



# INTERIM GUIDANCE FOR ATHLETICS

[Michigan.gov/Coronavirus](https://Michigan.gov/Coronavirus)

Updated 2/7/2021

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## Summary of Recent Changes on 2/7/2021

- Guidance updated based on current levels of SARS-CoV-2 transmission and activities permitted under epidemic orders.
- Masks should always be worn during indoor and/or contact sports, except where doing so is unsafe.
- Per a February 4, 2021 epidemic order, whenever masks cannot be worn, sports organizers, teams, and athletes must abide by the **Additional Mitigation Measures for Contact Sports or Activities When Face Masks Cannot be Used** (see pg. 6).

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## Executive Summary

- Organized sports, like other activities where participants gather and interact in close proximity across households, pose COVID-19 risks. Depending on COVID-19 infection rates, sports may need certain mitigation measures to avoid exposing participants to unacceptable infection risk and risk of accelerated virus transmission in their communities.
- Different restrictions and mitigation measures may be needed based on the particular risk of each sport and current rates of transmission: (a) contact sports, such as football and wrestling, pose a higher risk of transmitting COVID-19 to athletes, coaches, and the general community, than non-contact sports; (b) indoor sports pose higher risks than outdoor sports; and (c) sports where a face mask cannot be worn, such as wrestling and water polo, pose higher risks than sports where athletes can wear face masks throughout play.
- Mitigation measures are described below for non-contact sports and contact sports in which masks can be worn. Additional mitigation measures, including regular testing, are described for situations in which face masks cannot be worn safely.
- CDC and MDHHS guidance should be adhered to for sports teams/clubs and facilities that are continuing to operate.

## Sports and Risk of COVID-19 Transmission

Counties around the country have faced outbreaks of COVID-19 associated with sports teams. In Michigan, there were 42 known outbreaks associated with athletics (K-12 schools, professional, collegiate, and commercial venues) in August and September of 2020 (before restrictions on contact sports were implemented). Outbreaks of this magnitude have the potential to affect not only just a sports team, but also the broader community in which the players and coaches reside.

Sports requiring frequent and close interaction between players make prevention of virus transmission much more difficult compared to sports where players are not as close to each other. The risk of virus transmission is increased by the number of individuals a player physically interacts with, as well as the intensity and duration of that interaction.

Contact sports, meaning sports involving more than occasional and fleeting contact, pose a particular challenge in the era of COVID-19 due to the closeness of the players and potential for virus transmission. Even with mitigation measures in place, such as wearing of masks, transmission cannot be completely prevented when players are in prolonged or intense contact. Contact sports include the following: football, basketball, rugby, field hockey, soccer, lacrosse, wrestling, hockey, boxing, futsal and martial arts with opponents. These risks are even greater for indoor contact sports where there is a lack of natural ventilation to mitigate the close proximity of participants.

The [American Academy of Pediatrics](https://www.aapublications.org/) (URL: [bit.ly/2LsSbEO](https://bit.ly/2LsSbEO)) outlines sports for which face mask-wearing is not recommended, because the face mask could get caught on objects, impair vision, or become a choking hazard (competitive cheerleading/tumbling/stunting/flying; gymnastics; wrestling) or because a face mask would become saturated with water (swimming; diving; water polo; other water sports). These sports, too, pose greater risk of virus transmission than sports for which athletes can wear a face mask at all times.

As the epidemiology of COVID-19 around the country and the state of Michigan evolves, MDHHS will continue to review these recommendations.

Sports organizers, families, teams, and communities should assess the risk versus benefit of playing organized sports. Individual circumstances, including underlying health conditions that put athletes or household contacts at increased risk of severe disease if they should contract COVID-19, should be considered before returning to practice or play. Mitigation efforts can reduce the risk of contracting COVID-19; however, mitigation efforts will not eliminate COVID-19 risk.

## General Mitigation Measures for Athletics

MDHHS recommends the following behaviors to reduce risk of virus transmission whenever athletes are practicing or competing. These recommendations apply to athletes as well as support staff (coaches, athletic trainers, etc.).

### 1. Wear Face Masks

**Athletes must wear a face mask at all times, except in activities where face masks are not able to be worn safely.** Specific exceptions are listed in the section below.\*

- Adjusting the level and intensity of physical activity and taking frequent rest breaks can improve toleration of a face mask.
- Any cloth face covering that becomes saturated with sweat should be changed immediately.

