



# COVID-19 Intercollegiate Sports Guidance for Higher Education

1/14/2021

This document governs intercollegiate sports activities only. For intramural, club, or other recreational sports, refer to the [COVID-19 Sports Practice Guidance for Youth and Adults \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/sportsguide.pdf\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/sportsguide.pdf).

Executive Order 21-01 went into effect Sunday, Jan. 10 at 11:59 p.m. and does not have an end date. Key requirements that impact intercollegiate sports and athletics are addressed below.

- Multi-team (greater than two teams) events or tournaments are allowed starting Jan. 14, 2021 (page 7).

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.

Updates to this document include updated language around testing and face coverings (page 3 and 4).

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## General requirements under Executive Order 21-01

The requirements of Executive Order 21-01 will begin Sunday, Jan. 10 at 11:59 p.m. and do not have an end date. During this time:

- In-person organized sports activities for intercollegiate athletics must follow the requirements in this guidance.

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## Requirements for holding athletic events

### Review your preparedness plan

- COVID-19 Preparedness Plans are required by [Executive Orders issued by Governor Tim Walz \(mn.gov/governor/news/executiveorders.jsp\)](http://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 \(staysafe.mn.gov\)](https://staysafe.mn.gov).
- The COVID-19 Preparedness Plan must be available and accessible to participants, volunteers, and employees.
- Higher Education Institutions must also have a COVID-19 Preparedness Plan that follows guidance as [Guidance for Mitigating COVID-19 at Higher Education Institutions \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/guideihe.pdf\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/guideihe.pdf) and other guidance documents found at [Institutes of Higher Education \(IHE\): COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/ihe.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/ihe.html).
- 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 \(staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/all-businesses.jsp\)](https://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.
  - [CDC: People at Increased Risk \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/index.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/index.html)
  - [Executive Order 20-55, Protecting the Rights and Health of At Risk Populations during the COVID-19 Peacetime Emergency \(www.leg.state.mn.us/archive/execorders/20-55.pdf\)](https://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)

- When spectators are allowed (starting Jan. 10, at 11:59 p.m.), do not exceed the number of people allowed in the venue. Spectators must be managed according to the spectator requirements discussed in the requirements for holding games, scrimmages, and practices, below (see page 5).
- Facility and venue guidance is available at [Minnesota Stay Safe Guidance \(staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/index.jsp\)](https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/index.jsp), including:
  - [Stay Safe Guidance for Outdoor Recreation Entities \(staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/outdoor-recreation.jsp\)](https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/outdoor-recreation.jsp)
  - [Stay Safe Guidance for Entertainment \(staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/entertainment.jsp\)](https://staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/entertainment.jsp)

- A visual guide to capacity limits can be found here: [Minnesota's Stay Safe Plan \(mn.gov/covid19/for-minnesotans/stay-safe-mn/stay-safe-plan.jsp\)](https://mn.gov/covid19/for-minnesotans/stay-safe-mn/stay-safe-plan.jsp).
- Multi-team events or tournaments are not allowed through Jan. 14, 2021. After that, please follow tournament guidance listed below (see page 7).

## Promote routine testing

- For high-risk sports, MDH strongly recommends testing two to three times a week with at least one testing being a PCR test.
- For intermediate and low-risk sports, MDH strongly recommends following relevant testing guidance from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) or affiliated conference.
- NCAA guidance classifying various sports activities based on level of risk can be found in [Appendix. Sport Transmission Risk, Sample Testing, and Masking Strategies \(https://ncaaorg.s3.amazonaws.com/ssi/COVID/SSI\\_ResocializationDevelopingStandardsSecondEdition.pdf\)](https://ncaaorg.s3.amazonaws.com/ssi/COVID/SSI_ResocializationDevelopingStandardsSecondEdition.pdf).

## Follow face covering requirements

- For programs that **do not** elect to follow the optional testing program outlined in the following section, face coverings must be worn by all persons at all times, including practices and games, with only the following exceptions:
  - During wrestling contact, a cloth face covering could become a choking or visual hazard and is discouraged. For gymnastics and cheerleading, if there are concerns about safety in regards to choking or the face covering getting caught on objects, athletes may temporarily remove the face covering during activities such as tumbling/stunting/flying or on certain apparatuses. However, athletes must wear face coverings for all other practices and routines.
  - Individuals who swim/dive/participate in water sports should not wear a cloth face covering while they are in the water.
  - Individual sports performed outside that allow people to maintain distance from others are lower risk for transmission of SARS-CoV-2. A cloth face covering is not necessary for athletes participating in outdoor individual sports if the athletes can stay at least 6 feet away from others. However, if social distancing cannot be maintained, athletes must wear face coverings.
    - Note that even outdoor individual sports often involve occasional close contact with others, so teams and athletes will often need to modify the activity to ensure that 6 feet of social distance can be maintained. In addition, individual outdoor athletes are still required to wear a face covering when they are around teammates, coaches, or others, and not actively participating in the distanced individual activity.
    - For example, at an alpine or Nordic ski competition, a skier may remove their face covering for the duration of the competition if the competition is organized in a way that guarantees the skier will not come within 6 feet of others on the course, including when starting and finishing. In this situation, skiers would still need to wear face coverings before and after the competition.

