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Return to Play RI: Phase III youth, adult & school sports guidelines

Beginning in Phase III, youth and adult sports organizations began implementing sport activities in accordance with guidelines established by the state. In accordance with Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) [emergency regulations](#), organizations should refer to and adhere to the [Reopening RI General Business/Organization Guidelines](#). The State prepared a [fillable checklist](#) to assist businesses and organizations in meeting the requirements outlined in these RIDOH regulations. Youth and adult sports organizations and athletic facility operators must comply with RIDOH regulations and active [executive orders](#).

Youth sports organizations should also refer to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [guidance on youth sports](#) and [guidance on visiting parks and recreational facilities](#). School sports organizations are subject to the [Back to School RI: Health and Safety Guidance to Reopen Rhode Island's Elementary and Secondary Schools](#) and the rules and regulations of the sports organizations that govern school sports, such as local school committees and the [Rhode Island Interscholastic League](#).

The guidelines below summarize additional steps Rhode Island is asking all individuals, public and private schools, municipalities, youth and adult sports organizations, athletic facility operators, and corporations to take during Phase III. If you have any questions about this guidance, please contact Cindy Elder, RI Department of Environmental Management, Division of Parks & Recreation, at cynthia.elder@dem.ri.gov.

Phase III Operations:

- **Stable groups:** Participants are encouraged to organize teams as “stable groups.” The term “stable groups” means the same individuals, including players, coaches, staff and volunteers, remain in the same group over the course of the entire program. Participants are encouraged not to change from one group to another. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to choose one stable group for their child per season.
- **Event/Assembly size:** The gathering size for youth or adult sports practices or games (including players, coaches, volunteers and spectators) should be in accordance with the venues of assembly size limit in current executive orders.
- **Physical distancing:** Activities where at least six feet of physical distance can be maintained are encouraged, and 14 feet of physical distance is preferred. When not engaged in active play (e.g. on the bench or on the sideline), members of a stable group should maintain physical distance of six feet between each person.
- **Space between stable groups:** When stable groups are not engaged in active play with one another, the stable groups should maintain a minimum physical distance of 14 feet between stable groups.
- **Contract Tracing/Quarantine:** If a player, coach or member on a team or in a stable group

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tests positive for COVID-19, the entire team or group (if they have been in close contact with the individual who tested positive for COVID-19) needs to quarantine for 14 days or in accordance with directions from the RI Department of Health. All out-of-state participants in youth, adult and school sports should be advised of and adhere to current [executive orders](#) regarding the need to quarantine prior to participation. All individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 or have been in close contact with a person who tested positive should cooperate with the RI Department of Health to contact trace other potentially positive people and limit the spread of the coronavirus.

- **Screening:** All players, staff, coaches, volunteers and spectators should be screened for symptoms related to COVID-19 prior to the beginning of each activity. A screening tool is available, in [English](#) and [Spanish](#), to aid with proper screening at <https://health.ri.gov/covid/for/business/>. Any person exhibiting signs of illness and any person who has been exposed to a person with COVID-19 must be excluded from the activity in accordance with CDC and RIDOH guidelines at <https://health.ri.gov/diseases/ncov2019/>.
- **Hand cleaning:** Frequent handwashing or hand sanitizing should be promoted with all participants engaged in sports activities and spectators. If soap and water are not readily available, hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol may be used. Handwashing and/or sanitizing should occur upon entering and leaving an athletic facility and before, during, and after the sport activities. Athletes and coaches are encouraged to avoid backslapping, hugging, handshakes and fist bumps.
- **Athletic Facilities (non-school facilities, such as indoor ice rinks, athletic complexes, etc.):**
 - Communal areas, such as waiting areas, lobbies, and locker rooms may open at a capacity of 1 person per 100 square feet of space. These areas must have a written cleaning schedule and be supplied with cleaning materials and sanitizer.
 - Single-occupancy showers are permitted only where showers are sanitized between use. If showers cannot be sanitized between use, athletes should be encouraged to shower at home as quickly as possible after practice and games.
 - A cleaning schedule must be implemented to ensure the frequent cleaning of high-touch areas or equipment, daily cleaning, and cleaning and disinfection between sessions. This may include cleaning frequently touched surfaces on the field, court, or play surface at least daily, or between uses by different stable groups. See CDC guidance on [cleaning and disinfection](#) and in the CDC [guidance on youth sports](#).
- **Shared objects:** Discourage sharing of items that are difficult to clean, sanitize, or disinfect between use (e.g., bats, racquets). Participants should bring and use their own equipment where possible, or have equipment designated and labeled for individual use by the organization. Shared equipment should be limited and sanitized between users. Equipment should be staged to allow physical distance between users and to limit multiple touches. Cups, bottles, or other food/beverage items should not be shared.
- **Spectators:** Spectators are allowed in accordance with current [executive orders](#) and RIDOH regulations regarding venues of assembly gathering sizes. Spectators should ensure at least six feet of physical distance between household groups and maintain at least 14 feet of space from the outer limit of play. It is recommended that no more than two (2) spectators attend from any household. Spectators must wear face coverings in accordance with current [executive orders](#) on face coverings.



