

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs): Rhode Island Youth and Amateur Sports

How are the new executive order (EO) and guidance on sports different from the previous Phase III regulations and guidance?

Starting Dec. 21, the state will return to our most recent Phase 3 Sports Guidance with a few new requirements, including:

- **No Games or Competitions:** Sports in ALL risk categories shall not participate in games, scrimmages or competitive play with in-state or out-of-state teams. Lower and moderate risk sports should focus on practice and drills that avoid sustained, close contact. Higher risk sports should focus on individual conditioning and skill development at home, alone or with household members.
- **No Out-of-State Sports:** All sports organizations are prohibited from participating in tournaments, matches, games, competitions, camps, clinics and practices with out-of-state teams or sporting groups (except for professional and intercollegiate programs).
- **Indoor Sports Facility Capacity:** Facilities should operate at an occupancy level of no more than one person per 150 square feet, in accordance with executive orders and RIDOH regulations. Facilities may have stricter requirements based on the configuration of their facility, staffing or other issues at their discretion.
- **Curfew:** Indoor sports facilities are subject to the statewide curfew, which requires closing at 10 pm Sunday through Thursday and at 10:30 pm on Fridays and Saturdays, until further notice.
- **Clarification of the Definition of “Sports Organizations”:** This term includes organizations or individuals that operate sports leagues, camps and clinics.
- **Face Coverings:** Face coverings are required at all times, for all sports participants and spectators, indoors and outside, with the exception of swimming and water sports.
- **Contact Tracing:** Indoor sports facilities must collect and maintain contact tracing information for 30 days. Sports organizations are strongly encouraged to collect contact tracing information and maintain the same for 30 days.
- **Pending COVID-19 Tests:** Participants (athletes, coaches, officials, spectators, etc.) with pending COVID-19 tests should not attend games, practices or any sports activity until a negative test result is received, unless they are part of routine asymptomatic testing programs. Sports organizations are strongly encouraged to develop disciplinary policies to penalize persons who violate this provision.
- **Gatherings:** Indoor sports facilities and sports organizations should discourage coaches, parents and players from gathering before and after games and practices and should discourage in person meetings and social events.

Why are you stopping lower and moderate risks sports from participating in games, scrimmages or competitive play?

Rhode Island is experiencing an acute surge in positive coronavirus cases at this time. This prohibition is temporary and will be revisited.

What did you base your sports classifications on?

The sports classifications are based on two sources:

- National Federation of State High School Associations (NFSHSA), Sports Medicine Advisory Committee: Guidance for Opening Up High School Athletics and Activities
- United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee, USOPC Guidance: Return to Training and Sport Event Planning

These organizations classify sports into “lower, moderate, and higher risk” based on what is known about the transmission of COVID-19 and the inherent nature of each sport or recreational activity as traditionally played. The factors considered in determining the categories include: the type and duration of contact between players, whether equipment is shared, if the sport takes place indoors or outdoors, the number of players on a team, etc. Other New England states and New York use the categories developed by these organizations. It is important to understand that we reserve the right to adjust the categories based on new information and COVID-19 transmission data. In addition, RIDEM will consult with RIDOH to classify risk levels for sports that are not listed in the NFSHSA or USOPC recommendations.

Why are you prohibiting high-risk sports?

High-risk sports like wrestling, football, boys/men’s lacrosse, and competitive cheer involve close, sustained contact between participants. That means that the respiratory particles that carry COVID-19 will travel more easily between participants. This is even more concerning as sports move indoors for the winter.

Can athletes who play high-risk sports practice? What can they do?

No, athletes who play high-risk sports are not allowed to practice or to scrimmage at this time within their own team or with other teams. Athletes should focus on individual skill-building exercises and strength and conditioning.

Why are you prohibiting hosting tournaments, matches, games, etc. with out-of-state teams and prohibiting teams from traveling to other states for games?

With COVID-19 cases increasing nationwide, many states are discouraging travel to limit the spread of COVID-19 from one place to another. Traveling to another state for tournaments or games often means an increase in social gathering sizes and close contacts. The data show a number of positive cases have been the direct result of players participating in games and tournaments with teams from out-of-state.

Are athletes from Rhode Island allowed to play on out-of-state teams or at/in an out-of-state sports facility?

The requirements do not prohibit a Rhode Island player from playing on an out-of-state team or at an out-of-state sport facility. However, a person who plays on an out-of-state team must comply with Rhode Island's and the other state's travel policies and orders.

Are athletes from other states allowed to play on Rhode Island teams or at/in a Rhode Island sports facility?

The requirements do not prohibit an out-of-state resident from playing on a Rhode Island team or at a Rhode Island sport facility. However, out-of-state athletes must comply with Rhode Island's and their home state's travel policies and orders. Check Rhode Island's current list of [states with travel restrictions upon entry to Rhode Island](#) as travel restrictions may change week to week.

What is the policy on spectators?

