

February 22, 2021

TO: Public School Superintendents, Private School Leaders, School Medical Directors, and School Athletic Directors, Recreational Sports Organizers

FROM: Broome County Health Department

HEALTH ADVISORY: HIGHER-RISK RECREATIONAL AND K-12 SCHOOL SPORTS

SUMMARY

- New York State's [Interim Guidance For Sports And Recreation During The Covid-19 Public Health Emergency](#) categorizes sports and recreation activities as lower risk, moderate risk, and higher risk. Wrestling, ice hockey, basketball, contact lacrosse, and volleyball are among the sports categorized as higher risk.
- On January 22, 2021, Governor Cuomo announced effective February 1, 2021, participants in higher risk sports and recreation activities may partake in individual or distanced group training and organized no/low-contact group training and may partake in other types of play, including competitions and tournaments, only as permitted by their local health departments.
 - The [Interim Guidance For Sports And Recreation During The Covid-19 Public Health Emergency](#) stipulates that the following factors should be considered regarding higher risk sports, which may weigh against permitting such activities:
 - Whether a more-transmissible variant of COVID-19 has been identified in the area
 - Local rate of COVID-19 transmission or rate of positivity, and
 - Local ability to monitor and enforce compliance with requirements.
- Effective February 1, 2021, and until otherwise indicated, student-athletes are permitted to participate in organized recreational league or K-12 sponsored higher-risk school sports in Broome County, provided that specific guidelines are met.
- The County of Broome's responsibilities are limited to the issuance of this guidance and receipt of plans submitted by schools or school districts within the County, and other County obligations described in this guidance. The County has no responsibility to oversee any such plan's operation or implementation, the responsibility for which rests exclusively with the school or school district.

BACKGROUND

The World Health Organization defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” Regarding SARS-CoV-2 and participation in sports, the American Academy of Pediatrics has indicated that re-engaging in sports activities has physical and psychological health benefits. Participating in sports allows youth to improve their cardiovascular health, strength, body composition, and overall fitness. Mentally, youth may experience benefits from increased socialization and from a more structured routine. Both the psychological and physical benefits support developmental growth and can have immune system benefits.

The State’s decision to permit higher-risk sports and recreation activities does not mean that their risk has changed. Any time people are gathered, there is a risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2, which can lead to serious medical conditions and even death. Symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals can spread the virus. Masking, distancing, and other mitigation measures reduce, but do not eliminate risk. Further, there is a significant risk of transmission to those in the home of an infected student-athlete.

At present, it cannot be predicted who will become severely ill, although older people and those with underlying health conditions are at higher risk. The long-term effects of SARS-CoV-2 are not known; even people with mild cases may experience long-term complications.

Schools, players, parents, and coaches should understand that social interactions outside of an actual practice or competition (e.g. locker rooms, buses) are also potential places of transmission among student-athletes. Regarding clusters of SARS-CoV-2 cases among athletes, at this time, there is insufficient data to determine whether transmission is more likely to have occurred because of the nature of a given sport or because of the social factors and environment surrounding the athletes and teams.

Ultimately, the decision falls on a parents/guardian to decide whether they will allow their children to participate in a given sport or activity.

REQUIREMENTS FOR HIGHER RISK SPORTS IN BROOME COUNTY

General

Effective February 1, 2021, and until otherwise indicated, residents are permitted to participate in organized recreational leagues or K-12 sponsored higher-risk school sports in Broome County, provided that the following guidelines are met.

- Each school district or recreational league must submit to the Broome County Health Department, and make publicly available, a written plan that outlines precautions, and meets the guidelines for higher- risk sports, as detailed in this document and/or promulgated by the New York State Department of Health.
 - Plans should be submitted to BCHealth@broomecounty.us
- Plan format –Plans should contain a general plan that governs all common areas. Additional annexes should be added for each specific sport to be played. This should address sport specific issues.
- Plans must be approved by the district/school’s medical director. It is recommended that recreational leagues base sports-specific preparedness plans on district/school approved plans.
- A district or league’s plan can be more restrictive than this guidance, but cannot be less restrictive.
- Each school superintendent, designee, appropriate person or entity for recreational leagues, must oversee the creation of a sport-specific preparedness plan that delineates:
 - A plan administrator, who is responsible for communicating the plan to athletes, coaches, parents, trainers, referees/officials, etc.
 - A plan coordinator, who will serve as a point of contact, should any cases be identified. The coordinator must facilitate and assist with case investigation and contact elicitation and notification. This person will be the primary point of contact for the Broome County Health Department.
 - Contact information for these individuals must be published in the plan
- Each district/school establishes and disseminates their own dedicated phone number and email address to allow athletes, parents or others to report alleged failures to adhere to the obligations reflected in these requirements and/or those in NYS’ [Interim Guidance For Sports And Recreation During The Covid-19 Public Health Emergency](#). The plan should identify the above phone number and email.

