

Frequently asked questions for Adult Sports

Why has the state issued adult sports guidance?

Many adults engage in sports activities, and many more during warmer months. The advent of COVID-19 creates challenges for adults who want to engage in sports activities, especially for those activities that can include multiple players. Adult sports guidance was issued to give adult players information on how they can reduce the risk of contracting or spreading COVID-19 while engaged in sports activity. [Click here for adult sports guidance.](#)

Has the CDC issued guidelines for adult sports activities during the COVID-19 epidemic?

No. As of the date Rhode Island issued adult sports guidance, CDC (**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**) has not issued specific guidelines on ways adults can engage in sports while reducing the likelihood of contracting or spreading COVID-19. However, CDC has issued COVID-related youth sports guidance. We used that guidance to create youth sports guidelines for Rhode Islanders. [It can be found here.](#)

Can the youth sports guidance be used by adults engaged in sports?

The youth sports guidance provides a set of rules and recommendations for adult leaders to put into effect when putting on programs for children.

It looks like the adult sports guidance is stricter than the youth sports guidance. Why? That doesn't make sense.

Adults and children are different, and the two sets of guidelines are based on recognition of those differences. Adults have much higher COVID-19 infection rates than children. Eight out of every 10 COVID cases, eight of every 10 COVID hospitalizations, and slightly more than four of every 10 COVID deaths occur in adults ages 20 to 79. This contrasts with children ages 0 to 19 who account for 7% of cases, less than 2% of hospitalizations and 0% of fatalities. Adults simply are at higher risk than youths of contracting the virus. Consequently, the adult sports guidance is different than the youth sports guidance.

Also, adults are more capable of understanding and following the rules and guidelines. We're looking for adults to be responsible, comply with the adult sports guidance, and make positive decisions about keeping themselves, teammates, and Rhode Islanders safe from COVID-19. Also, we're looking for adults to model safe behavior for kids and help keep their families and communities safe.

Developmentally, kids don't have the same level of maturity and understanding as adults. It's not realistic to expect a 7-year-old to follow the rules 100%. But at the same time, sports provide an outlet where kids can release pent-up energy, get involved in healthy activity and have an opportunity to play and socialize with peers. Being active, getting sweaty, and developing new skills doesn't just promote physical health – the mental health benefits can be critical for young people, particularly during times of crisis. Physical activity helps children have a better outlook on life by building confidence, managing anxiety and depression, and increasing self-esteem and cognitive skills.

But isn't the link between exercise and mental health just as important for adults?

Yes. Sports and physical activity also are important for adults, helping to improve moods, cope with stress and reduce depression, lower the risk of high blood pressure and stroke, improve aerobic fitness, and prevent weight gain, among other benefits. [See CDC guidance for more information.](#)

What are the elements of the adult sports guidance?

This guidance does not prohibit sports but provides a framework to help adult sports leagues and associations draft their own tailored rules of play and govern their own players' conduct. The guidelines also help adult players understand the safer "rules of the road." The key principles of the adult sports guidelines are the same as the youth sports guidelines. They include:

- "Stable groups" of no more than 15 people (same players, same coaches, in the same group over the season)
- Physical distancing of 6 feet between players
- Recommending no physical contact
- Abiding by Executive Orders and RIDOH guidelines on quarantine
- Not playing if you're sick or have COVID-19 symptoms
- Hand washing and sanitizing before, during, and after sports activities
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces on the field, court, or playing surface
- Not sharing equipment including bats, balls, racquets, gloves, etc.
- Requiring face coverings or masks if 6 feet of physical distancing cannot be maintained; and
- Recommending practice and skill development rather than competition and team play.

Please be more specific about sports that are allowable versus sports that aren't allowable.

The State of Rhode Island is urging adults to be responsible and comply with the guidance and make safe decisions about keeping themselves, teammates, and Rhode Islanders safe from COVID-19. Again, this guidance is not sports-specific, but different sports and activities pose different levels of risk.

