

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Updated Guidance for the Operation of Interscholastic, Youth and other Amateur Sport Activities during the COVID-19 Pandemic

This guidance has been updated for the 2021 Winter sports season, beginning November 29, 2021. These recommendations are made in consideration of the circulation of the more transmissible Delta variant of SARS-CoV-2, recent trends in COVID-19 community transmission in the state, and the current availability of vaccines for all individuals 5 years old and older. DPH will continue to monitor pandemic metrics and will issue updated guidance if/when they are necessary and appropriate.

Introduction

In the interest of prevention of COVID-19 disease, the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) is offering revised guidance for the continued operation of sports activities for private, municipal, and interscholastic youth and adult sports leagues.

COVID-19 Vaccination

Vaccination is currently the most important and effective strategy for preventing COVID-19 infections and transmission during athletic activities. Athletic organizations should strongly encourage all eligible participants to get fully vaccinated against COVID-19 (i.e., 2 weeks after the 2nd dose of Pfizer or Moderna mRNA vaccines or the single dose of Johnson & Johnson vaccine) to protect themselves, their families, and their communities. Vaccination can help athletes, coaches, and officials avoid interruptions and/or cancellations of athletic activities because, unlike unvaccinated or partially vaccinated individuals, fully vaccinated athletes, coaches, officials, and other participants:

- no longer need to quarantine after exposure to a known COVID-19 case if they remain asymptomatic
- do not need to be included in regular screening testing programs for COVID-19
- **can actively compete (i.e., in-game) without a mask as of December 23, 2021**

Despite the availability of COVID-19 vaccines for individuals as young as 5 years old, many vaccine-eligible youth will not be fully vaccinated for the start of the Winter sports season. The risk of COVID-19 transmission among these participants and any at-risk family members remains significant.

DPH advises that athletic program administrators can help protect their participant families by **hosting vaccination events**. DPH and the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) have developed a useful vaccine toolkit ([#Vax2SchoolCT](#)) to assist with the planning and execution of vaccine clinics for students, staff, and their families in schools, however this toolkit can be similarly useful to athletic organizations if they are considering similar vaccination events at their facilities.

Risk Categorization for Various Sports

DPH has been consistent in the assertion that, by their nature of play, the environment in which activities take place (e.g., indoors vs. outdoors), local, statewide, and regional community rates of COVID-19, the vaccination status of participants, and other factors, certain sports are more likely to promote exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) through aerosol-sized and larger respiratory droplets. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends consideration of several different variables in assessing the potential risks for COVID-19 spread, including:

- Community levels of COVID-19
- Vaccination status of participants
- Level of intensity of activity
- Physical closeness of players
- Length of time that players are close to each other or to staff
- Setting of the sporting event or activity (e.g., indoors vs. outdoors)
- Size of the team
- Ability to engage in physical distancing while not actively engaged in play (e.g., during practice, on the sideline, or in the dugout)

COVID-19 Mitigation Strategies

There are [several strategies](#) that can be implemented to impact the risk considerations listed above. To help facilitate compliance with mitigation strategies and communicate expectations to participants and their families, **Athletic Directors, athletic club organizers, and facility operators** should:

- develop and implement **specific written protocols** for the COVID-19 prevention strategies to be used during practices and contests and provide those protocols, along with a **point-of-contact**, to the appropriate local health department
- **educate coaches, athletes, and parents** about the risks of COVID-19 spread during athletic activities and the need for strict compliance with protocols, including requirements for quarantine/isolation of cases and close contacts

- keep **detailed rosters** of participants for all practices and games with appropriate contact information and make that information available to health officials upon request for the purposes of contact tracing
- stress the importance of information-sharing with health authorities performing contact tracing and make it clear to coaches and participant families that **cooperation with contact tracing is a requirement** of participation with their athletic organization
- consider **specific rule changes** designed to **reduce the frequency, intensity, and duration of contact** between participants
- emphasize the need to **limit team-based group activities and gatherings** (e.g., pre-game meals, team parties, etc.) in order to reduce the risk of a team COVID-19 outbreak that will affect the ability to continue to practice and play

Mask Wearing

An appropriate mask is one that completely covers the nose and mouth, is worn directly on the face (i.e., not attached to a helmet or other equipment), and fits closely without significant gaps or openings. DPH currently advises individuals that **the wearing of masks by all individuals, regardless of vaccination status**, when interacting with other individuals in any indoor setting is the best way to prevent COVID-19 transmission in these settings.

