

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

Consistent with executive orders, regulation, and guidance the following provisions remain in place, including:

- **Games, Competitions and Scrimmages.** Outdoor higher risk sports, such as football and boys' and men's lacrosse, are allowed to resume competitions, scrimmages and games with modifications. Competitions, games and scrimmages of indoor higher risk sports, such as wrestling and boxing, are prohibited.
- **Spectators:** Spectator provisions for youth sports remain limited at two parents/guardians per athlete, plus their underaged siblings.
- **Interstate Sporting Events:** Interstate sporting activities are allowed with sports teams and groups from states that are not currently on the list of communities that have [a high community spread rate](#). When any individual, sports team or group plays in 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. Rhode Island-based sports teams who play outside of Rhode Island are subject to applicable laws and regulations in other jurisdictions.
- **Tournaments:** Tournaments held in Rhode Island with sports teams or groups from out-of-state are prohibited. The term "tournament" means a formal contest that consists of multiple competitions or a series of games between multiple persons or teams. Tournaments include multiple stages, played in a condensed period of time, such as over the course of a single day or multiple days in a row, including a series of games such as a "jamboree," "weekend series," or "showcase."
- **Updated Sports Guidance:** Specific rules regarding youth, adult, amateur and school sports regarding what is permitted and prohibited and limits on spectators and sports venues are determined through executive order or by regulation. The sports guidance provides general guidance and best practices required or encouraged to keep athletes, coaches and spectators as safe as possible. Under this approach, leagues, coaches, facilities and families can use the sports guidance to comply with Rhode Island policies, and look to the FAQs to further explain the executive orders and regulations applicable to sports.
- **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. Some masks work better than others. Learn more about wearing masks at <https://covid.ri.gov/covid-19-prevention/wearing-masks>.
- **COVID-19 Testing:** The sports 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

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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 sports 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 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:** For practices and games, indoor sporting facilities should operate at an occupancy level of no more than one person per 50 square feet. For competitions with spectators, indoor sports facilities should follow capacity restrictions for venues of assembly, which are currently 50% of capacity with a cap of 250 people, in accordance with executive orders and RIDOH regulations. Facilities may impose stricter requirements based on the configuration of the facility, staffing or other issues at their discretion.
- **Outdoor Sports Facility Capacity:** For practices or training, there is no limit on capacity. For competitions with spectators, outdoor sports facilities should follow capacity restrictions for venues of assembly, which are currently 50% of capacity with a cap of 500 people, in accordance with executive orders and RIDOH regulations. Facilities may impose stricter requirements based on the configuration of the 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.
- **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 information 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), SportsMedicine 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

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

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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. Many 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 has reviewed the revised NFHS guidelines and consulted with other states and sports leagues and decided to retain the sports classifications. While we agree with the NFSH factors and findings in the revised guidelines, the categories provide heightened awareness and options for adjusting rules to prevent the spread of COVID-19, allows the state to easily stop and start play based on risk category, are familiar to RIIL, other sports groups and organizations, allow for easy communication and understanding, and are still being used in many other states and by the US Olympic Committee.

Can athletes who play higher risk indoor sports practice? Can they compete?

Athletes who normally play higher risk sports indoors may continue to 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. Activities that include close contact with a partner may resume in a setting where close contact is a fundamental part of the activity and the partners are consistent throughout the practice.

Outdoor higher risk sports, such as football and boys'/men's lacrosse, are allowed to resume competitions, scrimmages and games with modifications. Competitions, games and scrimmages of higher risk sports normally played indoors, such as wrestling and boxing, are still prohibited.

Can I plan/hold a tournament in Rhode Island?

That depends. Under the current executive order, tournament play is allowed among Rhode Island teams, provided all COVID-19 protocols are followed including masking, social distancing, capacity limitations, and limiting crowding and social interactions. Tournaments of all kinds are prohibited for sporting events that include Rhode Island teams playing teams from out of state.

Why are you prohibiting tournaments with teams from out of state?

A number of positive cases have been the result of players participating in games and tournaments and from socializing before and after sporting events. Tournaments tend to attract multiple teams and spectators to a sports facility, which often results in teams and spectators socializing at the sports venue or at an off-site location while they wait to determine their next game or match. These practices lead to more congregating and socializing which contribute to the spread of COVID-19.

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?

A Rhode Island player or team is currently allowed to play on a team or at a facility that is out-of-state. 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? Are out-of-state teams allowed to play Rhode Island teams?

The current requirements allow an out-of-state resident to play on a Rhode Island sports team and at a Rhode Island sport facility. Also, out-of-state teams may play Rhode Island teams in Rhode Island provided that the out-of-state sports teams and groups are not from communities with a high community spread rate as set forth on a list maintained by RIDOH at <https://covid.ri.gov/>. Sports teams and groups from out-of-state are prohibited from participating in tournaments in Rhode Island. All players and teams from out-of-state must comply with Rhode Island's and their home state's travel policies and other COVID-19 requirements.

Are close contact partner activities, such as martial arts, dancing, boxing, and Jiu-Jitsu, permitted to resume?

Yes, close contact partner activities may resume. In settings where close contact is a fundamental part of the activity (e.g., ballroom dancing, boxing, jiu-jitsu) it is recommended that gyms or fitness centers set up consistent pairs of partners, when possible. In any case, training partners are not to change during a single day. Fitness centers must monitor patrons for symptoms and encourage hand washing before and after the activities.

What is the policy on spectators?

Spectators who attend sporting events or competitions are subject to current executive orders and RIDOH regulations, including COVID-19 requirements on physical distancing, face coverings, screening and capacity restrictions for venues of assembly. Sporting events, competitions, 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, applicable capacity limits for the sporting venue.

How are you going to enforce the limits on spectators?

We expect 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

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facilities. Every university, college, school or facility has the right to establish spectator limits that are more restrictive, based on the capacity and configuration of the facility. These hosts are responsible to implement and enforce their policies and capacity limits.

How do you expect athletes to play wearing masks?

At present, high school and other sports leagues 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, including aerial, and tumbling moves or activities 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). 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 there different requirements for 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?

There are instances where closing locker rooms causes other problems, such as athletes changing clothes in open areas resulting in privacy issues. So, in order to provide an opportunity for athletes and others to change privately and take off wet bathing suits or put on protective equipment, locker rooms may remain open, if operators adhere to the requirements set forth in the RIDOH regulations, which include mask wearing at all times, limiting capacity, marking

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distancing, and cleaning and sanitizing in accordance with RIDOH regulations.

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