### 2. Isolate or Quarantine Away from Others if Symptoms or Exposure to COVID-19

- Players should not play or practice while [symptomatic](https://www.cdc.gov/symptoms/) (URL: [bit.ly/3oCRHe5](https://bit.ly/3oCRHe5)) even with a negative COVID-19 test, per current CDC guidelines. They may return only when symptoms have resolved for >24 hours and with a negative RT-PCR result.
- Teams should institute a screen for symptoms before play. Teams may sign up for and use the free [MI Symptoms tool](https://misymptomapp.state.mi.us/) (URL: [misymptomapp.state.mi.us/](https://misymptomapp.state.mi.us/)) to complete self-screening for COVID symptoms.
- Anyone with symptoms or exposure should be tested before returning for play.
- Those who test positive should isolate and may not return to team play or practices for the duration of their infectious period as determined by [current CDC guidance](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-to-isolate.html) (URL: [bit.ly/2TBf0Xq](https://bit.ly/2TBf0Xq)).
- Athletes should not play or practice while a household contact is exhibiting any signs or symptoms of COVID-19.
- Athletes should not play or practice if deemed a [close contact](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-to-quarantine.html) (URL: [bit.ly/36OM2dK](https://bit.ly/36OM2dK)) of someone infected with COVID-19 and should quarantine at home as required by the local health department.
- Teams and athletes must comply with local and state public health officials during any case investigation and contact tracing that may be required, and with enforcement of quarantine and isolation requirements.

### 3. Practice Safer Individual Behaviors

- Wash hands frequently and cover coughs and sneezes.

- Do not share items that are difficult to clean, sanitize or disinfect. Use separate towels, clothing or other items used to wipe faces or hands.
- Individuals should use their own gear/equipment and minimize sharing equipment.
- Individuals are encouraged to provide their own food, drinks, and/or water.
- If a mask is removed during a break, participants must remain at least 6 feet apart from others.
- Refrain from pre- or post-event handshakes, hugs, fist bumps, high fives or contact celebrations.
- Refrain from spitting, chewing gum or tobacco in the event areas.
- For younger athletes, it may be beneficial for parents or other household members to monitor their children, make sure they follow social distancing and take other protective actions (e.g., younger children could sit with parents or caregivers, instead of in a dugout or group area).

#### **4. Clean and Disinfect Often**

- Ensure enough time between events or practices to allow for proper cleaning and disinfection of the facilities and shared equipment.
- Ensure adequate supplies to support healthy hygiene practices for participants, spectators, and employees, including soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol content, paper towels and tissues.
- Identify an adult staff member or volunteer to ensure proper cleaning and disinfection of objects and equipment, particularly for any shared equipment or frequently touched surfaces.
- When disinfecting, use products that meet [EPA's criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2](https://www.epa.gov/sars-cov-2/cleaning-disinfecting-sars-cov-2) (URL: [bit.ly/3cNO15B](https://www.epa.gov/sars-cov-2/cleaning-disinfecting-sars-cov-2)) and that are appropriate for the surface. Prior to wiping the surface, allow the disinfectant to sit for the necessary contact time recommended by the manufacturer. Train staff on proper cleaning procedures to ensure safe and correct application of disinfectants.
- Provide individual disinfectant wipes in bathrooms.
- Provide no-touch trash cans and, if equipped, encourage use of no-touch doors.

#### **5. Choose Safer Options for Practices and Competitions**

- Prioritize outdoor, as opposed to indoor, practice and play as much as possible.

- If playing inside, ensure ventilation systems or fans operate properly. Increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible, for example by opening windows and doors. Do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety or health risk (e.g., risk of falling or triggering asthma symptoms) to players or others using the facility.
- Areas with poor ventilation (weight rooms, small spaces) where social distancing cannot be implemented should be avoided.
- In practices, prioritize noncontact activity, like conditioning and drills, where social distancing can be maintained.
- Small groups may help reduce the risk of teamwide COVID-19 outbreaks as they allow for greater social distancing, easier contact tracing, and reducing the number of athletes that need to be quarantined.
- Minimize travel to other communities and regions for practices and competition.
- Limit the use of carpools, buses, or other shared transportation between persons outside the same household. When riding in an automobile to a sports event, encourage players to ride to the sports event with persons living in their same household, and always wear a mask if traveling with persons outside the same household.
- It is recommended that spectators are limited to two per athlete. The total capacity of stadiums and arenas may be limited by local or state regulation. Find the latest state regulations at [www.Michigan.gov/coronavirus](http://www.Michigan.gov/coronavirus).
  - As of January 22, 2021, stadiums can allow up to 500 people at venues that seat over 10,000 people and stadiums that seat less than 10,000 are allowed to be at 20% capacity, up to 250 people.

## 6. Testing for Contact Sports

- Testing is required for contact sports or activities where a mask cannot be worn safely.\* Please see the section below on **Additional Mitigation Measures for Contact Sports or Activities When Face Masks Cannot be Used**.
- Even where a mask can be worn safely, testing for SARS-CoV-2 can be used as an extra tool to help detect the virus early and avoid potential virus transmission, especially for contact sports where players are in prolonged or intense contact.
- Any testing cadence should be set based on prevalence and characteristics of virus in the community (e.g. rapid spread, positivity, variant)
- Testing is particularly recommended before any inter-team competition, especially before players come into close contact with other players from outside the local

community. Testing—and players staying home if they test positive—helps avoid teams spreading the virus from one community to another if the team is choosing to travel.

