COVID-19 Sports Guidance for Higher Education

11/18/2020

NOTE: Given the current level of COVID-19 transmission in Minnesota, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) and the Office of Higher Education (OHE) strongly recommend that institutes of Higher Education implement Scenario 4 mitigation efforts. These recommendations can be found in Recommendations for Different Levels of COVID-19 Transmission Among Higher Education Institutions (https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/iherecs.pdf).

Under Scenario 4, MDH strongly recommends that sports practices and games for intercollegiate athletics be paused. If a higher education institute chooses to continue intercollegiate athletic programming, athletes must be tested for COVID-19 three times per week even during weeks when there is no competition and there is only practice.

At this time, in accordance with Executive Order 20-99 (EO), activities are limited during four weeks from Friday, Nov. 20, 2020, at 11:59 p.m. through Friday, Dec. 18, 2020, at 11:59 p.m.

- Intramural, club, and other recreational sports are not allowed during the four-week pause.
- Multi-team events or tournaments are not allowed during the four-week pause (page 3).

This guidance document outlines prevention strategies to reduce the spread of COVID-19 during sports activities. This document is intended for organizers and participants of college sports.

Executive Order 20-99

Why are we dialing back on certain activities for four weeks?

Throughout the month of November, the data has made clear with each passing day that we need to take decisive and aggressive action to contain the most recent phase of the pandemic. Minnesota recently topped 200,000 total confirmed COVID-19 cases. It took Minnesota more than 6 months to record 100,000 COVID-19 cases, but only 42 days to add an additional 100,000 new cases. We averaged a state record of almost 6,000 cases per day over the previous week, breaking single-day records for COVID-19 deaths (58) on Nov. 11 and new cases (8,689) on Nov. 14. The Minnesota Department of Health’s (MDH) most recent weekly COVID-19 report found that the current average rates of new COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and intensive care unit admissions, and deaths are the highest they
have been since the start of the pandemic, far exceeding the numbers we saw in the worst points of our surges in April and May. We need strong action to control our future case numbers.

**EO requirements**

The full executive order (EO) with all requirements can be found at Executive Orders from Governor Walz (https://mn.gov/governor/news/executiveorders.jsp).

- **Social gatherings prohibited.** Social gatherings are groups of people who are not members of the same household, congregated together for a common or coordinated social, community, or leisure purpose – even if social distancing can be maintained. This prohibition includes planned and spontaneous gatherings as well as public and private gatherings. Most commercial activities are not considered social gatherings, so this change will not impact most industries.

- **Businesses and activities are affected differently.** For a full listing of all business and activity requirements and limitations, see the full executive order at Executive Orders from Governor Walz (https://mn.gov/governor/news/executiveorders.jsp). Many, but not all, businesses will have to pause in-person activities for the next four weeks. Please review the guidance below for industry-specific requirements.

- **Masks and face coverings required.** Executive Order 20-81, requiring face coverings in certain settings, remains in full force and effect.

- **People at higher risk.** All people currently living within the State of Minnesota who are at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19, as defined by Executive Order 20-55, are strongly urged to stay at home or in their place of residence and follow the provisions of Executive Order 20-55.

- **Work from home.** All people who can work from home must continue to do so.

**Clarification of definitions for Institutes of Higher Education**

- Social gatherings are not permitted if they are not associated with a class or structured event, meeting, or organized activity. Students studying together should maintain social distancing at all times and should limit to two people as much as possible.

**General requirements under Executive Order 20-99**

The requirements of Executive Order 20-99 are effective from Friday, November 20, 2020 at 11:59 pm through Friday, December 18, 2020 at 11:59 pm. During those four weeks:

- In-person organized sports activities are only allowed for collegiate or university institution teams or athletes participating in intercollegiate athletics. However, multi-team events or tournaments are not allowed during this four week period.

- In-person activities for intramural, club, and other recreational sports are not allowed.

- Campus fitness centers, gyms, and sports facilities must be closed for all use and activities except intercollegiate athletics activities.
Requirements for holding athletic events

Review your preparedness plan

- COVID-19 Preparedness Plans are required by Executive Orders issued by Governor Tim Walz (mn.gov/governor/news/executiveorders.jsp). An organization’s COVID-19 Preparedness Plans must address the requirements listed below as well as consider the outlined recommendations listed in this document. The plan should be updated when there are changes to public health official guidelines regarding group gatherings or sports activities.
  - All businesses (sports facilities, gyms, associations, sports clubs/teams, etc.) are required to develop a program-specific plan. Templates for developing a program-specific plan can be found at Stay Safe MN (staysafe.mn.gov).
  - The COVID-19 Preparedness Plan must be available and accessible to participants, volunteers, and employees.


