



GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OPENING SPORTS/ACTIVITIES

Missouri State High School Activities Association (MSHSAA)
MSHSAA Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC)

Purpose: The COVID-19 pandemic presents state high school associations with a myriad of challenges. The MSHSAA Board of Directors and MSHSAA Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC) offer this document as guidance on how our state association can consider approaching the many components of “opening up” sports and activities in preparation for the fall seasons, and beyond.

Benefit of Sports/Activities: The physical and psychosocial benefits of education-based activity participation are numerous. Students who participate in school activities learn life lessons in an environment that cannot be duplicated. The academic achievements, social and leadership skills, as well as overall mental health are known to be greatly enhanced in students who participate in a school activity compared to those who do not. The coronavirus pandemic has resulted in thousands of Missouri students missing out on these life-shaping educational experiences over the past several months.

Acknowledgement of Infection Risks: **The risk of coronavirus transmission will still be present to some degree as school activities begin in August and possibly through the 2020-2021 school year.** Students and their families, along with school personnel must recognize these risks and implement best practices to reasonably mitigate these risks. Participation in school activities is voluntary and every individual will need to evaluate the risk versus the benefits of activity participation. Those immunocompromised students and staff, or those who live with family members with elevated health concerns, should evaluate associated risks of participation and may choose not to participate. The primary means of coronavirus transmission is through respiratory droplets and potentially aerosolized. Risk mitigation strategies should be aimed at reducing the likelihood of a person’s respiratory droplets coming into contact with another person. Every school is different and every activity is different. Certain mitigation strategies may be feasible in one school or for one activity, but not another.

School Point-Person: It is recommended all schools designate a point person to disseminate the constantly changing information and oversee their school’s risk mitigation strategies. School leaders will need to determine how best to **implement ALL reasonable risk mitigation strategies**. Further, schools must appoint an individual(s) who will be responsible for ensuring screening is implemented and any positive screen or test must meet the protocols for return to participation. School leaders should remain in consultation with their local health departments and medical personnel to review and evaluate strategies applicable to their unique facilities and activities. In support of preparing member schools for a return to, and hopefully a continuation of, interscholastic activity participation, the following coronavirus risk mitigation best practices are provided.

Preliminary Questions and Answers:

The following four questions served as preliminary questions before further deliberation on this document:

- Q1. *Will MSHSAA conduct sports/activities regular seasons or postseason events if schools are **closed statewide** to in-person learning (apart from regularly scheduled school breaks)?*
- A1. If schools statewide are closed to in-person learning due to the corona virus pandemic, MSHSAA will be unable to allow for either a regular season or a post-season series in MSHSAA sports and activities.
- Q2. *Will MSHSAA conduct sports/activities regular seasons or postseason events if schools are **closed only** in COVID-19 “hotspots” in our state?*
- A2. If a majority of schools are open for in-person learning, efforts will be made to administer a regular season and postseason for those schools/students who are permitted to do so based on the guidelines of the local and state health departments. In this scenario, MSHSAA does not intend to revoke the participation opportunities for students who are able to take part.
- Q3. *Based on changing conditions in regard to the pandemic, would MSHSAA consider conducting a sports/activities regular season in sports/activities deemed “lower- risk” for COVID-19 transmission while canceling athletics/activities considered “higher-risk?”*
- A3. As of July 1, the Board of Directors believes it would not be in the best interest of our state to pick and choose which sports/activities would be permitted to continue to have a season while at the same time restricting other sports/activities from continuing due to public health concerns. Throughout the year, the Board will monitor and evaluate circumstances and consult with public health officials to make decisions in the best interest of all students.
- Q4. *Might there be restrictions unique to our state – or regions of our state – that need to be taken into consideration when returning to activities and participation?*
- A4. Yes. Since it is possible to have different areas of our state following a different set of guidelines/restrictions/allowances, it is quite possible that not all schools in Missouri will return to sports/activities at the same rate or under the same expectations, and some may need to halt participation during the year for a period of time if conditions warrant.
- Q5. *Our school has decided to offer only virtual education this fall due to concerns by our health department and/or community/parents regarding the spread of infection. Will we be able to offer sports and activities in conjunction with that educational plan?*
- A5. If you are only offering virtual instruction with no face to face education, either temporarily or for the semester/year, you may not offer sports and activities during that period. Sports and activities are irrevocably and appropriately intertwined with education provided in the school building. The MSHSAA Constitution defines a school, in part, as being organized to deliver instruction to students who report to a common location. If conditions are such in your local area that you are unable to safely bring students to a common location for instruction, bringing students together for practice and competitions is inappropriate.

