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Frequently Asked Questions for Youth and Adult Sports

Why do we need youth and adult sports guidance?

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has weighed heavily on everyone. We all need healthy outlets and activities during the summer. This is important to our mental and physical health and well-being. For many kids and adults, sports provide an outlet where they can release pent-up energy, socialize with peers, gain fitness, and build athleticism.

Broadly, the state's [Youth and Adult Sports Guidance](#) is a framework that provides best practices for those who wish to participate in sports while limiting the risk of exposure to COVID-19, consistent with the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) guidelines](#). The CDC's central principle is that the more people interact, the closer the physical interaction, the more that equipment is shared by multiple players, and the longer the interaction – the higher the risk of spreading COVID-19.

This guidance focuses on lower-risk approaches to engaging in sports activities and aligns with the current [executive orders](#) and [Rhode Island Department of Health \(RIDOH\) regulations](#).

What are the basic elements of the youth and adult sports guidance?

The key principles of the youth and adult sports guidance include:

- **Stable groups:** same players and same coaches, in the same group for the season.
- **Stable group size:** stable sports groups in Phase III should be kept to no more than 25 people for indoor activities and no more than 50 people for outdoor activities. This includes players, coaches, and volunteers.
- **Physical distancing** of six feet between participants is encouraged, but not required, while engaged in active play. When not engaged in active play, six feet of physical distance should be maintained between participants.
- **Face coverings:** Coaches, staff, volunteers, and spectators should wear a face covering when unable to easily, continuously, and measurably maintain six feet of physical distance; participants should wear face coverings when not engaged in active play. (Exceptions exist for children younger than age two and those who can't wear one for health or developmental reasons.)
- **Games** are allowed for no-contact and low-contact sports between stable groups from states that are not on [RIDOH's list](#) of locations with a high COVID-19 community spread rate.
- **Close-contact sports** should focus on drills and practice. Participants shouldn't participate in games, scrimmages, or practices with other teams.
- **Spectators** are allowed and limited, in number, in accordance with venue of assembly gathering sizes in current [executive orders](#) and [reopeningri.com](#) guidance. Spectators, players, coaches, volunteers, and other on-site personnel are included in the total venue of

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assembly gathering size. No more than two spectators per player is recommended. Spectators should maintain six feet of physical distance between household groups and 14 feet from the outer limit of play.

- Don't play if you're sick or have COVID-19 symptoms.
- Wash or sanitize hands before, during, and after sports activities.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces on the field, court, or playing surface.
- Discourage use of shared equipment, including bats, racquets, gloves, etc.

How long will this guidance be in effect?

This guidance will be in effect from July 1, 2020, until further notice. Data will drive its duration. It will depend on what RIDOH epidemiologists are observing in the rate of spread of COVID-19 and related metrics across the state. If COVID-19 infections are not increasing as the Rhode Island economy reopens, it is possible that the State will loosen this guidance later in the summer. In any event, sports guidance will be updated before the beginning of the school year to address school sports. Again, data on the key indicators – infections, hospitalizations, testing, contact tracing, and deaths – will drive decision making.

How many people can participate on teams? What are the limits?

During Phase III, stable group sizes are recommended to be kept to no more than 25 people for indoor sports and no more than 50 people for outdoorsports.

Stable groups mean the same athletes and coaches will be in the same groups every day they conduct practices, games, or team meetings. Athletes should not change from one group to another. That would destabilize the group and increase the chance of someone (who may be COVID-19 positive but asymptomatic) spreading the virus. Parents are encouraged to choose one stable group per child for the summer. The smaller and more constant the stable group, the lower the risk of spreading COVID-19.

How many spectators can attend events?

Spectators may attend sports practices and games. We recommend no more than two spectators per player household. The number of spectators who can attend a practice or game depends upon the size of the sports team and venue. Every sports venue is subject to current executive orders regarding venues of assembly sizes and capacity limits. Currently, an indoor event venue may have up to 125 people and an outdoor event venue may have up to 250 people (spectators, players, coaches, volunteers, vendors, etc.) or 66% capacity (with six-foot physical distancing), whichever number is smaller. It's important for spectators to be at least 14 feet from the outer limit of play, maintain at least six feet of physical distance between household groups, and wear a face covering at all times (with exceptions for small children or those who cannot wear one for health or developmental reasons).

Will physical distancing rules be in effect?

Yes, physical distancing will be important to youth and adult sports this summer. Coaches and volunteers should always maintain a six-foot physical distance from players. Activities should be designed to maintain at least a six-foot physical distance whenever possible, but 14 feet of distance is optimal. Stable groups sharing a practice space, whether indoors or outdoors, should maintain a minimum of 14 feet from the outer limit of play areas. (See above for definition of stable groups.)

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How can you do physical distancing and do sports?

Although this guidance is not sports-specific, different sports and outside activities surely pose different levels of risk. No-contact and low-contact sports, where physical contact between players rarely occurs, or can be minimized, and where equipment is almost never shared, present a lower risk. Games between stable groups in these no-contact or low-contact sports are allowed as the risk of spreading COVID-19 is lower.

For team sports that involve close physical contact, we strongly discourage games, within or between stable groups. We advise coaches to emphasize the development of skills, not competition, during Phase III of reopening.

Do athletes have to wear face masks? That could be hard when they're running or exercising.

The guidelines encourage face coverings for all participants, but they're not required for players when they are engaged in active play within a stable group and maintaining six feet of physical distance most of the time. Face coverings are always required for coaches, volunteers, spectators, and adult players when not able to maintain six feet of physical distance.

How can participants keep their hands clean if there's no restroom on site?

