exposure if someone develops an infection.
- Keep accurate records of those athletes and staff who attend each practice in case contact tracing is needed.
- Coaches should limit game day squad sizes for social distancing purposes.
- Coaches are reminded to wear proper coaching attire per weather conditions.
- Coaches should bring their own water bottle(s) and follow established guidelines for hydration.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS:

(A family’s role in maintaining safety guidelines for themselves and others):

- Parents/Guardians should monitor their children of any symptoms prior to any sporting activities. Children who are sick or showing symptoms must stay home. (If there is doubt stay home).
- Parents/Guardians and coaches should assess levels of risk based on individual athletes on the team who may be at a higher risk for severe illness.
- Provide personal items for your child and clearly label them.
- Disinfect your student’s personal equipment after each game or practice.
- Be prepared with face coverings for members of your family if permitted to attend events.
- Inform coaches if your student-athlete has been exposed to someone who is known to have COVID-19.

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN TRAVELING TO A COMPETITION:

- Make sure to communicate with the host school prior to the competition to discuss plans.
- Follow all policies and guidelines the host school has communicated.
- Make sure your team is bringing its own medical supplies and emergency action plans.
- Have a plan in place if someone begins to show symptoms.

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN HOSTING A COMPETITION:

- Make sure to have an administrative contact (cell number and email address) for all events.
- Communicate ahead of time with the incoming schools and officials about procedures, policies, and guidelines.
 - Examples to be covered include but not limited to, the following:
 - Parking;
 - Where to enter facility;
 - What equipment should the visiting team bring;
 - Water availability;
 - Bench area seating (how many players can be accommodated to maintain social distancing);
 - Locker room availability and resources;
 - Emergency action plans;
 - How will game day paperwork be handled (electronic exchange of information is preferred);
 - Masking exemptions.
- Make sure facilities have been properly sanitized before the visiting team has arrived.
 - Have hand sanitizer and disposable masks readily available.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and equipment including balls.
- Have a plan in place if someone begins to show symptoms.
- If your school will require anyone to execute a liability waiver before entering the premises, that requirement and document should be provided to all persons in advance so that it may be reviewed.

GATHERING LIMITATIONS:

- All sports-related gatherings must conform to the most recent [guidelines on safe gathering limits released by the Department of Health](#) on March 1st, 2021. Under the new amendment, venues hosting events or gatherings must determine their established occupancy limit as defined by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Life Safety Code and then apply the attendee calculator to determine how many attendees are permitted to attend the event or gathering.
- Please also review the [All Sports Guidance](#) document which was released by the Governor's Office on June 10th and updated on November 19th.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR SPECTATORS:

- Spectators are permitted.
- Individuals are required to wear face coverings in accordance with the [Secretary of Health's Order](#) effective November 18th, 2020. ([FAQ's on Order](#))

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 - 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.
 - Everyone age 2 or older must wear face coverings at all times, unless they are outdoors and can consistently maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet or fall under an exception listed in Section 3 of the Secretary of Health's Order on Universal Face Coverings.
 - Caregivers or spectators should not enter the field of play or bench areas.
 - Non-essential 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.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR MEDIA:

- Individuals are required to wear face coverings in accordance with the [Secretary of Health's Order](#) effective November 18th, 2020. ([FAQ's on Order](#))
- Media are permitted but are counted toward gathering limitations.
- The media must contact the school prior to attending to make appropriate arrangement for attendance.
- Media members should complete a personal health assessment daily.
 - If temperature is 100.4 or higher, individual is showing symptoms or is sick, stay home.
- Media availability may be limited especially if there are limits on capacity.
- Media should be restricted to areas outside of the team areas.
- Interview request may be limited and should be accommodated only if social distancing protocols can be followed.
- Locker room access and access to student-athletes should be monitored or limited on a case by case basis and, if it occurs, media must wear face coverings while in a building and maintain social distancing in all locations.
- Press box availability may be limited.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR GAME DAY WORKERS:

- Individuals are required to wear face coverings in accordance with the [Secretary of Health's Order](#) effective November 18th, 2020. ([FAQ's on Order](#))

Return to Competition: General Considerations for Baseball



Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA)
National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)
Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC)

SPORT:	Baseball	STAFF LIAISON:	Mark Byers
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Individuals are required to wear face coverings in accordance with the [Secretary of Health's Order](#) effective November 18th, 2020. ([FAQ's on Order](#))

This information below is directly copied from the FAQ's from the PA Department of Health:

Outdoors: Coaches, athletes (including cheerleaders), and spectators must wear face coverings if they cannot maintain sustained physical distance from persons outside of their household. This includes while actively engaged in workouts, competition, and on the sidelines, in the dugout, etc. If sustained six-foot distancing can be maintained, face coverings may be removed when outdoors.

BASEBALL RULE CONSIDERATIONS:

- Have hand sanitizer and wipes available at the field.
- Wash stations or sanitizer at each dugout.
- No one touches the score sheet except the scorer.
- Disinfect the bench/dugout prior to competition.
- Stagger seating of fans.
- Each team may provide sanitized balls (bucket) while on defense.
 - Have a bucket of available for used balls so they can be sanitized after the game.
Note: If a school is required to provide game balls for their half-inning as the visiting team, this is to be communicated in advance of the contest.
- Sanitize bases after each contest.
- Limit attendees to head coach and one captain from each team plus the plate umpire. Coaches should stay outside the width of the batter's box at home plate, maintaining 6 feet of distance between each person.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR COACHES:

- Eliminate handshakes post-game.
- Maintain 6' distance between players and umpires.
- No seeds, gum or spitting.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PLAYERS:

- No seeds, gum or spitting.
- Players must clean and sanitize equipment after each game.
- Social distancing on the bench and/or dugout.

- No sharing of water bottles.
- The use of personal equipment is preferred. However, if equipment is shared, it is recommended to sanitize equipment between use by players.
- Sanitize all equipment after each game.
- Eliminate handshakes post game.
- Eliminate handshakes with coaches/umpires pre-game.
- Pitchers are encouraged not to put their hands to their mouth.
- If the pitcher is wearing a face covering in the field, it must be a solid dark color.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR UMPIRES:

- Bring personal hand sanitizer. Wash hands frequently
- Do not share equipment.
- The umpire-in-chief is required to wear a face covering behind the plate.
- The field umpires shall follow the universal masking order. If sustained six-foot distancing can be maintained, face coverings may be removed when outdoors.
- Clean equipment after each game.
- Follow social distancing guidelines. Consider six feet minimum distance when talking to others (players, coaches, other umpires) at plate meeting.
- Do not shake hands and follow pre- and post-game ceremony guidelines.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARENTS:

(A family's role in maintaining safety guidelines for themselves and others):

- Make sure your child and immediate household members are free from illness before participating in practice and competition (if there is doubt stay home),
- Provide personal items for your child and clearly label them.
- Disinfect your students' personal equipment after each game or practice.