Recommendations for Return to Sport and Activity Due To COVID-19 Impact

Pre-participation Physical Evaluations (PPE) (Physicals):

There are no exceptions or relief being granted to MSHSAA Bylaws 3.8.1 and 4.5.4 regarding the requirement for students to have a valid physical prior to participating in those sports/activities that require a valid physical. While there were some concerns regarding access to primary care providers during the late spring and early summer, MSHSAA has determined that it is still essential that all students have a valid physical on file prior to participation.

Practices/Rehearsals:

Please consult with your local or state health department regarding the current restrictions/allowances relative to allowable group size and social distancing. Not all areas of the state will have the same criteria, and what is allowable in some geographical areas compared to other areas will vary throughout the state.

Gatherings: Gatherings sizes and/or group restrictions are determined by local and state health departments.

- Upon initial return to participation, gatherings should be limited to no more than the current local recommended gathering size, indoors or outdoors. Increasing or decreasing tolerances for group sizes shall be determined by local and state health department.
- When initiating practices/rehearsals, it may be reasonable to consider having groups that practice/rehearse together in smaller numbers to avoid the potential of large numbers of participants or coaches/directors having to quarantine if anyone tests positive for COVID-19. (Example: Have similar-position players/instrumentalists in different groups; have varsity and lower level teams in separate groups).
- Break into small groups for rest breaks and water breaks during practice. Do not congregate.
- When not directly participating in practices, rehearsals or contests, care should be taken to maintain current social distancing between each individual. Consider using tape or paint as a guide for students and coaches/directors.

Screening:

- Schools must appoint an individual(s) who will be responsible for ensuring screening is implemented and any positive screen or test must meet the protocols for return to participation.
- Before practices/rehearsals, track body temperatures (100.4 or greater) and symptoms of coaches, directors, staff, players, participants, etc. Temperature screening may be done at home, documented and presented upon arrival to the school. If home temperatures are ≥ 100.4 the participant must stay home and not come to practice/rehearsals/competition. Temperature screening may be done upon arrival to the school, if a temperature is 100.4 or greater (recommend using a no touch thermometer) the individual should be moved to an indoor environment for five minutes prior to having the temperature retaken. If temperature remains at 100.4 or greater it indicates a positive screen.
- Every coach/director and participant is required to wear a mask or face covering until screening is completed, showing no signs or symptoms.
- If a participant, coach/director, or official/adjudicator has a positive finding on their COVID-19 screen, he/she should be sent home immediately. If the participant's parents are not present, escort the participant to a designated isolation room or an area away from others. He/she must wear a mask or face covering. The participant/coach/director is to be referred to a health care provider or a local COVID screening hotline.

- Symptoms Include:
 - Fever (temperature greater than 100.4)
 - cough (new or worsening)
 - shortness of breath or trouble breathing
 - sore throat (different from seasonal allergies)
 - new loss of smell or taste
 - vomiting or diarrhea
- Written clearance by a healthcare provider, documentation of a negative test outcome or after a 14-day quarantine period (quarantine period starts from first positive **screen**) shall be required prior to return to participation.
- A record should be kept of all individuals present.
- The CDC has identified the following risk factors:
 - Risk increases steadily with age
 - Obesity and body mass index greater than 30
 - Chronic lung disease - including moderate or severe asthma
 - Type 2 diabetes
 - Chronic kidney disease
 - Sickle cell disease
 - Heart conditions
 - Immunocompromised patients – transplant recipient needing immunosuppressant medications (e.g. steroids, biologics, etc.)
 - Patients receiving chemotherapy, etc.
 - Specific ethnic groups have a greater incidence of disease and are at risk of more severe illness include Blacks, Latinos and Pacific Islanders.

Positive Testing

- Schools must appoint an individual(s) who will be responsible for ensuring any positive test must meet the protocols for return to participation.
- What happens when a student/coach/director tests positive?
 - Notify the local public health authority. A school nurse, athletic trainer, healthcare provider, or member of the organization should create and provide a list of all close contacts and their contact information to the health department. This will ensure timely and efficient contact tracing which is necessary to stop the spread of disease.
 - If a participant or coach/director is confirmed to have COVID-19, the following should occur:
 - All participants who had close contact, direct contact with this individual, or a direct exposure to secretions (i.e. being coughed on) (up to 48 hours before they started showing symptoms) should be excluded from practice and play for 14 days. The Health Department should be contacted to assist in proper contract tracing and quarantining of individuals. If there was doubt of who the individual came into contact with then the entire team/group that practiced/rehearsed or competed with the individual should be quarantined for 14 days. Teams/Groups should keep documentation of names and contact information of opposing teams/groups, coaches/directors, and officials/adjudicators for contact tracing purposes.
 1. A close contact is defined by the CDC as a person who has had close contact (less than 6 feet) for greater than 15 minutes with an individual with confirmed or

suspected COVID-19 infection during the 48 hours before the individual became symptomatic or was diagnosed.

