



# GUIDANCE FOR OPENING UP HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETICS AND ACTIVITIES

## National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC)

The COVID-19 pandemic presents state high school associations with a myriad of challenges. The NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC) offers this document as guidance on how state associations can consider approaching the many components of “opening up” high school athletics and activities across the United States.

The NFHS SMAC believes it is essential to the physical and mental well-being of high school students across the nation to return to physical activity and athletic competition. The NFHS SMAC recognizes that it is likely that ALL students will not be able to return to – and sustain – athletic activity at the same time in all schools, regions and states. There will also likely be variation in what sports and activities are allowed to be played and held. While we would typically have reservations regarding such inequities, the NFHS SMAC endorses the idea of returning students to school-based athletics and activities in any and all situations where it can be done safely.

Since NFHS member state associations are a well-respected voice for health and safety issues, the NFHS SMAC strongly urges that these organizations engage with state and local health departments to develop policy regarding coordinated approaches for return to activity for high school, club and youth sports.

The recommendations presented in this document are intended as ideas for state associations to consider with their respective SMACs and other stakeholders in designing return-to-activity guidelines that will be in accordance with state or local restrictions. Please note that the phases of “opening up” outlined below are based upon the White House document released in April 2020. Consult your state and local health departments to review if they are using a similar approach, or how the phases in this document correspond to your state or local governments nomenclature.

### Areas to Address:

#### 1. Administrative

##### A. *Equipment Reconditioning*

The National Athletic Equipment Reconditioners Association (NAERA) has advised the NFHS that significant equipment reconditioning capacity is currently operational. If schools have not sent out equipment for reconditioning, they should be directed to do so immediately. If schools currently have equipment being reconditioned, a school official should contact the reconditioning company to make specific delivery arrangements if their school is currently closed.

## *B. Conduct of Conditioning and Practice Sessions*

Phases are in accordance with guidelines published by the White House and CDC available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/>. Please consult with your local or state health department regarding their plan for “opening up” your state. Not all states are using the same criteria, and what is allowable during specific phases will vary from state to state, or even within a state. Use the following as a resource in designing a plan for your state. Please note that there will be “gating” criteria to establish Phase 1 and the further criteria must be met to advance from one phase to the next. These criteria will be determined by state and/or local governments and must be strictly followed.

### **Phase 1**

#### **Pre- workout Screening:**

- All coaches and students should be screened for signs/symptoms of COVID-19 prior to a workout. Screening includes a temperature check.
- Responses to screening questions for each person should be recorded and stored so that there is a record of everyone present in case a student develops COVID-19 (see Appendix II for sample Monitoring Form).
- Any person with positive symptoms reported should not be allowed to take part in workouts and should contact his or her primary care provider or other appropriate health-care professional.
- Vulnerable individuals should not oversee or participate in any workouts during Phase 1.

#### **Limitations on Gatherings:**

- No gathering of more than 10 people at a time (inside or outside).
- Locker rooms should not be utilized during Phase 1. Students should report to workouts in proper gear and immediately return home to shower at end of the workout.
- Workouts should be conducted in “pods” of students with the same 5-10 students always working out together. Smaller pods can be utilized for weight training. This ensures more limited exposure if someone develops an infection.
- There must be a minimum distance of 6 feet between each individual at all times. If this is not possible indoors, then the maximum number of individuals in the room must be decreased until proper social distancing can occur.

#### **Facilities Cleaning:**

- Adequate cleaning schedules should be created and implemented for all athletic facilities to mitigate any communicable diseases.
- Prior to an individual or groups of individuals entering a facility, hard surfaces within that facility should be wiped down and sanitized (chairs, furniture in meeting rooms, locker rooms, weight room equipment, bathrooms, athletic training room tables, etc.).
- Individuals should wash their hands for a minimum of 20 seconds with warm water and soap before touching any surfaces or participating in workouts.
- Hand sanitizer should be plentiful and available to individuals as they transfer from place to place.
- Weight equipment should be wiped down thoroughly before and after an individual’s use of equipment.

- Appropriate clothing/shoes should be worn at all times in the weight room to minimize sweat from transmitting onto equipment/surfaces.
- Any equipment such as weight benches, athletic pads, etc. having holes with exposed foam should be covered.
- Students must be encouraged to shower and wash their workout clothing immediately upon returning to home.

