

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

How is the February 2021 updated guidance on sports different from the previous youth and amateur guidance?

There are four main differences from the previous sports guidance:

- **Indoor Sports Facility Capacity:** Revises the indoor sports facility capacity to make clear that indoor sports facilities should follow the limits established by executive orders and regulations. **The current limit is set at total capacity of one person per 125 square feet.**
- **Curfew:** Eliminates the curfew that required indoor sports facilities to close early, consistent with [Executive Order 21-09](#).
- **Face Coverings:** Exempts the use of face coverings for gymnastic activities that involve acrobatic, aerial, and tumbling moves or are performed on an apparatus during solo/individual performances for safety purposes. Face coverings must be worn when gymnasts or dancers are not involved in acrobatic, aerial and tumbling or performing on an apparatus, e.g. when going to and from the activity area. Equipment and apparatuses used in gymnastic activities must be sanitized in between use.
- **Spectators:** Allows certain approved intercollegiate athletic events to be granted an exception to the prohibition on spectators at adult sporting events. For certain approved events (such as Senior Days/Nights), the host/facility may allow athletes to have up to six (6) individuals from a single household attend.
- **Interstate Sporting Events:** Clarifies that the prohibition of sports teams or groups from participating in sporting activities with out-of-state sports teams or groups applies to sporting activities within Rhode Island, with the exception of ice hockey which is subject to the multi-state agreement prohibiting all interstate competitions (except for professional, intercollegiate or U.S. national teams). Sports teams or groups who participate in tournaments, matches, games, competitions, practices, etc. in a jurisdiction outside of Rhode Island are subject to applicable laws (including executive orders) and regulations in that jurisdiction. Likewise, when any individual, sports team or group returns to Rhode Island, they are subject to Rhode Island laws (including executive orders) and regulations related to testing, quarantining and other measures associated with preventing risks associated with COVID-19 and all other state laws and regulations.

All other provisions remain in place, including:

- **Games, Practices and Competitions:** As of January 20, 2021, the updated guidance allows:
 - Games and competitions to resume for **moderate and lower risk sports**
 - Practices to resume for **higher risk sports** provided they avoid close, sustained contact.

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- **COVID-19 Testing:** The updated guidance encourages athletes and coaches who participate in sports to obtain a COVID-19 test weekly (or more frequently). The guidance also encourages sports leagues, organizations and indoor sports facilities to promote weekly testing through education and outreach or to establish policies that require weekly COVID-19 testing of participants and members. The Rhode Island Interscholastic League (RIIL) is strongly encouraged to work with superintendents and athletic directors to have athletes, coaches, and staff taking part in RIIL sports activities obtain a COVID-19 test weekly.
- **COVID-19 Positive Case and Quarantine:** The updated guidance strengthens protocols if RIDOH identifies a positive COVID-19 case or outbreak connected to an athlete, coach, official, or sports team or organization. Specifically, the updated guidance advises that participants and organizations should immediately cease activities associated with the positive case or outbreak, cooperate fully and promptly with RIDOH case investigation and contact tracing, and follow the instructions provided from RIDOH regarding the need to quarantine and when activities may resume.
- **Indoor Sports Facility Capacity:** Facilities should operate at an occupancy level established under executive orders and RIDOH regulations. The current limit allows no more than one person per 125 square feet. Facilities may set stricter requirements based on the configuration of their facility, staffing, or other issues at their discretion.
- **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, water sports, and individual or solo gymnastic activities involving acrobatic, aerial, and tumbling moves and/or when performing on an apparatus.
- **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 who are symptomatic or have been in close contact with someone who is COVID-19 positive should not attend games, practices or any sports activity while waiting for their test results, 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.

What did you base your sports classifications on?

The sports classifications are based on two sources:

- National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), Sports Medicine Advisory Committee: [Guidance for Opening Up High School Athletics and Activities](#), in effect on January 1, 2021
- United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee, [USOPC Guidance: Return to Training and Sport Event Planning](#), in effect on January 1, 2021

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These organizations classified sports into “lower, moderate, and higher risk” based on what was 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.

