



January 28, 2021

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

From: Oswego 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](https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/SportsAndRecreationMasterGuidance.pdf) <https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/SportsAndRecreationMasterGuidance.pdf> categorizes sports and recreation activities as lower risk, moderate risk, and higher risk. Wrestling, ice hockey, basketball, contact lacrosse, rugby, competitive cheerleading/group dance and volleyball are among the sports categorized as **higher risk**.
- On January 22, 2021 Governor Cuomo announced that 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](https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/SportsAndRecreationMasterGuidance.pdf) 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 SARS-CoV-2 has been identified in the area
 - Local rates of SARS-CoV-2 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 Oswego County, provided that specific guidelines are met:**
 - Sports activities will be placed on pause if the 7-day rolling average of test positivity is more than 8% in the Central New York region as found on <https://forward.ny.gov/early-warning-monitoring-dashboard>
 - Oswego County Health Department reserves the right to pause all higher risk sports should Oswego County experience a spike in infection rates.

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 psychological and physical benefits support developmental growth and can have immune 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 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, 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 parent/guardian to decide whether they will allow their child to participate in a given sport or activity.

REQUIREMENTS FOR HIGHER RISK SPORTS IN OSWEGO COUNTY

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 Oswego County, provided that the following guidelines are met:

- Each school or league adheres to the guidance written in the [Interim Guidance For Sports and Recreation During The COVID-19 Public Health Emergency](#).
- It is recommended that each school's Board of Education or non-public school's Board of Directors (or other appropriate person/entity for recreation leagues) approve the district or league's participation in each specific sport.
- Each school's Medical Director must approve the district/school's participation in higher-risk sports.
- Each school superintendent/school leader, or appropriate person/entity for recreational leagues, must oversee the creation of a sport-specific preparedness plan. The plan must delineate:
 - 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 tracing and notification.
 - A daily system to ensure that no one associated with the practice or competition is ill, including referees, officials or spectators (if allowed).
 - A system for logging attendance by all individuals associated with the practice or competition, including referees/officials and spectators (if allowed). The system must capture names, phone numbers and email addresses.
 - How practice and game time can be staggered to avoid crowding and congestion when participants, referees/officials and spectators (if allowed) are arriving, playing, and leaving.
 - If feasible, how pods can be created to limit the potential for transmission in the event of an exposure. A pod is a group of athletes who only practice or play with members of their own pod.
 - Sharing of objects (e.g. water bottles, towels, snacks) will be avoided and the use of dedicated personal equipment encouraged.
 - If feasible, how practices or competitions can be held outdoors. If not feasible, how time spent indoors can be minimized.

- Use of locker rooms and facility showers are strongly discouraged to avoid a place for transmission of the virus.
- Carpooling should be discouraged to the extent possible.
- If traveling by buses, busing is strongly advised to conform to social distancing requirements for buses per state school transportation requirements. This applies to all school and recreational league events. For games requiring overnight travel, sharing of hotels rooms is strongly discouraged.
- Minimize congregate dining and when it is necessary, apply NYS social distancing regulations related to dining and gatherings.
- **At this time, spectators, including family members, fans, and volunteers not required for the event operation, are prohibited. However, schools and leagues should formulate their plans to include spectators, as this decision may change in the future.**
- Each school or league must develop and use a SARS-CoV-2 higher-risk sport informed consent for parents/guardians to sign. Oswego County Health Department recommends that schools and leagues obtain legal advice in the development of this informed consent.
- Each school/ league must obtain medical clearance for sports participation from the athlete's health care provider.
- If an athlete or coach has a positive COVID-19 diagnostic test and attended a practice or competition while infectious, all in-person team or group activities (e.g. practices, scrimmages, games, meetings) will be canceled for a 10-day period.
- Each team is responsible for screening all athletes and coaches for COVID-19 symptoms for every team event, including practice, scrimmage or tournaments. Individuals who were exposed to a COVID-19 case or diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past 10 days are not allowed to participate in the sport or join spectators (if allowed).
- COVID-19 vaccination status does not alter regulation requirement.
- Each district/school or recreational league 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.
- Masks that conform to recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention must be worn at all times, by all athletes, coaches, managers, referees/officials, spectators (if allowed), individuals dropping off or picking up athletes, etc. If athletes are unable to wear a mask because of difficulty breathing during high intensity activities or swimming, they must wear one all times when not actively playing, including when on the bench or pool deck.
 - 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 athletes when indicated.
- Travel for practice or play to or from anywhere other than contiguous counties within Section III is not permitted.
 - Travel to, or from, any area that has been designated as a red or orange zone is not permitted.
 - Travel to, or from, any area that has been designated as a yellow zone is permitted, so long as it adheres to all applicable NYS guidance.
 - Superintendents/school leaders from districts/ schools from outside Oswego 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 Oswego County to participate in practice or competition.
 - Travel to/from interstate competitions is prohibited.
- Each district/school or recreational league will maintain at their own expense a valid policy of insurance covering liability arising from their sponsorship of higher-risk sports.

- Each district/school or recreational league must submit their plan and the name, cell phone number, and email of their plan coordinator who will assist in case investigations and contact tracing to Oswego County Health Department via email at healthdepartment@oswegocounty.com.