**Physical Activity and Athletic Equipment:**

- There should be no shared athletic equipment (towels, clothing, shoes, or sports specific equipment) between students.
- Students should wear their own appropriate workout clothing (do not share clothing) individual clothing/towels should be washed and cleaned after every workout.
- All athletic equipment, including balls, should be cleaned after each use and prior to the next workout.
- Individual drills requiring the use of athletic equipment are permissible, but the equipment should be cleaned prior to use by the next individual.
- Resistance training should be emphasized as body weight, sub-maximal lifts and use of resistance bands.
- Free weight exercises that require a spotter cannot be conducted while honoring social distancing norms. Safety measures in all forms must be strictly enforced in the weight room.
- **Examples (including by limited to):**
  - A basketball player can shoot with a ball(s), but a team should not practice/pass a single ball among the team where multiple players touch the same ball.
  - A football player should not participate in team drills with a single ball that will be handed off or passed to other teammates. Contact with other players is not allowed, and there should be no sharing of tackling dummies/donuts/sleds.
  - A volleyball player should not use a single ball that others touch or hit in any manner.
  - Softball and baseball players should not share gloves, bats, or throw a single ball that will be tossed among the team. A single player may hit in cages, throw batting practice (with netting as backstop, no catcher). Prior to another athlete using the same balls, they should be collected and cleaned individually.
  - Wrestlers may skill and drill without touching a teammate.
  - Cheerleaders may not practice/perform partner stunts or building. (Chants, jumps, dances without contact are permissible.)
  - Tennis players may do individual drills, wall volleys and serves.
  - Runners should maintain the recommended 6 feet of distancing between individuals

**Hydration:**

- All students shall bring their own water bottle. Water bottles must not be shared.
- Hydration stations (water cows, water trough, water fountains, etc.) should not be utilized.

**Phase 2****Pre-Workout/Contest Screening:**

- All coaches and students should be screened for signs/symptoms of COVID-19 prior to a workout. Screening includes a temperature check.
- Responses to screening questions for each person should be recorded and stored so that there is a record of everyone present in case a student develops COVID-19 (see Appendix II for sample Monitoring Form).
- Any person with positive symptoms reported should not be allowed to take part in workouts and should contact his or her primary care provider or other appropriate health-care professional.
- Vulnerable individuals should not oversee or participate in any workouts during Phase 2.

**Limitations on Gatherings:**

- No gathering of more than 10 people at a time inside. Up to 50 individuals may gather outdoors for workouts.
- If locker rooms or meeting rooms are used, there must be a minimum distance of 6 feet between each individual at all times.
- Workouts should be conducted in “pods” of students with the same 5-10 students always working out together. Smaller pods can be utilized for weight training. This ensures more limited exposure if someone develops an infection.
- There must be a minimum distance of 6 feet between each individual at all times. If this is not possible indoors, then the maximum number of individuals in the room must be decreased until proper social distancing can occur. Appropriate social distancing will need to be maintained on sidelines and benches during practices. Consider using tape or paint as a guide for students and coaches.

**Facilities Cleaning:**

- Adequate cleaning schedules should be created and implemented for all athletic facilities to mitigate any communicable diseases.
- Prior to an individual or groups of individuals entering a facility, hard surfaces within that facility should be wiped down and sanitized (chairs, furniture in meeting rooms, locker rooms, weight room equipment, bathrooms, athletic training room tables, etc.).
- Individuals should wash their hands for a minimum of 20 seconds with warm water and soap before touching any surfaces or participating in workouts.
- Hand sanitizer should be plentiful and available to individuals as they transfer from place to place.
- Weight equipment should be wiped down thoroughly before and after an individual’s use of equipment.

- Appropriate clothing/shoes should be worn at all times in the weight room to minimize sweat from transmitting onto equipment/surfaces.
- Any equipment such as weight benches, athletic pads, etc. having holes with exposed foam should be covered.
- Students must be encouraged to shower and wash their workout clothing immediately upon returning to home.

#### **Physical Activity and Athletic Equipment:**

- Lower risk sports practices and competitions may resume (see Potential Infection Risk by Sport below).
- Modified practices may begin for Moderate risk sports.
- There should be no shared athletic towels, clothing or shoes between students.
- Students should wear their own appropriate workout clothing (do not share clothing), and individual clothing/towels should be washed and cleaned after every workout.
- All athletic equipment, including balls, should be cleaned intermittently during practices and contests.
- Hand sanitizer should be plentiful at all contests and practices.
- Athletic equipment such as bats, batting helmets and catchers gear should be cleaned between each use.
- Maximum lifts should be limited and power cages should be used for squats and bench presses. Spotters should stand at each end of the bar.