Spectators

At this time spectators are **allowed**. However, plans should include:

- How school districts or recreational leagues plan to comply with venue guidance (if applicable), capacity limits, and NYS gathering guidance.
- If the school district and venue size permits, no more than two spectators per student-athlete may be permitted.
 - Plan must include social distancing enforcement plan for spectators.
- This will continuously be under review as new information and guidance becomes available.

Masks

Each school district or recreational league must outline and employ the following:

- Masks that conform to recommendations from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) must be worn at all times, by all student-athletes, coaches, managers, referees/officials, spectators, etc.
- Any mask that becomes saturated with sweat must be changed immediately.
- Reusable masks (cloth face coverings) must be washed daily in hot water and not reused until cleaned.
- Coaches, managers, and other school employees should monitor proper use and correct improper use by student-athletes, when indicated. This should also include mask breaks as appropriate.
- Medical Exemptions for mask wearing are permitted as governed by existing NYS Education Guidance

Monitoring

Each school district or recreational league must outline and employ the following:

- A daily system to ensure that no one associated with the practice or competition is ill, including, but not limited to, players, coaches, game personnel, referees/officials and spectators.
 - This must include: temperature checks and a health assessment screening consistent with NYSED and NYSDOH guidance.
 - Screenings must be completed on each day of practice or competition.
 - Records must be made accessible to the Broome County Health Department electronically. The plan must indicate how to access said records.
- A system for logging attendance by all individuals associated with the practice or competition, including, but not limited to, players, coaches, game personnel, referees/officials and spectators. The system must capture names (if applicable, parent or guardian), county of residence, phone numbers and email addresses.
 - Records must be made accessible to the Broome County Health Department electronically. The plan must indicate how to access said records.
 - How practice and game times can be staggered to avoid crowding and congestion when participants, referees/officials and spectators are arriving, playing, and leaving.
 - If feasible, how cohorts can be created to limit the potential for transmission in the event of an exposure. A cohort is a group of athletes who only practice or play with members of their own pod.
 - Cohorts should either practice in physically separate rooms, facilities or areas or steps taken to ensure that pods are appropriately distanced.
 - Teams should avoid reassigning athletes to different cohorts to the maximum extent possible.
 - The smaller the cohort size, the more the team can minimize potential transmission.

Testing

- Broome County recommends each student-athlete, coach, manager, referee/official, or other individual associated with the higher-risk sport should undergo weekly SARS-CoV-2 testing, unless the individual has documentation of a positive SARS-CoV-2 test within the previous 90 days.
 - Testing must be arranged or conducted by the district/school.
 - The district/school must report patient-specific results (positive or negative) to ECLRS per NYS guidelines.
 - The “home” team is responsible for arranging for and reporting of results from officials/referees.

Physical Distancing Risks

Each school district or recreational league must outline how the following will be mitigated:

- How sharing of objects (e.g. water bottles, towels, snacks) will be avoided and the use of dedicated personal equipment encouraged.
- How locker rooms and facility shower use can be avoided.
- How carpooling to and from practice or competition can be discouraged to the extent possible.
- How travel by buses will conform to social distancing requirements for buses per state school transportation requirements; for recreational leagues, use of buses should also conform to NYS guidance for social distancing bus transportation requirements for schools.
- If feasible, how practices or competitions can be held outdoors.
 - If not feasible, how time spent indoors can be minimized.

Travel

Each school district or recreational league must outline the following in their plan:

- Travel to/from interstate competitions must comply with the most current [NYS DOH Travel Advisories and guidance](#)
- For games requiring overnight travel, how hotel room sharing can be discouraged, to the extent possible.
- How congregate dining will be minimized and when it is necessary, how NYS social distancing regulations related to dining and gatherings will be adhered to.
- Superintendents or their designee from districts/schools outside Broome County must stipulate to the host district/school that no one associated with the team is known to be ill or currently infected with SARS-CoV-2 prior to their team traveling to Broome County to participate in a practice or competition.

Consent, and Clearances

Each school district or recreational league must outline and employ the following:

- Each parent/guardian must sign a district/school developed SARS-CoV-2 informed consent that, at a minimum, acknowledges that:

- Participation in the higher-risk sport places the student-athlete at risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2.
- Symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals can spread the virus.
- Masking, distancing, and other mitigation measures reduce, but do not eliminate risk.
- At present, it cannot be predicted who will become severely ill if infected.
- SARS-CoV-2 can lead to serious medical conditions and death for people of all ages.
- The long-term effects of SARS-CoV-2 are, at present, unknown; even people with mild cases may experience long-term complications.
- There is a significant risk of transmission to those in the home of infected student-athletes.
- Older people and people with underlying health conditions are at higher risk of serious disease.
- This acknowledgement shall affirm a condition of ongoing participation will be full cooperation with case/ contact investigations and compliance with isolation/quarantine requests if indicated.