## **\*Some contact sports or activities may be determined by a sports organization to be unsafe to perform while wearing a face mask:**

- If a sports organization, association, or league that oversees the sport and sets rules and guidelines for sports safety determines a mask is unsafe during contact sports practice or competition, those sports must follow the **Additional Mitigation Measures for Contact Sports or Activities When Face Masks Cannot be Used**.
  - All teams that are a member of the sports organization must follow the determination of the sports organization.
- The following contact sports or activities are not recommended to be performed while masked by the [American Academy of Pediatrics](https://www.aapeds.org/) (URL: [bit.ly/2LsSbEO](https://bit.ly/2LsSbEO)):
  - Competitive cheerleading when tumbling/stunting/flying, and gymnastics while on the different apparatuses, because the covering may get caught on objects and become a choking hazard or accidentally impair vision.
  - During wrestling contact, a cloth face covering could become a choking hazard and is discouraged.
  - Individuals who participate in water sports should not wear a cloth face covering while they are in the water, because a wet cloth face covering may be more difficult to breathe through.
- Current [CDC guidance](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/s111820-cdc-guidance.html) (URL: [bit.ly/3rjbyZZ](https://bit.ly/3rjbyZZ)) provides additional considerations on mask-wearing for both lower-intensity and higher-intensity sports.

## **Additional Mitigation Measures for Contact Sports or Activities When Face Masks Cannot be Used**

In limited situations where athletic practice or competition cannot be performed with a face mask, additional mitigation measures can be used to allow for safer play:

- Face masks should only be removed prior to activities that could be deemed as hazardous, as outlined above. Athletes need to wear cloth face coverings between practice drills, while not playing on the field, mat, or court, on the sidelines, when arriving at or departing from the playing or practice location, in the locker room, and during shared transportation to and from the event, and in the presence of anyone outside of the household. Face masks should fit players well and always be worn over the mouth and nose.



- Coaches, staff, and spectators shall continue to use masks, and athletes shall continue to use masks when not actively participating in play (including in locker rooms, on the sidelines, when entering or leaving the field).
- During the two weeks before and after unmasked athletic events, athletes should completely avoid participation in non-team social gatherings, which should be strictly enforced by team staff and coaches.
- For contact sports or activities where face masks cannot be worn, the following testing regimen is required for participants aged 13 years and up:
  - Unmasked activities in practice or competition can be performed **only** with a negative antigen test within the preceding 24 hours or negative RT-PCR test within the preceding 72 hours of the unmasked practice or play.
  - Athletes who test positive with an antigen test should isolate immediately and obtain a RT-PCR test within 48 hours. Unless the athlete tests negative on that RT-PCR test, they must isolate and may not return to team play or practices for the duration of their infectious period as determined by [current CDC guidance](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/s111920-covid-19-guidance.html) (URL: [bit.ly/2TBf0Xq](https://bit.ly/2TBf0Xq)).
  - Athletes (symptomatic or asymptomatic) who test positive on a RT-PCR test must isolate for 10 days from date of first positive test (if asymptomatic) or as determined by [current CDC guidance](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/s111920-covid-19-guidance.html) (URL: [bit.ly/2TBf0Xq](https://bit.ly/2TBf0Xq)) (if symptomatic). They may not return to team play or practices for the duration of their infectious period.
  - Athletes who have recovered from confirmed COVID-19 in the past three months and remain symptom-free may participate in athletics without testing if they can provide a letter from their doctor attesting that they fall into this category (the individual must have had a positive **diagnostic** test within three months. An antibody test is not sufficient).
  - Team staff should maintain prompt follow-up for case investigation and full contact tracing (including affected contacts outside of the athletic team).
- Professional sports, collegiate sports, and semiprofessional sports whose leagues have stricter requirements for testing and athletic conduct than that outlined above should continue to follow their league protocols. Testing can be no less frequent than the protocols outlined above.



**For additional resources on mitigation measures and resources available to athletes and teams, please see the following links:**

- [MDHHS COVID-19 Information and Resources for Athletics](https://bit.ly/3pXCwMI) (URL: [bit.ly/3pXCwMI](https://bit.ly/3pXCwMI))
- [CDC: Playing Sports](https://bit.ly/3rjbyZZ) (URL: [bit.ly/3rjbyZZ](https://bit.ly/3rjbyZZ))
- [CDC: Considerations for Youth Sports Administrators](https://bit.ly/3aFfynm) (URL: [bit.ly/3aFfynm](https://bit.ly/3aFfynm))
- [MI Safe Start: Youth Sports](https://bit.ly/3qbvK60) (URL: [bit.ly/3qbvK60](https://bit.ly/3qbvK60))

For the latest information on Michigan's response to COVID-19, please visit [www.Michigan.gov/Coronavirus](https://www.Michigan.gov/Coronavirus). You may also call the COVID-19 Hotline at 888-535-6136 or email [COVID19@michigan.gov](mailto:COVID19@michigan.gov).