

RETURN TO SPORTS

The past months have represented an unprecedented time in the U.S. and the D.C. metro area. While dealing with challenges surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, sports have been placed on hold to protect communities and young athletes.

As part of the phased process of returning to activities and in light of many professional and collegiate level sports leagues resuming some variation on their usual season, many questions come to light about the safety and feasibility of returning to youth athletics. As a community, we can minimize the risk to our young athletes and all those involved in youth athletics.

Sports participation inherently poses an increased risk of COVID-19 exposure and transmission because there are many factors that simply cannot be altered. Increased exertion leads to heavier breathing, which often renders mask use extremely uncomfortable or impossible and furthermore increases the production and projection of respiratory droplets. Players are often in close proximity, which cannot be changed without affecting the nature of the sport. Teams increase interaction with other people, thereby increasing the probability of sick contacts. While it seems children are less sickened by COVID-19, the same cannot be said for their adult contacts including parents, coaches, game officials and athletic trainers.

It is important to realize that we cannot remove all risks associated with sports and COVID-19. However, for many children and their families, sports are vital to their physical fitness, mental health and self-identity. For some, participation in sports serves as a gateway to access higher education. While many children and their families think of sports as a necessity, there are certainly degrees of return and modifications that can be made to decrease risk within the necessary limitations stated above. Ultimately, returning to sports and to what degree is an individual and family decision that should take into account the risk factors of the child and family, the sports and the community at large. We provide some guidelines below in response to questions that may arise during the process of returning to sports. These recommendations should be considered in conjunction with and do not supersede state and local laws and regulations.

FAQS

WHAT ARE SOME GENERAL PRECAUTIONS THAT SHOULD BE UNDERTAKEN TO MAKE RETURNING TO SPORTS AS SAFE AS POSSIBLE?

- Encourage proper hand hygiene: Athletes, parents, coaches, game officials and other staff should be encouraged to wash hands frequently using soap and water for 20 seconds. When soap and water is not available, hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol should be available for frequent use (by adults and children who can safely use hand sanitizer).
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue (that is immediately thrown away) or into the elbow. This should be followed by hand/elbow washing or sanitization.
- Everyone should be encouraged to avoid touching their face or someone else's face.
- Individuals who are sick, have tested positive for COVID-19 or have had close contact with someone who has tested positive should stay home. Designate a contact person for each team or organization who will trace athletes, coaches and other staff who are sick, tested positive for COVID-19 or had an exposure.

- All coaches, parents, game officials, staff, spectators and athletes (not actively participating in the sport) should wear a facemask. This includes athletes on the sideline or in the dugout. Encourage face masks especially when social distancing is not possible. (Exceptions to this include children under 2 years old, a person who has trouble breathing, is unconscious, is incapacitated or is unable to remove the facemask without assistance. People who are swimming or engaged in water sports should not wear a face mask.)

- When possible avoid enclosed shared spaces like locker rooms. If shared use is unavoidable, go in small groups only with limited time. Follow the CDC guidelines for disinfecting and cleaning all shared spaces.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>

- Do not share personal items, such as water bottles, towels or uniforms. If there is a water station, all cups or bottles should be filled by one designated person who is practicing good hand hygiene. All items should be cleaned after each use. The person performing cleaning should sanitize hands before and after cleaning.

- When possible, do not share equipment, such as bats, helmets, pinnies or rackets. If equipment sharing must occur, sanitize the item between each use with an appropriate cleaner or disinfecting wipe. The person performing cleaning should sanitize hands before and after cleaning.

- All personal equipment should be cleaned before and after use.

- Events, including practices, should be outdoors when possible. Any indoor facilities should be properly ventilated. When possible, doors and/or windows should be opened. (As long as this does not pose a risk to the athletes or attendees).

- Social distance and wear masks when performing pre and post-game meetings or activities. Do not perform handshakes and avoid touching.

- When possible, travel to and from practices and games in individual vehicles. Avoid buses or carpooling.

WHAT PRECAUTIONS SHOULD MY CHILD TAKE DURING SPORTS?