- Maintain a plan administrator for your organization’s COVID-19 plan.
  - Communicate your COVID-19 plan to officials, umpires, and trainers.
  - This should include expectations around screening, face coverings, and other prevention efforts.
  - Plan templates are available at Stay Safe Guidance for All Business Entities (staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/all-businesses.jsp).

- Have protocols that are considerate of coaches, staff, players, volunteers, and participants at highest risk of complications from COVID-19.
  - Executive Order 20-55, Protecting the Rights and Health of At Risk Populations during the COVID-19 Peacetime Emergency (www.leg.state.mn.us/archive/execorders/20-55.pdf)

Follow physical distancing

- Adhere to social distancing requirements. Maintain 6 feet between participants when they are not playing (on the bench, in the dugout, on the sideline, etc.).
- During any practice or competition spectators must be at least 12 feet from the closest participant. So at least 12 feet from the field, the bench, or the court, whichever is closest.

Follow guidance for the event setting (e.g., gymnasium, rinks)

- Spectators, including family and friends of participants, are not allowed. Only athletes, coaches, and other essential staff are authorized to be present in venues hosting these activities.
Facility and venue guidance is available at [Minnesota Stay Safe Guidance](staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/index.jsp), including:

- [Stay Safe Guidance for Outdoor Recreation Entities](staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/outdoor-recreation.jsp)
- [Stay Safe Guidance for Entertainment](staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/entertainment.jsp)
- A visual guide to capacity limits can be found here: [Minnesota’s Stay Safe Plan](mn.gov/covid19/for-minnesotans/stay-safe-mn/stay-safe-plan.jsp).

Multi-team events or tournament is not allowed during the four-week pause.

Post instructions throughout the venue and at entrances, and inform members of the teams and staff:

- Not to enter if they are experiencing symptoms
- They are required to adhere to hygiene and social distancing instructions, signage and markings; and
- The venue’s requirements involving the use of face-coverings.

Encourage members of teams and staff to review a screening survey that checks for COVID-19 symptoms, close contacts with confirmed cases and quarantined cases, and out of state travel. See MDH’s Visitor and Employee Health Screening Checklist ([www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facilityhlthscreen.pdf](www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facilityhlthscreen.pdf)).

- Food venues and concessions are not allowed.

## Follow face covering requirements

As of July 25, 2020, per the Governor’s Executive Order, people in Minnesota will be required to wear a face covering in all indoor businesses and public indoor spaces.

This Executive Order includes exemptions for people who are unable to wear or tolerate a face covering due to medical or other reasons. There are also situations in which a face covering may be temporarily removed or where face coverings are not required. For example, a person may temporarily remove their face covering when participating as an athlete in an organized sport in an indoor business or public indoor space while the level of exertion makes it difficult to wear a face covering.

Face coverings are strongly encouraged, but not required, when actively playing in a game or participating in a practice as an athlete in an indoor or outdoor organized sport, to the extent possible when social distancing is not being maintained. However, face coverings must be worn when coming to and going from a game or practice, as well as when the athlete is on the sidelines.

More information about face covering requirements and exemptions is available at [Masks and face coverings](www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/prevention.html#masks).

- Additional information is also provided at:
Face Covering Requirements and Recommendations under Executive Order 20-81 (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facecover.html)

Frequently Asked Questions About the Requirement to Wear Face Coverings (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facecoverfaq.html)

Promote Health Checks

- Create protocols to maintain health checks and screening of participants and staff/volunteers.
  - Any staff, volunteers, or participants who are sick must stay home.
  - Have policies in place outlining the process for those who become sick while participating in a sport.
  - Be aware that persons can get a positive COVID-19 test even if they do not have symptoms.

Requirements for holding practices

Follow the Requirements for holding athletic events in addition to the following:

Spectator requirements:

- Spectators, including family and friends of participants, are not allowed. Only athletes, coaches, and other essential staff are authorized to be present.

Number of participants allowed:

- Keep practices small in size. Pod sizes cannot exceed 25 people per pod, either inside or outside. Pod count is composed of players and coaches.

Requirements for holding games, scrimmages, and competitions

Spectator requirements:

- Spectators, including family and friends of participants, are not allowed. Only athletes, coaches, and other essential staff are authorized to be present.

Number of participants allowed:

- During a game, scrimmages, or competitions (played indoors or outdoors)
  - Can include all of the people needed to make up the team.
  - A team is defined as the total number of players/athletes, coaches, referees, umpires, etc. needed to hold the game or competition as long as the total number of people does not exceed the total number allowed by the venue or facility (check capacity limits). This includes cross country and track teams.
During a Cross Country or Track Event

- The “course maximum”—meaning the number of people allowed on the course at one time—is 250 participants or the total square footage of the course divided by 113, whichever is less.