- If a sport requires a helmet that interferes with wearing a face covering safely or effectively (which is more likely with younger children), athletes may consider alternatives to face coverings that are specifically designed by helmet manufacturers to provide protection against the splashes, sprays, and aerosols that can lead to COVID-19 transmission (i.e., a full face shield).
  - A face covering is still the most protective option and should be used to the extent possible, but a full face shield may provide some protection.
  - Any face shield used as a face covering alternative must cover the entire face, extend to the ears and below the chin, and must not have exposed gaps or vents near the eyes, mouth, or nose.
  - For more information, please see [Frequently Asked Questions About the Requirement to Wear Face Coverings \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facecoverfaq.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facecoverfaq.html).
- More information about face covering requirements is available at [Masks and face coverings \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/prevention.html#masks\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/prevention.html#masks).

## Optional testing program

- Face coverings during practices are not required for athletes when testing is being done as follows:
  - For all sports, testing of all athletes must be completed twice per week, every week, with a recommendation of at least one PCR test.
  - Face coverings must still be worn when athletes are training in an area where they are intermixing with other patrons of a gym or sports facility (e.g., a weight room where both intercollegiate athletes and other patrons are present).
- Face coverings during competitions are not required for athletes during competition when testing is being done as follows:
  - For high-risk sports, three tests must be done for all athletes the week leading up to any competition, with a recommendation of at least one PCR test.
  - For intermediate and low-risk sports, two tests must be done for all athletes the week leading up to any competition, with a recommendation of at least one PCR test.
  - For classification of intermediate and low-risk sports, see NCAA or conference specific classifications.
  - Face coverings must still be worn when athletes are not playing (on the bench, in the dugout, on the sideline, etc.).

## 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:

### Spectators

- When spectators are allowed (starting Jan. 10, at 11:59 p.m.), do not allow spectators at practice to avoid crowding to the extent possible.
  - If necessary for spectators to be at practices, minimize the number of spectators and ensure that 6 feet social distancing between households is being adhered to and venue/facility guidance is being followed.

### Participants

- Keep practices small in size. For practices or training (non-game or competition activities), create pods. Pod sizes cannot exceed 25 people per pod, either inside or outside.
  - A “pod” is a group of individuals that only practice or play with members of their own pod, which limits the potential for transmission in the event of an exposure or outbreak. Teams and organizations are responsible for ensuring that members of different pods do not practice together, interact, or otherwise come into close contact while organized sports are occurring.
  - Pods must either practice in physically separate rooms, facilities, or areas, or steps must be taken to ensure that pods are separated by a distance of no less than 12 feet at all times.
  - Teams must also avoid reassigning athletes to different pods to the maximum extent possible.
  - The smaller the pod size, the more the team can minimize broader transmission of COVID-19 among teammates, so teams are strongly encouraged to create pods that are smaller than the maximum of 25.

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## Requirements for holding games, scrimmages, and competitions

### Spectator requirements

- Spectators, including family and friends of participants, were not allowed until Jan. 10, 2021, at 11:59 p.m. Only athletes, coaches, and other essential staff are authorized to be present.
- Starting Jan. 10 at 11:59 p.m. the following measures are required to manage spectators:
  - For games held indoors, if 12 feet can't be maintained between the participants in the game (athletes, coaches, student managers, timekeepers) and the spectators, participants must be included in the total capacity count.
    - If spectators and participants in the game can be clearly separated by at least 12 feet, then participants in the game do not need to be included in the total capacity count.

- Capacity for spectators at games must follow the appropriate venue guidance (see “Follow guidance for the event setting” section above).
- Require advanced reservations and/or ticketing (e.g., online, app-based, email, will-call). Do not allow walk-ins, impromptu purchases or admittance.
- Schedule arrival times for longer than their typical duration to minimize the congregation of patrons waiting. Establish staggered admission times, entry times and durations to minimize overlap and congregating of patrons at choke points (e.g., access points, security check points, admission areas, concession areas).
- Post instructions for patrons throughout the venue at entrances, and inform spectators:
  - Not to enter if they are experiencing symptoms.
  - About the venue’s attendance limits.
  - That they are required to adhere to hygiene and social distancing instructions, signage and markings.
  - That they are required to follow the venue’s requirements for wearing face coverings.
- Encourage patrons and visitors to review a screening survey that checks for COVID-19 symptoms, close contacts with confirmed cases and quarantined cases, and out of state travel. For example, see [Visitor and Employee Health Screening Checklist \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facilityhlthscreen.pdf\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facilityhlthscreen.pdf).