While social distancing guidelines may be difficult to enforce, especially in younger athletes, each child should be encouraged to adhere to the recommendations of proper hand hygiene, coughing/sneezing into their elbow or a tissue and avoiding face touching.

- Athletes should try to avoid prolonged interactions with other players and contacts, within the limitations of the sport.

- When not in play, athletes should avoid congregating and wear a face mask at all times.

- Behaviors that increase risk of exposure such as spitting and biting should be discouraged.

- Avoid unnecessary contact such as high fives, fist bumps and handshakes. For example, celebrations for scoring should be socially distanced.

- Team snacks should be provided in individual packaging. No shared food or drink.

- Avoid removing mouth guards. Clean hands before and after handling the mouth guard.

IS IT SAFE FOR MY CHILD TO PRACTICE WITH TEAMMATES?

Athletes should avoid physical closeness as much as possible. The safest way to practice with teammates is to work on individual skills while socially distanced, at least 6 feet apart. It is important to continue to practice good hand hygiene and avoid sharing equipment and personal items with teammates.

WHAT PRECAUTIONS SHOULD THE ADULT SUPERVISORS (COACHES, GAME OFFICIALS AND OTHER STAFF) TAKE?

It is important for each person to adhere to the recommendations of proper hand hygiene, coughing/sneezing into their elbow or a tissue, refrain from giving high fives, avoid face touching, avoid congregating together and wear a facemask.

Some other considerations for coaches include assessing the manner of training. Athletes should avoid physical closeness as much as possible. During training and warm ups, coaches should focus on individual skills instead of competition, limit the time athletes spend time close together by doing full contact only in games and limit the number of games. Coaches should avoid mixing groups of athletes during training, keeping groups together for each session/warm ups. Conditioning should be done socially distanced.

Coaches should also hold training/conditioning, practices or games in outdoor spaces when possible. Any indoor facilities should be properly ventilated. When indoors, if possible, doors and/or windows should be opened. (As long as this does not pose a risk to the athletes or attendees).

For practices and games, a contact person should be designated for communication should an athlete or family member develop symptoms or receive a

COVID-19 diagnosis. A sign-in process or attendance sheet should be used so athletes can be traced in the event of a COVID-19 exposure.

WHAT PRECAUTIONS SHOULD THE SPECTATORS (PARENTS, FAMILY AND OTHER OBSERVERS) TAKE?

Spectators should be limited to essential supporters. Consider limiting or capping the number of spectators allowed at practices and events to ensure proper distancing. While at the event, spectators should socially distance at least 6 feet apart and wear a face mask. Seats or bleacher spots should be blocked to allow for proper social distancing.

Projection of voices, especially in the setting of poor ventilation, increases the risk of transmission. Therefore, vocal cheering and shouting should be discouraged in an indoor setting and substituted with clapping and other forms of support for your athlete and team. If cheering outdoors, ensure proper distance from other spectators and do not face other spectators when cheering.

All spectators should also adhere to appropriate hand hygiene and avoid face touching.

Do not retrieve any sport equipment/balls outside of the field of play; these should only be retrieved by a player or game official.

ARE SOME SPORTS SAFER THAN OTHERS?

The unique risks associated with each sport should be carefully considered and, when possible, modifications should be made prior to return. In general, the following factors determine the risk of COVID-19 transmission:

- Physical closeness: proximity, frequency, duration
- Setting (indoor vs. outdoor) and ability to ventilate
- Shared equipment
- Ability to social distance when not in play
- Size of team, number of participants

Based on these factors, common sports have been categorized from least to highest risk of COVID-19 transmission. We provide suggestions to help decrease the risk for each sport, however, these should be taken as guidelines only and not as an endorsement to return to a specific sport. The decision to return to a sport is individualized and should take into account the risk factors of the child and family, the sport and the community at large.