For example: running, walking, biking, playing tennis, or golf all can be done in stable groups with individuals keeping a 6-foot distance from one another. More challenging but still possible would be the example of swimming: maintaining 6-foot physical distancing in a chlorinated, public swimming pool.

For team sports that involve a high level of cooperation and physical contact – such as basketball, flag football, soccer, and lacrosse – at this time, we are strongly recommending that adult leagues not organize games even within stable groups of 15. We advise teams and coaches to emphasize the development of skills, not competition, in this phase of reopening, and to avoid physical contact.

What is the risk in being involved in games that include physical contact?

COVID-19 spreads mainly among people who are in close contact (within about 6 feet) for a prolonged period. We also know today that many people have COVID-19 but have no symptoms or are "asymptomatic." Spread happens primarily through respiratory particles. The spread of COVID-19 happens when an infected person, who may have no symptoms, coughs, sneezes, or talks. Very fine

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particles or droplets from their mouth or nose can be launched into the air and inhaled into the lungs of others, or even land in the mouths or noses of people nearby. Vigorous activity raises respiration levels and can lead to increased sharing of respiratory particles or droplets. The risk for transmission of COVID-19 increases the closer people are together and the longer they are close to each other.

Will games be allowed in Phase Three?

At this point, Phase Three guidelines have not been developed. And, the decision on when to begin Phase Three will be made based on data that has not been collected. Short answer: This is still up in the air.

What happens if I don't follow the guidelines in the adult sports guidance? What happens if my team doesn't?

While some of the information in the adult sports guidance is based on Rhode Island Department of Health emergency regulations or active Executive Orders, much of the guidance contains simple but important recommendations to reduce the risk of getting and spreading COVID-19.

CDC estimates that that 35% of people with COVID-19 do not have any symptoms. Furthermore, for people who do get symptoms, CDC estimates that 40% of coronavirus transmission occurs before they get symptoms. ([Click here for more information.](#)) The adult sports guidelines are aimed at helping adults to be active in a safe way, while also reducing the chances of unintentionally spreading the virus.

Examples of how some sports can apply the COVID-19 adult sports guidelines:

Softball

Because of adults' higher risk of contracting COVID-19, the guidelines strongly encourage that adult softball teams and players stick to drills and practice during this phase of reopening. The guidance does not prohibit softball or other sports. It is a framework for adult sports leagues and associations to use to draft their own rules of play and govern their own players' conduct.

Leagues should be sure to include the key principles of this guidance in their own guidance. Namely: "Stable groups" of no more than 15 people, physical distancing of at least 6 feet between players, no physical contact, face coverings if 6 feet of physical distancing cannot be maintained, no sharing of balls, bats, gloves, etc.

Volleyball

Shared equipment adds to risk. We would prefer that people hold off on volleyball until Phase Three. If they do play within stable groups of 15, they should wear masks, wash/sanitize their hands, and sanitize the ball frequently.

Ultimate Frisbee

We encourage adults who play ultimate frisbee to monitor the website of

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the sport's governing body, [USA Ultimate](#), which will be issuing its return to play rules within the next couple of weeks.

Basketball

Unfortunately, basketball is a contact sport and we are strongly advising against adults playing it in Phase Two.

Should cities and towns keep outdoor basketball courts closed to the general public?

Yes, at least until Phase Three Opening basketball courts encourages pick-up games. An open pick-up game where participants come and go presents much greater risks than organized sports supervised by coaches who can help ensure only participants in stable groups are playing with one another and other safety precautions are followed.

How can I apply the guidance to sailing?

Many Rhode Island communities and organizations offer sailing programs during the summer. The [Adult Sports Guidance](#) applies on boats as on land, but we recognize that it may be difficult to maintain six feet of distance continuously on a boat. Sailors should strive to maintain this distance whenever possible and should wear face coverings whenever six feet of physical distance cannot be maintained. In addition, stable groups of 15 (including instructors, captains, etc.) or less should be designated as crewmates for the season, regardless of what boat they are sailing on. The organization hosting the program should collect contact information from each person in the group for contact tracing purposes. All of these recommendations are intended to reduce risk of spread of COVID-19.