#### **Hydration:**

- All students shall bring their own water bottle. Water bottles must not be shared.
- Hydration stations (water cows, water trough, water fountains, etc.) should not be utilized.

### **Phase 3**

#### **Pre- Workout/Contest Screening:**

- Any person who has had a fever or cold symptoms in the previous 24 hours should not be allowed to take part in workouts and should contact his or her primary care provider or other appropriate health-care professional.
- A record should be kept of all individuals present.
- Vulnerable individuals can resume public interactions, but should practice physical distancing, minimizing exposure to social settings where distancing may not be practical, unless precautionary measures are observed.

#### **Limitations on Gatherings:**

- Gathering sizes of up to 50 individuals, indoors or outdoors.
- When not directly participating in practices or contests, care should be taken to maintain a minimum distance of 3 to 6 feet between each individual. Consider using tape or paint as a guide for students and coaches.

### **Facilities Cleaning:**

- Adequate cleaning schedules should be created and implemented for all athletic facilities to mitigate any communicable diseases.
- Prior to an individual or groups of individuals entering a facility, hard surfaces within that facility should be wiped down and sanitized (chairs, furniture in meeting rooms, locker rooms, weight room equipment, bathrooms, athletic training room tables, etc.).
- Individuals should wash their hands for a minimum of 20 seconds with warm water and soap before touching any surfaces or participating in workouts.
- Hand sanitizer should be plentiful and available to individuals as they transfer from place to place.
- Weight equipment should be wiped down thoroughly before and after an individual's use of equipment.
- Appropriate clothing/shoes should be worn at all times in the weight room to minimize sweat from transmitting onto equipment/surfaces.
- Any equipment such as weight benches, athletic pads, etc. having holes with exposed foam should be covered.
- Students must be encouraged to shower and wash their workout clothing immediately upon returning to home.

### **Physical Activity and Athletic Equipment:**

- Moderate risk sports practices and competitions may begin.
- There should be no shared athletic towels, clothing or shoes between students.
- Students should wear their own appropriate workout clothing (do not share clothing), and individual clothing/towels should be washed and cleaned after every workout.
- Hand sanitizer should be plentiful at all contests and practices.
- Athletic equipment such as bats, batting helmets and catchers gear should be cleaned between each use. Other equipment, such as hockey helmets/pads, wrestling ear guards, football helmets/other pads, lacrosse helmets/pads/gloves/eyewear should be worn by only one individual and not shared.
- Maximum lifts should be limited and power cages should be used for squats and bench presses. Spotters should stand at each end of the bar.
- Modified\* practices may begin for Higher risk sports:
  - \*Continue pre-practice screening as in Phases 1 and 2. Shower immediately after practices/contests.
  - Re-assess epidemiology data and experiences in other states and other levels of competition to determine when Higher risk sports competition may resume.

### **Hydration:**

- All students shall bring their own water bottle. Water bottles must not be shared.
- Hydration stations (water cows, water trough, water fountains, etc.) may be utilized but must be cleaned after every practice/contest.

#### **C. Contests**

1. Potential Infection Risk by Sport (modified from United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee – Sports Medicine recommendations)

**Higher Risk:** Sports that involve close, sustained contact between participants, lack of significant protective barriers, and high probability that respiratory particles will be transmitted between participants.

*Examples: Wrestling, football, boys lacrosse, competitive cheer, dance*

**Moderate Risk:** Sports that involve close, sustained contact, but with protective equipment in place that may reduce the likelihood of respiratory particle transmission between participants OR intermittent close contact OR group sports OR sports that use equipment that can't be cleaned between participants.

*Examples: Basketball, volleyball\*, baseball\*, softball\*, soccer, water polo, gymnastics\* (if equipment can't be sufficiently cleaned between competitors), ice hockey, field hockey, tennis\*, swimming relays, pole vault\*, high jump\*, long jump\*, girls lacrosse, crew with two or more rowers in shell, 7 on 7 football*

\*Could potentially be considered "Lower Risk" with appropriate cleaning of equipment and use of masks by participants

**Lower Risk:** Sports that can be done with social distancing or individually with no sharing of equipment or the ability to clean the equipment between use by competitors.