LOWEST

- Golf
- Skiing/Snowboarding
- Diving
- Fencing
- Cycling
- Archery
- Bowling

LOW

- Dance/Ballet (alone)
- Gymnastics
- Tennis
- Swimming
- Track and Field
- Cross Country
- Baseball/Softball

INTERMEDIATE

- Soccer
- Lacrosse
- Rowing
- Field Hockey

HIGH

- Dance/Ballet (group)
- Water Polo
- Cheerleading
- Basketball
- Volleyball
- Ice Hockey
- Rugby
- Boxing
- Football
- Martial Arts

HIGHEST

- Wrestling



Physical closeness:
proximity,
frequency, duration



Setting (indoor
vs. outdoor) and
ability to ventilate



Shared
equipment



Social distancing
ability when not in
play



Size of team,
number of
participants

LOWEST

| SPORT | RISK FACTOR | HOW TO DECREASE RISK |
|--|---|---|
|  Golf | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared equipment (eg. golf cart, clubs) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not share golf cart or clubs Consider using a face mask at all times Clean hands before and after handling the golf ball or golf course high-touch items Avoid touching golf course items such as flag or rake |
|  Skiing/ Snowboarding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared equipment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not share ski lift Do not share ski poles, goggles If it is necessary to share skis and/or snowboards, clean before sharing |
|  Diving | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indoor increases risk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clean high-touch surfaces frequently (eg. handrails) Do not share towels or shammys |
|  Fencing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indoor increases risk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clean equipment between use Do not share equipment |
|  Cycling | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proximity Duration Number of participants | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Space out starts Clean equipment between use |
|  Archery | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indoor increases risk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clean equipment between use Consider using a face mask at all times Use personal equipment if possible |
|  Bowling | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indoor increases risk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not share bowling balls Clean balls and hands before and after each frame Consider using a face mask at all times Socially distance at all times Designate one score keeper, frequent hand hygiene during use of high-touch surfaces |

LOWEST

| SPORT | RISK FACTOR | HOW TO DECREASE RISK |
|--|--|---|
|  Gymnastics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Indoor increases risk ● Shared/high-touch surfaces | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clean high-touch surfaces in between use (eg. rings, bars and beam) ● If spotting, enforce frequent hand hygiene ● Clean mats frequently |
|  Dance/Ballet (Alone) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Indoor increases risk ● Shared/high-touch surfaces | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clean high-touch surfaces in between use (eg. bars) ● Clean mats frequently |
|  Tennis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Shared equipment ● Proximity (doubles tennis) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clean tennis racquets ● Avoid using hands to pick up tennis ball, use foot or racquet if possible ● Clean hands frequently if handling tennis ball ● Doubles: ensure proper distancing with partner |
|  Swimming | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Proximity ● Duration ● Size of team ● Shared equipment ● Indoor increases risk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Make sure all swimmers are properly spaced, no passing in the same lane, no congregating at the ends of the swim lane ● No sharing of equipment, frequent cleaning of equipment |
|  Track and Field | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Proximity ● Number of participants ● Shared equipment ● Indoor increases risk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Make sure runners are properly spaced ● Increase number of heats to allow for lane spacing ● Clean field equipment between use |
|  Cross Country | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Proximity ● Number of participants ● Duration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Make sure runners are properly spaced ● Consider staggered starts |
|  Baseball/ Softball | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Proximity ● Shared equipment ● Size of team ● Duration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Social distancing and mask use should be enforced in the dugout ● Clean bats, balls and other shared equipment between use ● Clean hands before and after handling of ball, bats and any other shared equipment ● Balls that leave the field of play should only be retrieved by players, umpires or coaches |