- Participants must be divided into completely separated participant groups to ensure that the number of participants on the course at one time never exceeds the course maximum.

- Event participants must be further divided into “pods” and physically distanced (meaning 6 feet of distance is maintained between people from different households) within the pods.
  
  - For cross country and track team events/competitions, four teams of up to seven athletes constitutes a pod.
  
  - For all other events, pods may not exceed 25 individuals

- Any race events (including run/walk races, triathlons, bicycle races, or cross-country skiing races) that are half-marathon length or longer can only be held in venues that have defined perimeters and clear entrance and exit points (i.e., not on public roadways). This is to ensure that capacity limits are adhered to, that crowding can be controlled, and that social distancing is maintained among spectators. Requirements for outdoor recreational race events

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## Important risk considerations

### Level of contact in a sport

Before starting games for any sport, consider the risk associated with that sport in terms of COVID-19 being spread between players.

- The more physical or close contact that occurs the greater risk there is in spreading illness.

- A sport or training that takes place indoors is riskier than if the activity is done outdoors.

- Resources for Risk Categorization of Sports:
  
  
  - [United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee Coronavirus Updates](www.teamusa.org/Coronavirus)
    
    Under the “Return to Training and Sport Event Planning” tab, select Sport Event Planning.

  - [National Federation of State High School Association’s Guidance for Opening up High School Athletics and Activities](nfhs.org/media/3812287/2020-nfhs-guidance-for-opening-up-high-school-athletics-and-activities-nfhs-smac-may-15_2020-final.pdf)

### Know before you play

There may be an increased risk of COVID-19 when participating in a game and COVID-19 activity may be different in different regions of the state, also contributing to a possible increase in risk.
Traveling out of state to participate in sports activities is strongly discouraged. However, if teams are considering traveling to other regions or states for games, they should be aware of COVID-19 activity to inform their decision.

- **For Minnesota:**
  - [Situation Update for COVID-19](www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/situation.html)
  - [Governor’s COVID-19 Dashboard](mn.gov/covid19/data/covid-dashboard/index.jsp)
- **For the broader United States:**
  - [Johns Hopkins University of Medicine COVID-19 United States Cases by County](coronavirus.jhu.edu/us-map)
  - [CDC COVID Data Tracker](www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/cases-in-us.html)

### If a member of your team or organization has COVID-19

- If a case of COVID-19 is reported to you, notify MDH by email at both health.sports.covid19@state.mn.us and health.highered.covid19@state.mn.us. MDH will be available to answer questions you have and can provide guidance. MDH also has template notification letters for close contacts or others on the team who may have questions about their risk of COVID-19.
- MDH/LPH will interview the case or parent/guardian, determine the dates when the case was infectious, identify anyone that may have been exposed, and collect contact information for those individuals.
- People identified as exposed (close contacts) are those who spent at least 15 minutes within 6 feet of the case while the case was infectious or who had direct physical contact with an infected person. See [When to Quarantine](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine.html).
  - The infectious period starts 2 days before symptoms start, or 2 days before the case was tested if they had no symptoms.
  - Exposed persons (close contacts) will need stay home for 14 days from the last contact with the COVID-19 case.
  - If necessary, MDH may contact your organization for information on close contacts.
  - It is important to keep rosters of who was at practices and games each day so we can do contact tracing quickly. For more information on how we do contact tracing, see [Tracing COVID-19](www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/tracing.html).
  - You can find more information on what contacts need to do at [What to Do if You Have Had Close Contact With a Person With COVID-19](www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/contact.pdf).
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- Individuals who are sick with COVID-19 will need to stay out for 10 days from symptom onset. You can find most up to date information on these recommendations at If You Are Sick (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/sick.html).

- In general, you do not need to cancel practice or games once you hear of a case. If such steps are needed, MDH/LPH will reach out to you and work with you to determine next steps.

- If you know you have a case but haven’t heard from MDH or LPH and you still have concerns or need notification resources, please email us at health.sports.covid19@state.mn.us.

Guidance development

This document was developed in collaboration with stakeholders in Minnesota – in particular, the Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission and the Higher Education Athletic Task Force.

The Minnesota Department of Education continues to partner with the Minnesota State High School League in providing guidance to member schools regarding participation in athletics and activities. School-based activities and athletics are important to our students’ educational experience and more specific guidance will be provided in alignment with the three educational scenarios described in the 2020-2021 Planning Guide for Schools: Health Considerations for Navigating COVID-19 (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/k12planguide.pdf). This document provides parameters for schools to use in their planning for possible reopening in fall 2020-2021.