However, **beginning on December 23, 2021, fully vaccinated athletes, coaches, and officials** (i.e., at least 14 days past their second dose of Pfizer or Moderna vaccine or their first dose of Johnson & Johnson vaccine) **may remove their mask while actively participating in a game or other official contest**. Masks should be worn at all other times while indoors by all participants, including during practices, while sitting in bench areas, while spectating, and during entry and exit. Due to the risk of entanglement and choking, athletes participating in certain athletic activities (e.g., a wrestling match, swimming or diving events, indoor track jumping events, cheer/dance/gymnastics stunting) may engage in these contests without a mask regardless of vaccination status. See the table below for specific requirements by sport.

These recommendations are based on the known benefits of vaccination and the allowances that such benefits can afford fully vaccinated individuals when engaged in high intensity performance. The decision to implement these changes after in-person learning ends for the Fall semester is based on newly implemented protocols in K-12 schools in Connecticut that allow students who are close contacts of a COVID-19 case to continue with in-person learning under certain circumstances and conditions (i.e. “Screen and Stay”) and the desire of DPH and our partners at the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) and the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC) to prevent further learning loss by ensuring a maximum number of students are able to remain in classrooms in our state through the remainder of this semester. DPH will continue to closely monitor the experience of youth sports organizations with the implementation of more relaxed masking rules during competitions taking place over the holiday recess and **will make any necessary revisions to this guidance if and when it is deemed necessary and appropriate** for the protection of public health. Of note, masks continue to be required at all times on buses in accordance with the Federal Order (CDC) requiring mask use on public transportation, including school buses.

Table: Prior and New Guidance from CT DPH for Masking during Youth Athletic Activities

Sport	Prior Guidance	New Guidance by Vaccination Status <i>(not for use prior to December 23, 2021)</i>	
		Fully Vaccinated Participants	Partially vaccinated or Unvaccinated Participants
Basketball	Masks required in all settings indoors.	Masks not required in-game; masks required in all other settings (practice, sidelines, bench, locker rooms, etc.)	Masks required in-game and in all other settings (practice, sidelines, bench, locker rooms, etc.)
Ice Hockey	Masks required in all settings indoors.	Masks not required in-game; masks required in all other settings (practice, sidelines, bench, locker rooms, etc.)	Masks required in-game and in all other settings (practice, sidelines, bench, locker rooms, etc.)
Indoor Track (Running)	Masks required in all settings indoors.	Masks not required in-race;- masks required in all other settings (practice, sidelines, bench, locker rooms, etc.)	Masks required in-race and in all other settings (practice, sidelines, bench, locker rooms, etc.)
Indoor Track (Throwing/Jumping)	Masks can be removed temporarily during active jumps/throws in competition settings; required at all other times indoors.	Masks can be removed temporarily during active jumps/throws in competition settings; required at all other times indoors.	Masks can be removed temporarily during active jumps/throws in competition settings; required at all other times indoors.
Wrestling	Masks should not be worn in-match or during practice while actively grappling; masks required in all other settings (non-grappling practice, sidelines, bench, locker rooms, etc.)	Masks should not be worn in-match or during practice while actively grappling; masks required in all other settings (non-grappling practice, sidelines, bench, locker rooms, etc.)	Masks should not be worn in-match or during practice while actively grappling; masks required in all other settings (non-grappling practice, sidelines, bench, locker rooms, etc.)
Swimming/Diving	Masks should not be worn in the water; masks required in all other settings (dry land practice, sidelines, bench, locker rooms, etc.)	Masks should not be worn in the water; masks required in all other settings (dry land practice, sidelines, bench, locker rooms, etc.)	Masks should not be worn in the water; masks required in all other settings (dry land practice, sidelines, bench, locker rooms, etc.)

		New Guidance by Vaccination Status (not for use prior to December 23, 2021)	
Sport	Prior Guidance	Fully Vaccinated Participants	Partially vaccinated or Unvaccinated Participants
Cheerleading/ Dance	Masks required during competitive routines and in all other settings (practice, sideline cheer, bench, locker rooms, etc.); masks may be removed temporarily during stunting/tumbling but must be immediately replaced	Masks not required during competitive routines and should not be used during stunting/tumbling; masks required in all other settings (practice, sideline cheer, bench, locker rooms, etc.)	Masks required during competitive routines and in all other settings (practice, sideline cheer, bench, locker rooms, etc.); masks may be removed temporarily during stunting/tumbling but must be immediately replaced
Gymnastics	Masks should not be used during competition or practice on apparatus or while tumbling; -masks required in all other settings (practice, sideline cheer, bench, locker rooms, etc.)	Masks should not be used during competition or practice on apparatus or while tumbling; masks required in all other settings (practice, sideline cheer, bench, locker rooms, etc.)	Masks should not be used during competition or practice on apparatus or while tumbling;- masks required in all other settings (practice, sideline cheer, bench, locker rooms, etc.)