INTERMEDIATE

| SPORT | RISK FACTOR | HOW TO DECREASE RISK |
|--|--|---|
|  <p>Soccer</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Proximity ● Size of team ● Duration ● Indoor increases risk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Balls that leave the field of play should only be retrieved by players ● If using a mouth guard, avoid removing it, ensure proper hand hygiene before and after handling of mouth guard ● Players not participating should socially distance and wear masks |
|  <p>Lacrosse</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Proximity ● Size of team ● Duration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Avoid using hands to pick up ball ● Avoid removing mouth guard, ensure proper hand hygiene before and after handling of mouth guard ● Game officials should clean hands before and after handling the ball ● Do not share equipment ● Players not participating should socially distance and wear masks |
|  <p>Rowing</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Proximity ● Size of team ● Duration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consider using face shields during practices and during meets if permitted ● Clean high-touch surfaces (eg. oars) frequently |
|  <p>Field Hockey</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Proximity ● Size of team ● Duration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Avoid using hands to pick up ball ● Avoid removing mouth guard, ensure proper hand hygiene before and after handling of mouth guard ● Do not share equipment ● Players not participating should socially distance and wear masks |

HIGH

| SPORT | RISK FACTOR | HOW TO DECREASE RISK |
|--|--|--|
|  <p>Water Polo</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Proximity ● Size of team ● Shared equipment ● Indoor increases risk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● During practice, make sure all players are properly spaced when possible ● If non-active player retrieves the ball out of bounds, either switch out and/or sanitize the ball – non-active players who handle the ball should clean hands before and after handling ● Do not share towels or equipment ● Players not participating should socially distance and wear masks |
|  <p>Dance/Ballet (Group)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Proximity ● Size of group ● Shared/high-touch surfaces ● Indoor increases risk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clean high-touch surfaces in between use (eg. bars) ● Clean mats frequently ● Minimize/eliminate paired stunts, lifts ● If performing paired stunts or spotting, ensure that the same groupings are maintained through the duration of practice ● Ensure frequent hand hygiene, especially when performing high-contact activities such as paired stunts or spotting ● Perform dance with proper spacing ● Avoid facing each other during dance/ballet moves |
|  <p>Cheerleading</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Proximity ● Size of team ● Shared equipment ● Duration ● Indoor increases risk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Minimize/eliminate paired stunts, lifts ● If performing paired stunts or spotting, ensure that the same groupings are maintained through the duration of practice ● Ensure frequent hand hygiene, especially when performing high-contact activities such as paired stunts or spotting ● Consider using masks, especially when projecting voice ● Substitute hand signals for calling cheers ● Perform cheers with proper spacing and only outdoors ● Avoid facing each other during cheers ● Ensure proper distancing from spectators ● Do not share pompoms, megaphones or other equipment |
|  <p>Basketball</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Proximity ● Size of team ● Shared equipment ● Duration ● Indoor increases risk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Balls that leave the court should only be retrieved by players or game officials ● Game officials should clean hands before and after handling the ball ● Designate separate balls for each team for warm ups ● Players not in play should socially distance and wear masks ● Clean high-traffic areas frequently (eg. bench, sideline seats) ● Do not share towels or water bottles ● If using a mouth guard, avoid removing it, ensure proper hand hygiene before and after handling of mouth guard |

| SPORT | RISK FACTOR | HOW TO DECREASE RISK |
|---|--|---|
|  <p>Volleyball</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity • Size of team • Shared equipment • Duration • Indoor increases risk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balls that leave the court should only be retrieved by players or game officials • Game officials should clean hands before and after handling the ball • Designate separate balls for each team for warm ups • Players not in play should socially distance and wear masks • Avoid congregating with team cheers • Do not switch benches between sets • Clean high-traffic areas frequently (eg. bench, sideline seats) • Do not share towels or water bottles • Sanitize hands before and after set up and break down of nets |
|  <p>Ice Hockey</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity • Indoor increases risk • Size of team • Shared equipment • Duration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid removing mouth guard, ensure proper hand hygiene before and after handling of mouth guard • Clean hands before putting on gloves and after taking off gloves • Wash hockey gloves after each use • Game officials should clean hands before and after handling the puck • Players not in play should socially distance and wear masks • Clean high-traffic areas frequently (eg. bench) • Do not share equipment |
|  <p>Rugby</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity • Size of team • Shared equipment • Duration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid removing mouth guard, ensure proper hand hygiene before and after handling of mouth guard • Balls that leave the field should only be retrieved by players or game officials • Game officials should clean hands before and after handling the ball • Players not in play should socially distance and wear masks |
|  <p>Boxing</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity • Indoor increases risk • Duration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid removing mouth guard, ensure proper hand hygiene before and after handling of mouth guard • Clean boxing gloves, use hand wraps and clean wraps after each use • Clean hands before putting on gloves and after taking off gloves |