*Examples: Individual running events, throwing events (javelin, shot put, discus), individual swimming, golf, weightlifting, alpine skiing, sideline cheer, single sculling, cross country running (with staggered starts)*

## 2. Transportation to events

Schools must consider social distancing requirements when scheduling contests and events for the fall. Social distancing (as required by state or local health department) will need to be maintained on buses/vans. Thus, multiple buses/vans and/or parental/guardian transportation will likely be needed.

## 3. Social distancing during Contests/Events/Activities

### a. Sidelines/benches

Appropriate social distancing will need to be maintained on sidelines/bench during contests and events. Consider using tape or paint as a guide for students and coaches.

### b. Who should be allowed at events?

Group people into tiers from essential to non-essential and decide which tiers will be allowed at an event:

1. Tier 1 (Essential): Athletes, coaches, officials, event staff, medical staff, security
2. Tier 2 (Preferred): Media
3. Tier 3 (Non-essential): Spectators, vendors

*Only Tier 1 and 2 personnel will be allowed to attend events until state/local health departments lift restrictions on mass gatherings.*

#### D. Athletic Training Services

Given the coming financial crisis at the state and local levels, the NFHS SMAC fears that athletic trainer positions will be seen as a “luxury” and those positions will be at risk during the budgeting process. It is also assumed that athletic trainers supplied to high schools by hospitals and sports medicine clinics are also at risk as many medical clinics and hospitals have suffered severe revenue loss during the pandemic.

Athletic trainers in high schools are positioned to play a vital role as sports return following this pandemic. As health-care professionals, they can take lead roles in developing and implementing infection control policy throughout the school. Whenever needed, state associations and their SMACs should promote the importance of athletic trainers in high schools and their role in injury evaluation, treatment and risk minimization as well as being a vital component of any return-to-school and athletics plan.

### 2. Return to Physical Activity

Current pre-season conditioning and acclimatization models assume that athletes have deconditioned over the summer months. The current pandemic may result in students being deconditioned for four to five months. The NFHS is currently involved with a number of other organizations in developing consensus guidelines for fall sports practices. These guidelines will be sent to state associations immediately after they are finalized and approved by all involved organizations.

### 3. Hygienic

#### A. Illness reporting

Create notification process for all event athletes, coaches, event staff, media, spectators and vendors if the organizers/medical personnel learn of suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 at the event.

#### B. Considerations for Officials, Coaches, Other Personnel

1. Vulnerable individuals should not participate in any practices, conditioning activities, contests or events during Phases 1 and 2.
2. Masks may be worn, social distancing enforced and “Hygiene Basics” adhered to in all situations.

#### C. Hygiene Basics

#### **CONTINUE TO PRACTICE GOOD HYGIENE**

- Wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer, especially after touching frequently used items or surfaces.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Sneeze or cough into a tissue, or the inside of your elbow.
- Disinfect frequently used items and surfaces as much as possible.
- Strongly consider using face coverings while in public, and particularly when using mass transit.

#### **PEOPLE WHO FEEL SICK SHOULD STAY HOME**

- Do not go to work or school.
- Contact and follow the advice of your medical provider.

## **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

1. Wide availability of hand sanitizer at contests and practices. Participants, coaches and officials should clean hands frequently.
2. Wiping down ball and equipment frequently.
3. No pre-game and post-game handshakes/high-fives/fist bumps.
4. Officials and sideline volunteers should be given option to wear face coverings (may use artificial noisemaker in place of whistle).

## **References**

“Opening up America Again.” *The White House*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/>. Accessed: 5/6/2020.

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### **DISCLAIMER – NFHS Position Statements and Guidelines**

The NFHS regularly distributes position statements and guidelines to promote public awareness of certain health and safety-related issues. Such information is neither exhaustive nor necessarily applicable to all circumstances or individuals and is no substitute for consultation with appropriate health-care professionals. Statutes, codes or environmental conditions may be relevant. NFHS position statements or guidelines should be considered in conjunction with other pertinent materials when taking action or planning care. The NFHS reserves the right to rescind or modify any such document at any time.



# APPENDIX I



# COVID-19 Athlete/Coach Monitoring Form

Name	Time	Circle Yes/No below										Temp (if higher than 100.3°F)
		Fever		Cough		Sore Throat		Shortness of Breath		Close contact, or cared for someone with COVID-19		
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	