2. Exceptions may be considered if all activities were done practicing appropriate social distancing while wearing a mask and after consultation with your local health department.
 3. If a coach/director or participant is positive and was wearing a mask or face covering, it is possible that none of their contacts will have to be excluded from participation. In some cases, a mask or face covering may not be considered protective depending on the type of exposure. A participant in quarantine should stay home, stay separated from others, follow state or local health department guidance, should NOT participate in practices/rehearsals, and, if appropriate, may participate in individual conditioning activities with remote virtual instruction with guidance from a health care professional.
 - Coaches/Directors and staff who were in contact with the infected individual while properly wearing a mask may not need to be excluded from participation. In some cases, a mask may not be considered protective depending on the type of exposure.
- What happens when a participant/coach/director has been exposed to a confirmed positive case of Covid-19?
 - Individuals who have had a significant exposure (i.e. close contact as defined above) to a confirmed positive COVID-19 individual must quarantine for 14 days from the last date of exposure to the positive COVID-19 individual. If the exposed individual has a negative SARS-Cov-2 test, they still must quarantine for 14 days.
 - If the exposed individual develops symptoms during the 14-day quarantine period, testing for SARS Cov-2 should occur. If positive, then the participant/coach/director must follow the guidance for a confirmed positive individual. The participant/coach/director can return if the test is negative and symptoms have improved following the 14-day quarantine.

Cleaning:

- CDC guidance for cleaning and disinfecting should be followed. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>
- Cleaning schedules should be created and implemented for all athletic facilities and music classrooms to mitigate any communicable diseases. **(Note – Refer to Music page at www.mshsaa.org for access to references for suggested cleaning procedures for instruments. The link is titled “NFHS, NAMM and NAFME Instrument Cleaning Guidelines and Information”).**
- Prior to an individual or groups of individuals entering a facility, hard surfaces within that facility should be wiped down and sanitized (door handles, chairs, furniture in meeting rooms, locker rooms, weight room equipment, bathrooms, athletic training room tables, storage rooms, instrumental equipment, etc.).
- Individuals should wash their hands for a minimum of 20 seconds with water and soap before touching any surfaces or participating in workouts or rehearsals.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Hand sanitizer should be plentiful and available to individuals as they transfer from place to place.
- Weight equipment, musical equipment, etc. should be wiped down thoroughly before and after an individual’s use of equipment.
- Any equipment such as weight benches, athletic pads, etc. having holes with exposed foam should be covered.

- Participants must be encouraged to shower and wash their workout clothing immediately upon returning home.

Physical Activity and Athletic/Activities Equipment:

- There should be no shared athletic towels, clothing or shoes between participants.
- Participants should wear their own appropriate workout clothing (do not share clothing), and individual clothing/towels should be washed and cleaned after every workout.
- Refrain from sharing practice/scrimmage jerseys or scrimmage hats/caps.
- Hand sanitizer should be plentiful at all contests and practices/rehearsals.
- Athletic equipment such as bats, batting helmets and catchers gear should be cleaned between each practice or game. Other equipment, such as football helmets/other pads, lacrosse helmets/pads/gloves/eyewear, field hockey helmets/pads/gloves/eyewear, should be worn by only one individual and not shared.
- Masks or face coverings are REQUIRED for participants, coaches/directors and officials/adjudicators any time they are not doing strenuous physical activity. Wearing masks before activities and immediately following activities is REQUIRED, especially prior to screening.
- Maximum lifts should be limited and power cages should be used for squats and bench presses. Spotters should stand at each end of the bar with the use of a mask.

Hydration:

- All participants should be required to bring and fill their own water containers/bottles. Water containers/bottles must not be shared.
- Communal drink stations such as hydration carts should not be used. Participants are encouraged to bring larger than normal water containers to limit the need for refilling. Significant consideration must be given in devising plans for refilling personal water containers, if necessary, without contamination from participants. Extra care should be taken to sanitize any coolers used.
- Managers should not assist with the personal water containers of participants and staff.

Transportation to Events:

- Schools need to consider social distancing requirements when scheduling contests and events for the fall sports/activities season. Social distancing (as required by state or local health department) will need to be maintained on buses/vans.
- Schools are encouraged to schedule more local/regional competition and avoid any competition that might require an overnight stay.

Social Distancing at Events:

- Schools are encouraged to offer live streaming of games/contests/performances to reduce attendance at events so that current gathering size and social distancing can be met.
- Sidelines/benches/performance and participant areas: Social distancing guidelines established by local and/or state health departments will need to be maintained on sidelines/benches/performance and participant areas during contests and events. Consider using tape or paint as a guide for participants and coaches/directors.
- Who should be allowed at events? Group people into tiers from essential to non-essential and decide which tiers will be allowed at an event if local and or state health department guidelines restrict group sizes. Only Tier 1 and 2 personnel will be allowed to attend events until state/local health departments lift restrictions on mass gatherings.