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- **Face coverings:** Coaches, staff, volunteers, players and spectators should wear a face covering in accordance with RIDOH regulations and current [executive orders](#). School coaches, staff, volunteers, players and spectators should wear a face covering in accordance with [Back to School RI: Health and Safety Guidance to Reopen Rhode Island's Elementary and Secondary Schools](#). Athletes are encouraged to bring extra face coverings and change into a clean, dry face covering in case their face covering becomes wet or soiled while engaged in sports activities.
- **Risk Level of Sports:** The United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee, [National Federation of High School Associations](#) (NFHSA) and numerous other sports organizations have categorized sports based on the risk of transmission of COVID-19 inherent in the sport or recreational activity itself as traditionally played. For the purposes of this guidance, the State recommends sports organizations and athletic facility operators follow the categories established by NFHSA in its [Guidance for Opening Up High School Athletics and Activities](#) as follows:
 - **Higher Risk:** Includes 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/men's lacrosse, competitive cheer, dance.
 - **Moderate Risk:** Includes group sports or sports that involve intermittent close contact or close, sustained contact, but with protective equipment in place that may reduce the likelihood of respiratory particle transmission between participants 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/woman's lacrosse, crew with two or more rowers in shell, 7 on 7 football. The State also includes team sailing in this category.
 - *Could potentially be considered "Lower Risk" with appropriate cleaning of equipment and use of masks by participants.
 - **Lower Risk:** Includes sports that can be done with physical 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). The State also includes solo sailing in this category.
- **Lower and moderate risk sports:** Games between stable groups for low and moderate risk sports may occur and should incorporate modifications that reduce close physical or face-to-face contact. See **Modifications to Play** below. Games with teams from other states may occur for low and moderate risk sports provided that the team members have complied with all applicable travel restrictions and executive orders. No more than two teams should be at any venue during a game.
- **Higher Risk Sports:** Participants in higher risk sports (e.g., wrestling, football) should focus on practice and drills that avoid sustained, close contact. Participants in higher risk sports should not participate in games with in-state or out-of-state teams.
- **Modifications to Play:** There will always remain an inherent risk in participating in sports. To minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission, sports that may resume playing games are

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strongly encouraged to identify measures that can be taken to significantly limit contact and increase physical distancing between players. In general, these include:

- Modify play and practice as much as possible to keep players spaced six feet apart for most of a game or practice.
- Stagger team arrival and drop-off times or locations or put in place other protocols to limit contact between groups and with guardians as much as possible. One example is increasing the amount of time between practices and competitions to allow for one group to depart before another group enters the facility. This also allows for more time to clean the facility between uses.
- Conduct the activity or sport outdoors where possible, as outdoor activity is generally safer than indoors and allows for greater distancing. Consider rescheduling practices or games due to inclement weather rather than relocating the sport indoors.
- Shorten activities, practices, and game play or perform the activity with fewer participants to the extent possible.
- Eliminate or reduce the sharing of equipment or clean shared equipment between uses and participants.
- Incorporate additional protective equipment, whenever possible, to further reduce the spread of respiratory particles or contact.

Specific examples of modifications include:

- Rules Modification: Establish rules to discourage close contact whenever possible.
- Stagger Starts: In race-like activities where players typically start or finish together, modifications can include staggered starts or six feet distancing between participants (e.g., have runners in every other lane, spacing competitors on start line six feet apart).
- Eliminate Deliberate Contact: Deliberate close contact could be eliminated. Deliberate close contact includes but is not limited to collisions, body checking, tackling, blocking, and racing/riding in packs.
- Minimize Intermittent Contact: Game situations that result in intermittent close physical or face-to-face contact could be modified or eliminated including restarts, face-offs, throw-ins, scrums for the ball/puck, or similar activities. These activities may be allowed if face masks are used during contact (e.g., face-offs could take place with face masks worn by each player involved).

- **School Sports**

The Rhode Island Interscholastic League (RIIL) in partnership with RIDE and RIDOH has developed [modifications for high school sports](#). All sports organizations are encouraged to follow RIIL modifications or any modifications that the sport's national governing body puts forth to limit or decrease close physical or face-to-face contact.

- **Specific School Sports Provisions:** The following applies to high school, middle school and elementary school sports:

- Nothing in this guidance shall interfere with the [Back to School RI](#) guidance; in the event of a conflict, the [Back to School RI](#) guidance shall prevail.
- RIDE, and RIDOH may work with Rhode Island school districts and RIIL may develop more restrictive guidance and policies than those established here to meet the specific needs of the community.
- All school districts, regardless of distance or in-person learning policies, may offer sports in accordance with this guidance.
- Sports practices and conditioning may begin on September 21, 2020. Competition

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for low and moderate risks sports may begin in early October as determined by RIDE, RIDOH, local school districts, and RIIL. [Fall sports](#) not allowed will potentially be moved to a special “Fall 2” season later in the school year depending on pandemic transmission data. The DEM, RIDE, RIDOH and RIIL will work to make that determination later.

- Teams must follow the Busing and Student Transportation provisions in the [Back to School RI](#) guidance when traveling to off-site practices or games in other jurisdictions.
 - Spectators are discouraged but if allowed schools must ensure that the conduct of spectators adheres to the rules in this guidance and the limit on the total number of people at venues of assembly.
- **Plan and communication:**
 - Athletic facility operators and youth, adult and school sports organizations are encouraged to provide participants with their COVID-19 plan.
 - Organizations are encouraged to have administrators, players, staff, coaches, volunteers and spectators sign a pledge that they will comply with the organization’s COVID-19 plan.
 - Organizations are encouraged to appoint a volunteer to support coaches in monitoring compliance with COVID-19 plans during practices and drills.

Resources: Additional resources can be found in [CDC’s youth sports guidance](#) and at the Aspen Institute’s [“Return to Play COVID-19 Risk Assessment Tool.”](#)