For sporting events or practices with athletes under the age of 18, no more than two parents/guardians of the athlete and the athlete's siblings may attend, provided all other COVID-19 safety protocols are met including, capacity limits for the sporting venue. Spectators are prohibited from attending all other sporting events or practices, which means they are not allowed at amateur adult competitions.

How are you going to enforce the limits on spectators?

We hope that parents and guardians of our young athletes will do the right thing and follow the executive order and sporting facilities rules. Facility owners are required to follow these rules and can bar teams who violate them from using their facilities. We will work with the facilities and the leagues to address any violations, which could lead to fines, prohibitions, and/or shutting down of facilities. Every facility has the right to establish spectator limits that are more restrictive, based on the capacity and configuration of the facility.

How do you expect athletes to play wearing masks, especially in a sport like hockey?

At present, high school team sports are being conducted with athletes wearing masks, and other states (like Vermont and Massachusetts) already have this rule for active play, and report that it is working well. Playing with a mask on may require some modifications (e.g., shorter shifts, more substitutes), but it is necessary to restrict the respiratory spread of COVID.

Are there any exceptions to the mask requirement?

There are exceptions for water sports, children under two years of age, those who are developmentally unable to wear a mask, and when wearing a mask would damage a person's health. We encourage you to find ways to modify sports activities in response to new rules, such as more frequent breaks, shorter games or other accommodations.

Are sports teams and athletic facilities required to obtain medical documentation for an athlete, coach, official, spectator or visitor who claims a “medical exemption” from the mask-wearing requirement?

The Rhode Island executive order has a provision exempting people (i) who are under two years of age, (ii) whose health would be damaged or (iii) who are developmentally unable to comply, from the absolute requirement that a person wear a mask or face covering in public. These exemptions are meant to be narrow, and the intent of the executive order is to have people wear a face covering or mask in public. We know that wearing a face covering is the easiest way to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19; as such, participants in athletic activities or at athletic facilities are encouraged to make modifications to play (such as more breaks from play or shorter or lower intensity drills) to allow the wearing of a face covering by all participants at all time,.

In regard to medical documentation (e.g., a doctor’s note), that is not required under the current executive order to qualify for the limited exemption from the requirement to wear a face covering. However, sports teams, leagues and athletic facilities may have stricter requirements regarding the use of face coverings and/or may require documentation.

Is it necessary for household members to wear face masks when playing together at an indoor facility? What if I’m doing individual activities, like hitting tennis balls from a ball machine?

The current executive order requires the wearing of a face covering indoors and outdoors with limited exemptions. There is no exception to the wearing of a face covering if participating in a sporting activity with members of the same household or individually. You should wear a face covering or mask at all times when inside an athletic facility.

Now that we’re wearing masks all the time, does the whole team have to quarantine if someone tests positive?

While it’s important that athletes wear masks at all times, it doesn’t change quarantine requirements determined by the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH). Generally, a close contact is someone you have been within six feet of for 15 minutes or more. Someone that you briefly interacted with from a distance of more than six feet would not be considered a close contact. Thus, the most effective way to reduce whole-team quarantines is to combine mask wearing with team “pods” that never get within six feet of each other. When RIDOH investigates contacts of a person who tested positive, players who were not in close contact may not have to quarantine, that is, as long as they have not been in close contact with the positive case outside of the sports experience.

Can you wear a face shield instead of a face mask for hockey or other high and moderate risk sports?

No. There is no scientific evidence that a full clear face shield, such as the ones sold for hockey helmets, provides sufficient protection from the coronavirus, and the CDC and the RI Department of Health (RIDOH) do not currently recommend them as a substitute for masks. For more information about masks, please visit RIDOH’s [COVID-19 and Wearing Masks webpage](#).

REOPENING RI

Why are you exempting colleges and professional sports?

College and professional indoor sporting facilities and teams are highly regulated with NCAA rules and league rules (i.e., Big East, Ivy League, etc.) or associated professional rules being followed. For example, starting in November, most college athletes are being tested for COVID-19 three times per week.

Why are locker rooms allowed to remain open?

We recommend closing locker rooms and arriving at practices and games ready to play. However, there are instances where doing that causes other problems, such as athletes changing clothes in open areas resulting in privacy issues. So, in order to provide an opportunity for student-athletes and others to change privately and take off wet bathing suits or put on protective equipment, we are allowing locker rooms to stay open, with the requirement that they adhere to strict standards, including limiting capacity, marking distancing, and sanitizing regularly.

If we are an indoor facility offering a remote learning program or before/after school care program, can we continue to operate this portion of our programming?

If you hold a DHS license to legally operate a childcare and/or before/after school program, you may continue to operate these activities in accordance with DHS Child Care Licensing Regulations and CDC Guidelines. If you are currently operating a program that provides direct supervision to four or more unrelated children, you must become licensed with the Department of Human Services. Please visit the DHS website for more information or contact Nicole.Chiello@dhs.ri.gov

More Questions?

If you have a question that is not on this FAQ, please reach out to Cynthia.Elder@dem.ri.gov