- Tier 1 (Essential): Participants, Coaches/Directors, Officials/Adjudicators, Event Staff, Medical Staff, Security
- Tier 2 (Preferred): Media
- Tier 3 (Non-essential): Spectators, vendors

Athletic Training Services:

- Athletic trainers in high schools are positioned to play a vital role as sports and activities return following this pandemic. As health-care professionals, they can take lead roles in developing and implementing infection control policy throughout the school. MSHSAA member schools should promote the importance of athletic trainers in high schools and their role in injury evaluation, treatment and risk minimization as well as being a vital component of any return-to-school and athletics/activities plan.
- Given the financial crisis at the state and local levels, the MSHSAA SMAC fears that athletic trainer positions will be seen as a “luxury” and those positions will be at risk during the budgeting process. It is also assumed that athletic trainers supplied to high schools by hospitals and sports medicine clinics are also at risk as many medical clinics and hospitals have suffered severe revenue loss during the pandemic.

Return to Physical Activity/Strength and Conditioning (Heat Acclimatization):

The 16-day heat acclimatization period for fall sports assumes that athletes have deconditioned over the summer months. The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in students being deconditioned for four to five months. https://journals.lww.com/nsca-sci/Fulltext/2019/06000/CSCCa_and_NSCA_Joint_Consensus_Guidelines_for.1.aspx

Return to Play/Activity:

MSHSAA COVID-19 Return To Play Flow Chart – Steps to determine Return to Play Progression

[Return to Play Flow Chart](#)

MSHSAA COVID-19 Return To Play Form – Mandatory form completion prior to Return to Play

[Return to Play Form](#)

Illness Reporting and Notifications:

Create a notification process for all event participants, coaches/directors, event staff, media, spectators and vendors if the organizers/medical personnel learn of suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 at the event.

Considerations for Officials/Adjudicators, Coaches/Directors, Other Personnel:

- Vulnerable individuals should not participate in any practices/rehearsals, conditioning activities, contests or events.
- Masks or face coverings, such as a gaiter, are required to be worn when not actively engaged in strenuous physical exertion (running/jogging). Current local and state social distancing guidelines are to be followed and “Hygiene Basics” adhered to in all situations. We also strongly recommend, but do not require, that masks or face coverings are used during strenuous physical exertion (ie running).

Good Hygiene Must Continue:

- Wash your hands with soap and water for a minimum of 20 seconds or use ample amount of hand sanitizer, especially after touching frequently used items or surfaces.
- Avoid touching your face.

- Sneeze or cough into a tissue, or the inside of your elbow.
- Disinfect frequently-used items and surfaces as much as possible.
- Wear a mask or face coverings while in public, and particularly when traveling in a group.

People who feel sick should stay home:

- Do not go to work or school.
- Contact and follow the advice of your medical provider.

Other Considerations:

- Hand sanitizer should be widely available at contests and practices. Participants, coaches/directors and officials/adjudicators should clean hands frequently.
- Wipe equipment down frequently.
- No pre-game and post-game handshakes/high-fives/fist bumps.
- Officials and sideline volunteers are required to wear a mask or face covering.
- There will be sport/activity rules modifications documents to assist further with mitigation of virus transfer during this time. The MSHSAA will notify member schools when these rules modifications have been finalized and where the modifications will be posted for accessing.

References

NFHS Guidance for Opening Up High School Athletics and Activities: https://nfhs.org/media/3812287/2020-nfhs-guidance-for-opening-up-high-school-athletics-and-activities-nfhs-smac-may-15_2020-final.pdf

CDC Resources: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>

St. Louis Sports Medicine COVID-19 Task Force Information:

<https://www.mercy.net/content/dam/mercy/en/pdf/return-to-sports-recommendations.pdf>

Children's Mercy (KC) Information: <https://www.childrensmercy.org/health-and-safety-resources/information-about-covid-19-novel-coronavirus/returning-to-community-activities/recommendations-for-a-safe-return-to-sport-and-physical-activity-after-covid-19/>

MSHSAA Guidelines and Recommendations: These MSHSAA Guidelines and Recommendations are provided to promote public awareness of certain health and safety-related issues. Such information is neither exhaustive nor necessarily applicable to all circumstances or individuals and is no substitute for consultation with appropriate health-care professionals. Statutes, codes or environmental conditions may be relevant. These MSHSAA Guidelines and Recommendations should be considered in conjunction with other pertinent materials when taking action or planning care. Guidance may be rescinded or modified at any time, based on current conditions.

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