## Participant requirements

- Stagger game times to avoid crowding and congestion when participants are arriving, playing, and leaving.
- 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 groups of up to seven athletes constitutes a pod.

## Additional Recommendations

- Strongly consider limiting spectators to one to two per participant to minimize transmission and to comply with applicable venue guidance and capacity limits.
- Names, phone number, and/or email should be collected as part of the reservations so that quick notification can be done if an individual develops COVID-19.
- Consider limiting or not allowing concessions to minimize opportunities for crowding.
- Consider limiting the size of or not allowing bands, cheer squads, and other entertainment groups at the competition.
  - If allowed, it is strongly recommended that any bands, cheer squads, or other entertainment groups present at a competition remain at least 12 feet away from the spectators and participants in the game.
  - If bands, cheer squads or other entertainment groups cannot maintain 12 feet of distance from spectators and participants in the game, then members of the band, cheer squads, and other entertainment groups must be included in the total spectator count.

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## Multi-team (greater than two teams) events and tournaments

Multi-team events and tournaments are allowed starting on Jan. 14, 2021 Once allowed the following guidance applies:

- MDH strongly recommends against holding tournaments or sporting events that will bring teams together from different states or from outside your local area.
- If teams choose to host multi-team events, the following guidelines apply.

### Requirements

- Teams can only be in a facility while playing a game. Teams should only arrive early enough to warm up before their competition, and teams should leave as soon as their game is over.
- The capacity requirements that apply to the venue hosting the event must be followed.

### Recommendations

- Consider limiting or not having entertainment (including bands, cheer squads, or dance teams).
- Do not allow spectators or significantly limit the number of spectators.
- Limit the amount of time in locker rooms and similar shared facilities.
- Limit the number of participants as much as possible, as well as minimize number of individuals (coaches, trainers, support staff) traveling with the team.

- Remember that if an individual tests positive for COVID-19 and was traveling with others in a vehicle for greater than 30 minutes, it could result in quarantine of everyone travelling with the case in that same vehicle (bus, van, SUV, etc.).
- Avoid overnight stays as much as possible.
  - Consider having events at a central location that doesn't require teams to stay overnight.
  - Remember that staying at hotels can create another environment where teammates gather in close proximity, which increases risk of transmission.

## 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:
  - [National Collegiate Athletic Association COVID-19 Coronavirus \(www.ncaa.org/sport-science-institute/coronavirus-covid-19\)](http://www.ncaa.org/sport-science-institute/coronavirus-covid-19)
  - [United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee Coronavirus Updates \(www.teamusa.org/Coronavirus\)](http://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: Guidance for Opening up High School Athletics and Activities \(nfhs.org/media/3812287/2020-nfhs-guidance-for-opening-up-high-school-athletics-and-activities-nfhs-smac-may-15\\_2020-final.pdf\)](http://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 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/situation.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/situation.html)
  - [Governor's COVID-19 Dashboard \(mn.gov/covid19/data/covid-dashboard/index.jsp\)](http://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 \(coronavirus.jhu.edu/us-map\)](https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/us-map)
- [CDC COVID Data Tracker \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/cases-in-us.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/cases-in-us.html)
- Also, given the current recommendation for people who travel out of state to quarantine upon return, teams should work with their institution to understand the institution's travel-related quarantine requirements.

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## 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](mailto:health.sports.covid19@state.mn.us) and [health.highered.covid19@state.mn.us](mailto: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.
- Once you hear of a case on your team, the team or association COVID-19 contact and/or coach must review whether or not the case was infectious while with their teammates and whether or not an exposure occurred. The COVID-19 contact and/or coach can consult with MDH or their affiliated association to discuss exposure assessment or any other concerns.
- It is important to keep rosters of who was at practices and, when allowed, games each day so contact tracing can be done quickly.
- A 14-day quarantine is recommended for people who have been exposed to COVID-19. In some circumstances, a shortened quarantine period may be possible.
- For more information, see [Quarantine Guidance for COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/quarguide.pdf\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/quarguide.pdf).
- 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 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/contact.pdf\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/contact.pdf).
- People 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 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/sick.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/sick.html).
- More information on what to do if you have a player who is symptomatic can be found here: [COVID-19 Decision Tree for People in Schools, Youth, and Child Care Programs \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/exguide.pdf\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/exguide.pdf).



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