Athletic league, club, and team organizers are responsible for ensuring that participants (including spectators) **comply with mask wearing** guidelines. Athletic program administrators should also be aware of any **local mandates regulating the use of masks** inside certain facilities within individual towns or jurisdictions, advise participants of existing regulations, and enforce compliance with local rules during their athletic events.

Although current masking Orders allow for exemptions from mask wearing when a healthcare provider attests that an individual currently has a medical condition for which wearing a mask would pose a significant risk, athletic organizations should discuss, in consultation with their medical advisors and general counsel, under what conditions (if any) an individual who is not fully vaccinated would be allowed to continue to participate in activities without a mask.

As athletics are optional activities, can be highly aerobic with increased respiratory droplet generation and spread, and most involve frequent close and/or direct contact, unmasked individuals engaged in athletic activities in indoor settings who are not fully vaccinated can pose a significant increased risk for transmission of COVID-19 to other participants. As such, **DPH advises that unmasked individuals who are not fully vaccinated should not participate in indoor group athletic activities unless all other mitigation strategies can be reliably and consistently implemented** (e.g., maintaining increased distancing and controlling the movement of unmasked individuals, screening testing one or more times per week, increased ventilation, daily symptom screening, etc.).

Quarantine and Other Actions after Exposure

CDC has recently published [new guidance](#) for individuals who have been identified as a [close contact of a known COVID-19 case](#):

- If **fully vaccinated** (i.e., 14 days after their final vaccine dose), or fully recovered from COVID-19 in the prior 90 days, and **remain free from symptoms** of COVID-19:
 - **do not need to quarantine** away from athletics or other activities
 - **get tested** 5-7 days after last contact (*note: testing is not recommended for individuals who have recovered from COVID-19 within the prior 90 days, as a positive test result may be residual and not reflective of current infection*)
 - **wear a mask** when indoors (including during active game play) around other people until a negative test result is received (or for 14 days if no test is performed)
- If **fully vaccinated** (i.e., 14 days after their final vaccine dose), or fully recovered from COVID-19 in the prior 90 days, and **experiencing symptoms** of COVID-19:
 - **get evaluated by a healthcare provider** as soon as possible
 - **quarantine** away from athletics and other activities **for a full 14 days**, or 10 days (i.e., return on day 11) with a negative test on day 8 or later, **unless a healthcare provider rules out COVID-19** as the source of symptoms (which will usually include a negative test result)
 - **wear a mask** when indoors (including during active game play) around other people **until a negative test result** is received (or for 14 days if no test is performed), or **until COVID-19 is ruled out** by a healthcare provider
- If **not fully vaccinated**, or have not had COVID-19 in the prior 90 days:
 - **quarantine** away from athletic activities for a **full 14 days**; or at least 10 days (i.e., return on day 11) with a negative test at day 8 or later
 - **continue to wear a mask** around other people for a **full 14 days**, regardless of when release from quarantine occurs

Return-to-Play after COVID-19 Infection

Although the symptoms and disease course of COVID-19 in younger people appear on average to be somewhat milder than those of older individuals, there is the potential, and documented cases, of [severe disease complications](#) in people of all ages. In addition, it is not known whether the currently circulating Delta variant, or other SARS-CoV-2 variants will affect children differently than what has been the experience to date. Furthermore, the long-term health effects and impacts on organ systems function resulting from even mild or asymptomatic COVID-19 disease is still unknown, although there have been some studies implicating [blood clotting and cardiac effects](#) as potentially under-recognized longer-term sequelae. As such, DPH recommends that all youth athletes receive health screening and clearance from a healthcare provider prior to resuming athletic activities after recovering from COVID-

19. Post-COVID athletic health screening and a phased approach to a return to athletic activities should incorporate the American Academy of Pediatrics' (AAP) guidance for [Return to Sports and Physical Activity](#).

Out-of-State Competition

Currently, areas of “substantial” or “high” COVID-19 transmission risk ([as defined by CDC](#)) are widespread throughout the country. As such, DPH recommends that athletes, coaches, and other participants **who are not fully vaccinated refrain from travel out-of-state to participate in athletics** at this time. DPH recommends that those teams or individuals choosing to travel outside of Connecticut for the purposes of engaging in athletic activities follow all of the current CDC guidelines for [Travel during COVID-19](#).



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