The NFHS updated its guidelines on February 1, 2021 and no longer uses higher, lower and moderate risks sports classifications. Why does Rhode Island continue to use the classifications?

The framework for Rhode Island sports guidance is based on the NFHS classification system that was in place from May 2020 through January 2021. The State is reviewing the revised NFHS guidelines and consulting with other states and sports leagues to determine what, if anything, will change. In the meantime, Rhode Island will continue using the classifications and the current approach.

Why are you prohibiting games and competitions for higher risk sports?

Higher risk sports like wrestling, football, 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 higher risk sports practice? What can they do?

Yes, athletes who play higher risk sports may practice provided they avoid close, sustained contact and remain within their own team. 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?

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.

With regard to ice hockey, the Governors of New Jersey, Maine, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, and Massachusetts have suspended interstate youth hockey competitions for public and private schools and youth hockey leagues through at least March 31, 2021. The prohibition does not impact interstate collegiate, professional, or U.S. national team hockey activities, which will remain subject to existing health and safety protocols and/or restrictions. As public health data continues to evolve, the states will reassess the need for continued restrictions on interstate sports activities.

Are athletes from Rhode Island allowed to play on out-of-state teams? Are Rhode Island sports teams allowed to play at out-of-state sports facilities?

The requirements do not prohibit a Rhode Island player from playing on an out-of-state team or at an out-of-state sports facility. Likewise, except for ice hockey in the seven states noted above, the requirements do not prohibit a Rhode Island team from playing at an out-of-state facility. However, a person or team who plays on an out-of-state team or in an out-of-state sports facility must comply with Rhode Island's and the other state's travel policies and orders.

Are athletes, sports teams, or groups 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. The guidance does prohibit indoor sporting venues from allowing sports organizations, teams and groups from participating in tournaments, matches, games, competitions, camps, clinics and practices with out-of-state teams or sporting groups, except for professional and intercollegiate athletic programs.

What about martial arts and dance studios?

Martial arts and dance studios are indoor sports facilities, subject to rules that apply to those facilities. Risk levels for sports are based upon the characteristics of the activity. For example, competitive martial arts and competitive group dance are higher risk activities, which are currently not allowed. If the studio is hosting students or teams who take part in competitive martial arts or dance, the studio should follow the sports guidance which currently allows only practice for higher risk sports. If the studio is hosting a martial arts or dance class for participants who are not competing, with modifications in place that reduce contact, those activities may continue as they are moderate or lower risk.

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. There is an exception for certain approved intercollegiate athletic events, such as Senior Days/Nights, to allow up to six (6) individuals from a single household to attend for each athlete. Institutions of higher education may submit requests to the Department of Business Regulation at: <https://dbr.ri.gov/covid/plans/plans.php>.

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 school or 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 also 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?

Yes. There are exceptions for: water sports; individual or solo gymnastic activities involving acrobatic, aerial, and tumbling moves or performed on an apparatus; 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.

For water sports and for individual or solo gymnastic activities involving acrobatic, aerial, and tumbling moves or performing on an apparatus, a cloth face covering or mask must be worn at all times when an individual is not engaged in those activities (e.g., while going to and from the area in which the activity is occurring).

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?

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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, except when swimming.

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.

If RIDOH identifies a positive COVID-19 case or outbreak connected to an athlete, coach, official, sports team or organization, all activities associated with that case or outbreak should immediately cease, and all participants and organizations should fully and promptly cooperate with RIDOH case investigation and contact tracing, and follow the instructions provided from RIDOH regarding the need to quarantine and when activities may resume. Organizations and leagues are strongly encouraged to adopt rules regarding the need for all participants to follow RIDOH quarantine directions.

Can you wear a face shield instead of a face mask for hockey or other higher 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](#).

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.

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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 FAQs document, please reach out to Cynthia.Elder@dem.ri.gov