

Fall Sports Programs for the 2020-2021 School Year

Rev. Sept. 8, 2020

Background

The following guidance provides direction on fall school sports programs for students K-12. This guidance is applicable to both public and independent schools. It was developed with input from public health experts and educators.

General Guidance

Practices and Scrimmages

School-based fall sports programs may initiate coach-led practice sessions (e.g., skills and drills work) and inter-squad scrimmages within your school program no earlier than the first day of academic instruction.

Facial coverings are required to be worn by all players, coaches, officials, staff, and spectators at all times, including during active play. Students who have a medical or behavioral reason for not wearing a facial covering should not be required to wear one; these decisions should be made in partnership with the health care provider and school nurse. An exception is provided for participants in cross country running – both practice sessions and interscholastic meets/competitions – so long as physical distancing is maintained between individuals using staggered starts or other means.

When schools are operating under Step I of the Agency of Education’s [Strong and Healthy Start](#) guidance or if a decision is made by the local superintendent to restrict or eliminate in-person instruction as a result of confirmed COVID-19 illness in student(s) or staff, all school-based athletic activities shall cease until at least such time as the decision to resume instruction under Step II of the Agency of Education guidance for academic instruction is made by the local superintendent after consultation with the Department of Health.

Competitions

If permitted under “Guidance for Specific Types of Sports” (see below), school-based fall sports programs may initiate interscholastic games, meets and competitions when Vermont schools reach Step III as described in the [Strong and Healthy Start](#) guidance. All Vermont schools will begin the academic year in Step II and the decision to move to Step III will be determined by the Department of Health. It should be anticipated that schools will be in Step II for a minimum of two weeks after school opens for academic instruction.

Games and meets may only occur between or involve Vermont-based teams or teams from counties eligible for quarantine-free travel, based on the most recent map published by the [Agency of Commerce and Community Development](#).

NEW Referees and other game officials are exempt from wearing a mask during active play if masking inhibits their ability to officiate (i.e., blow a whistle). Referees and other game officials must have a mask on their person at all times and are required to wear a mask during arrival, departure, warm-ups, half-time, etc., and anytime there is need to approach a player or coach to explain a call or manage the game when six feet of physical distance cannot be maintained.

Guidance for Specific Types of Sports

The risk associated with different types of sports programs is a function of the degree of contact between participants and the type of setting or venue in which the contest is held. The following requirements reflect these differences and create a framework that appropriately limits risk.

Outdoor Sports Involving No or Low-Contact

Cross country running, golf and bass fishing may hold team practice sessions and interscholastic meets/competitions. The number of participants in any meet or competition may not exceed current limits on event size – currently 150. A meet may involve multiple groupings through the day if the groups do not interact with one another. For example, meet organizers may consider staggered starts and departures to ensure the number of participants on-location at a single point in time does not exceed limits on event size. Meet organizers must maintain lists of participants in each grouping for 30 days to assist in contact tracing.

Outdoor Sports Involving Short-Duration, Incidental Contact

Soccer and field hockey may hold team practice sessions, inter-squad scrimmages within your school program and interscholastic games. “Jamboree” or tournament-style play (one team playing multiple games vs multiple opponents in a single day/weekend) is not currently permitted.

Indoor Sports Involving Short-Duration, Incidental Contact

Volleyball may hold team practice sessions limited to no and low contact physical conditioning and skill building drills. Indoor inter-squad scrimmages within your school program are allowed only if all participants (players and coaches) are wearing cloth facing coverings at all times while play is occurring. Outdoor matches, including interscholastic games, may be considered if all participants are wearing cloth facing coverings at all times while play is occurring.

Sports Involving High Contact

Football and cheerleading may hold practice sessions limited to no and low contact physical conditioning and skill building drills. Full contact scrimmages, games and cheer stunting will not be allowed during the Fall 2020 season. Low contact alternatives, such as 7-on-7 football or sideline cheer, may be considered.

Safety Precautions

As noted above, facial coverings are required to be worn by all players, coaches, officials, staff and spectators at all times.

During times when athletes are not actively participating in practice or competition, appropriate physical distancing should be maintained. Teams should structure team meetings to limit congregation and ensure physical distancing between players on the sidelines or benches.

During competition, alter spacing of players, coaches, officials and staff to achieve physical distancing to the greatest extent possible.

The number of spectators should be limited as much as possible and measures should be put in place to ensure social distancing between households. Interactions between spectators and participants should be minimized before, during and after events.

At no time shall the total number of spectators exceed current limits on event size – currently 150 for outdoor events.

Any allowance for spectators at indoor events must be consistent with the most current health guidance published by the Agency of Education related to school visitors. At no time shall the total number of spectators exceed 50 percent of the fire safety occupancy limit of a venue or one (1) person per 100 square feet, to a maximum of 75 people indoors.

School campuses and other venues with multiple facilities (such as multi-field locations, multi-court gyms) may have more than one unit of the maximum event size as long as those units are in distinct portions of the facility (a different gym, unique and distinct fields) and the distinct gatherings have no interaction with one another (for example, a soccer team and a field hockey team should not be using the same locker room at the same time). Locker room use must adhere to physical distancing and masking requirements.

Prioritize outdoor, as opposed to indoor, activity (e.g. training sessions and matches) as much as possible for all fall sports programs. Use of indoor training facilities, such as weight rooms, must adhere to the most current guidance published by the Agency of Commerce and Community Development for fitness centers and similar exercise facilities, which currently limits use to 25% of approved fire safety occupancy; or one (1) person per 200 square feet and, no groups of more than 25 people shall occur in any single, distinct indoor space.

Equipment and other supplies touched by participants must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected regularly. Limit sharing equipment as much as possible.

No spitting on the field or sideline.

No sharing of water bottles.

If restroom facilities (including portalets) will be provided for spectators, they should be cleaned and disinfected regularly, consistent with CDC guidance. If restroom facilities will not be available for public use, notify spectators ahead of time so they can prepare appropriately.

Concession operations must adhere to the most current guidance published by the Agency of Commerce and Community Development for food service operations.

Encourage parents/caregivers or other designated adults to transport participants to off-site, interscholastic games to minimize the number of participants requiring bus transportation. Anyone utilizing bus transport is required to wear facial coverings on the bus and comply with all other relevant guidelines in the most current health guidance published by the Agency of Education related to bussing and transportation.

It is recommended that middle school-level programs build schedules against local teams to reduce travel.

Guidance for Winter Sports

Guidelines for school-based winter sports programs will be published by October 15, 2020.