Organizers and sponsors of sports programs and leagues will need to make sure that players, staff, and coaches have hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available. We have known since the start of the pandemic that hand washing is one of the easiest, most effective ways to slow the spread of the virus. We strongly advise parents to make sure their kids wash their hands vigorously before and after participating in sports. Also, organizers and coaches should schedule daily cleaning, frequent cleaning of high-touch areas, and cleaning and disinfection between sessions.

How risky is it for kids to share bats, balls, and other gear?

It is risky. This guidance discourages sharing equipment. By shared equipment, we mean protective gear, balls, bats, racquets, mats, water bottles, or other items that are touched by multiple people. To reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread, we ask coaches, volunteers, parents, and players to minimize the sharing of equipment and clean and disinfect items between uses by different players. Participants should bring their own equipment when possible.

How are we going to keep kids from high-fiving and hugging?

It's natural for kids to high-five when they've scored a goal or to hug a friend they haven't seen in a while. However, we're counting on coaches and parents to educate – and model – safe behaviors, just as you do in other elements of coaching and parenting. Give them alternatives and be creative, like cheers or dance moves that can be done from a safe distance.

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What types of sports get to play games?

No-contact and low-contact sports may resume games between stable groups with teams from any state that is not on [RIDOH's list](#) of locations with a high COVID-19 community spread rate. A no-contact sport is one in which players have no physical contact and can maintain physical distance most of the time. A low-contact sport is one in which players have very limited physical contact, maintain physical distance most of the time, and wear face coverings when they cannot maintain physical distancing. Specific plans and measures should be taken to further reduce contact for these sports (e.g., no sliding rules for baseball and softball).

Close-contact sports should not hold games, within or between stable groups, during this phase of the reopening. A close-contact sport is one in which players have frequent physical contact and are frequently close to each other. The CDC recommends that coaches of close-contact sports focus on individual skill building versus competition and place players into small groups that stay together throughout the season. (See definition of stable groups above.) During this phase for close-contact sports, we encourage focusing on conditioning, drills, and activities where physical distancing can be maintained.

Examples of Sports by Level of Contact

No-Contact Sports	Low-Contact Sports	Close-Contact Sports*
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Badminton• Bicycling• Golf• Rowing• Running• Skateboarding• Table Tennis• Tennis• Weight Lifting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Baseball• Cheerleading (Individual)• Field events• Gymnastics• Sailing• Skiing• Softball• Swimming	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Basketball• Boxing• Competitive Group Cheerleading• Football• Ice or Field Hockey• Lacrosse• Martial Arts• Roller Derby• Rugby• Soccer• Volleyball• Water Polo• Wrestling <p>* Some close-contact sports can be modified to reduce contact, particularly for practices and drills. See CDC guidelines below.</p>

Sources:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/youth-sports.html>
<https://fpnotebook.com/sports/exam/sprtsctctvlvs.htm>
<https://www.aspenprojectplay.org/return-to-play>

What about indoor facilities like hockey rinks, basketball courts, and indoor soccer?

Indoor facilities that are large enough to accommodate multiple stable groups at one time, while still complying with their COVID-19 Control Plan, the indoor stable group size, and venue of assembly limits, and maintaining 14 feet of physical distance between stable groups, are allowed. Care should be taken to ensure stable groups do not intermingle. Facilities may want to consider staggered practice times or dividing the rink or court. In addition, close-contact sports should not have games inside or outside during Phase III. Spectators may be allowed when they can be physically distanced at least 14 feet from the outer limit of play and when the capacity of the facility allows for additional people, no more than 125 people total or 66% of total capacity for all persons in the facility.

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What are the rules for road races and walkathons?

Road races and outdoor walkathons are considered public events or venues of assembly. This means that they can have up to 250 people per event, including athletes, staff, volunteers, spectators, vendors, and any other participants. They should still follow all applicable guidance and executive orders, including [Youth and Adult Sports Guidance](#), regarding physical distancing, face coverings, hand hygiene, and discouraging use of shared equipment.

Who did you talk to in developing these guidelines?

Department of Environmental Management (DEM) Director Janet Coit and her staff consulted with a broad range of administrators, recreation directors, scouting leaders, and coaches from across the state. These include representatives from the Rhode Island Recreation Association, Rhode Island Interscholastic League, Little League of Rhode Island, YMCA of Greater Providence, Boys and Girls Club, Girl Scouts of Rhode Island, Narragansett Council of the Boy Scouts of America, Soccer Rhode Island, Providence Recreation Department, Bristol Parks and Recreation, and other municipal leaders.

The CDC's guidelines and resources also helped inform Rhode Island's guidance.

Is it safe to use a public basketball court? What about pick-up games and playgrounds?

An open pick-up game where participants come and go presents much greater risks than a neighborhood or league practice that includes the same small number of players throughout the summer. Keep in mind that basketball is a close-contact sport, and we strongly recommend that players focus on skill building versus games.

Regardless of the sport, pick-up games will be riskier if the group of players doesn't remain consistent. Parents can play a role in keeping their families safe by organizing athletic activities in public spaces with the same group of kids over the course of the summer. Whether you're at the local court, playground, or park, remember to bring hand sanitizer, wear face coverings when not actively playing, avoid use of shared equipment, and maintain physical distance as much as possible.

What happens in the next phase of reopening?

We cannot speculate or make promises. The State has consulted with stakeholders and experts and made data-driven decisions in developing [all COVID-19 guidance documents](#). We are hopeful that in the next phase, Rhode Island will continue to allow more opportunities for sports activities. However, this will depend largely on compliance with Phase III guidelines, and, more importantly, where Rhode Island stands on the key indicators of the State's pandemic response – infections, hospitalizations, testing, contact tracing, and deaths – in the months ahead.

Will there be school sports this fall?

The current guidance is not intended to cover or govern decisions related to school or interscholastic sports. Sports guidance is expected to be updated before the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year to address school sports.