| SPORT | RISK FACTOR | HOW TO DECREASE RISK |
|---|---|--|
|  <p>Football</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity • Size of team • Shared equipment • Duration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid removing mouth guard, ensure proper hand hygiene before and after handling of mouth guard • Wash gloves after each use • Balls that leave the field should only be retrieved by players or game officials • Game officials should clean hands before and after handling the ball • Players not in play should socially distance and wear masks • Clean high-traffic areas frequently (eg. sideline seats) • Do not share equipment |
|  <p>Martial Arts</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity • Indoor increases risk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid removing mouth guard, ensure proper hand hygiene before and after handling of mouth guard • Do not share equipment • Martial arts with grappling fall under highest risk category |

HIGHEST

| SPORT | RISK FACTOR | HOW TO DECREASE RISK |
|--|--|---|
|  <p>Wrestling</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity • Indoor increases risk • Duration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid removing mouth guard, ensure proper hand hygiene before and after handling of mouth guard • Clean the mats in between each match • Do not share equipment |

IS IT SAFE TO TRAVEL FOR SPORTS?

It is best to limit travel outside of the community, as this may increase chances of exposure to COVID-19. If you are planning to attend a competition outside of your community, review the recent trends of that area prior to travel. Whenever possible, travel in an individual vehicle with members of your own household and book individual accommodations.

WHEN SHOULD MY CHILD STAY OUT OF SPORTS DUE TO COVID-19?

Your child should stay out of sports if:

- They have symptoms of COVID-19 (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>)
- They have tested positive for COVID-19
- They have had close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. The following link defines close contact (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fif-you-are-sick%2Fquarantine-isolation.html)

Additionally, you should discuss returning to sports with your family physician if your child or a member of the household have an underlying medical condition that places them at increased risk.

MY CHILD HAS BEEN OUT OF SPORTS FOR A LONG TIME. DO THEY NEED TO DO ANYTHING TO PREPARE FOR RETURNING TO SPORTS?

Most athletes have been out of sports and training for many months. It is important to adhere to the usual standards for the safe return to sports.

- All children should still have an annual health supervision visit, especially if your child was previously diagnosed with COVID-19 or has an underlying medical condition that places them at increased risk.
- Since most athletes have been out of sports for an extended period of time during this pandemic, a gradual increase back to activities is recommended to prevent overuse injury.
- It is important to perform a gradual return to activity after any pause in the season or in the athlete's participation.
- It is very important for athletes to be given time to acclimate to the weather, gradually returning during this time to prevent heat illness. This gradual return should occur over the course of 2 weeks.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Youth-Sports-Participation-During-COVID-19-A-Safety-Checklist.aspx>

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Youth-Sports-and-COVID-19-Understanding-the-Risks.aspx>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/youth-sports.html#risk>

<https://www.nata.org/practice-patient-care/health-issues/heat-acclimatization>

https://ksi.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1222/2020/06/Return-to-Sports-and-Exercise-during-the-COVID_Final-endorsed_6.2.2020.pdf

DISCLAIMER: *This material contains general information about COVID guidelines for school and school related activities. Children's National verifies that the data included is accurate and consistent with CDC guidelines in effect at the time of publication, [September 2020], and will be updated when there are changes in recommended practice.*

By downloading and using this material you agree to the following terms and conditions of use: you accept all liability related to your use of this material; you agree that you will hold Children's National Medical Center harmless for your use of this material; you agree that CNMC is not responsible for your use of the material; you agree that these guidelines do not replace your professional judgment; you also agree that if you have any specific questions about any medical matter pertaining to an individual child you will consult the child's primary doctor or professional healthcare provider.