

Updates since March 16, 2021:

- Updated March 19, 2021 to clarify that sideline cheer is allowed as a moderate-contact sport.
- Updated March 17, 2021 to clarify that flag football is considered a moderate-contact sport.

Youth sports are important to our children's physical and mental health, and California's public health approach has worked to balance those benefits against COVID-19 risks. With case rates and hospitalizations declining across California, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) is allowing outdoor high- and moderate-risk sports competition to begin while counties are in the purple or red tier, with modifications and steps to reduce risk in counties with a case rate at or below 14 per 100,000 population.

On February 19, 2021 CDPH released updated guidance for youth and recreational adult sports. The guidance went into effect on February 26, 2021.

Who does this guidance pertain to?

The new guidance applies to youth in grades K-12 in school, community-sponsored recreational, club sports, organized youth sports, and adults playing recreational sports. It does not apply to collegiate or professional sports.

Why are youth sports allowed to resume?

With conditions improving in our state and testing more readily available, we can limit the risk of transmission across our state and in our communities when combined with strict adherence to wearing of face masks, physical distancing and limitations on inter-team competitions and tournaments. Parents and guardians should be fully informed on the risks of minors participating in high-contact and moderate-contact sports so they can make the decision if it's appropriate for their child to compete.

What determines when a county is eligible to begin playing high- and moderate-contact sports?

A county's adjusted case rate, per the Blueprint for a Safer Economy, must be at or below 14 per 100,000 population. Blueprint tiers are updated and made public every Tuesday.

Will teams have to stop competing if the case rate in their county goes above 14 per 100,000?

If sports activities are permitted to resume in a county pursuant to this updated guidance, competition is not required to cease if the county's adjusted case rate exceeds the 14 per 100,000 threshold.

What sports are allowed?

Sports are permitted depending on:

- The Tier the jurisdiction is in (see Table in guidance).
- The level of contact participants in the sport have with each other (low, moderate or high).
- Whether the sport is played indoors or outdoors.

Conditioning and practice for all sports are considered low risk if conducted outside and at least six feet of physical distancing can be maintained. The wearing of face coverings, including during conditioning, practice and competition, and the maintenance of physical distancing should be implemented at all times to the extent practicable without compromising player safety.

What does it mean to wear a face covering and maintain physical distancing to the maximum extent possible?

If sports participants will be frequently or consistently within six feet of each other during play and face coverings can be worn without compromising player safety, they should be worn; this includes most low- and moderate-risk sports except for swimming and diving. Sports participants on the sidelines must wear face coverings at all time.

Is scrimmaging or competition allowed?

Inter-team competitions (i.e., between two teams) resumed in California beginning January 25, 2021, based on the guidelines outlined in state guidance. The status of return-to-competition is subject to change at any time given the level of COVID-19 transmission in California.

No tournaments or events that involve more than two teams may occur. However, exceptions may be made, when authorized by the local health officer, for sports where individual competitors from multiple teams are routine such as: track and field; cross-country; golf; skiing/snowboarding; tennis; swimming/diving/surfing; biking and equestrian events.

Travel outside of California for competition is not allowed; several multistate and multi-jurisdictional outbreaks have been reported in California residents and around the nation.

Is testing required?

Testing is required for some sports and strongly encouraged for others. Because football, rugby and water polo are high-contact sports that are likely to be played unmasked, with close, face-to-face contact exceeding 15 minutes, weekly testing is required for all participants age 13 and over and coaches in counties with a case rate between 7 and 14 per 100,000. For competition, test results must be made available within 24 hours of play. Outdoor moderate-contact sports, such as baseball, cheerleading and softball, can be played in these counties without the testing requirement.

Do teams made up of participants of varying ages need to comply with this testing requirement?

When adjusted case rates for a county are between 7 and 14 per 100,000, weekly testing is required for all high-contact sports participants age 13 and over. This applies to football, rugby and water polo. However, if more than 50% of a team's participants are under the age of 13, the entire team's participants are exempted from the testing requirement. For purposes of this exemption, it would be defined as more than 50% of an entire team roster. Coaches for these teams, however, will still be required to test weekly.

Is the state making testing available to these athletes?

Free, confidential testing is available to every Californian that needs it. More information on testing resources is available at www.covid19.ca.gov.

How are sports classified as low-, moderate-, or high-contact?

- **Low-contact sports:** individual or small group sports where contact within six feet of other participants can be avoided. Some of these sports have relatively low exertion rates that allow for consistent wearing of face coverings when within six feet of other people.
- **Moderate-contact sports:** team sports that can be played with only incidental or intermittent close contact between participants and have moderate exertion rates.
- **High-contact sports:** team sports with frequent or sustained close contact (and in many cases, face-face contact) between participants, high exertion rates, and high probability that respiratory particles will be transmitted between participants.

See table in guidance for categorization of sports. The list of sports is not exhaustive but provides examples of sports with different levels of contact so the level of contact can be assessed for other sports.

What factors increase the risk of transmission while participating in sports?

Risk of COVID-19 infection increases with higher COVID rates in the community where sport participants live.

- Risk increases for indoor activities; indoor sports are higher risk than outdoor sports due to reduced ventilation.
- Risk increases with competition involving two separate teams; intra-team games and competition involve less mixing of households and communities.
- Risk increases when face coverings are not worn, and physical distancing is not maintained.
- Risk increases with increasing levels of contact between participants; closer contact (particularly face-to-face contact), and the frequency and total duration of close contact, increases the risk that respiratory particles will be transmitted between participants.
- Risk increases with greater exertion levels; greater exertion increases the rate of breathing and the quantity of air that is inhaled and exhaled with every breath.
- Risk increases with mixing of cohorts and groups, particularly when from different communities (during or outside of sports play); mixing with more people increases the risk that an infectious person will be present.

Why are indoor sports restricted more than outdoor sports?

Outdoor activities are lower risk than indoor activities, as study after study has confirmed. Additionally, a number of outbreaks in California and across the nation have been specifically linked to high-contact sports conducted indoors, such as basketball and wrestling. For example, an outbreak in California was tied to a youth basketball tournament in November, with another large outbreak across three counties in December tied to a basketball program for middle and high school aged players.

Is anyone allowed to watch youth or recreational adult sports?

Observers for youth sports (age 18 years and under) are limited to immediate household members who may observe practices and games as needed for age-appropriate supervision. No other observers, including scouts and college recruiters, are allowed.

- Age-appropriate supervision should be limited to a single adult (or immediate family member older than the sport participant).
- Observers should be limited to ensure physical distance can be maintained, reduce potential crowding, and maintain indoor capacity limits.
- Household members observing practices and games as needed for age-appropriate supervision must wear face coverings and stay at least 6 feet from non-household members.

In indoor settings, observer capacity is limited; 25% in Tier 3 (Orange/Moderate), and 50% in Tier 4 (Yellow/Minimal), and ventilation for indoor sports should be increased.

Are athletes or coaches able to participate in more than one sport at a time?

Athletes and coaches should treat their team as a cohort and should only participate on one team over the same season or period of time.

When can a participant return to play following COVID-19 symptoms or infection?

Sports participants with symptoms of COVID-19 should not attend practices or competition. They should consult their physician for testing and notify their coach, athletic trainer and/or school administrator of their symptoms. Youth recovering from COVID-19 will have different paths to return to sports based on the severity of their illness. See the American Academy of Pediatrics Interim Guidance on Return to Sports for additional guidance for more serious infections.

Is flag football considered the same as high-contact football, and do participants need to follow the same requirements?

No, flag football is considered a moderate-contact sport and would not need to follow the same requirements (including testing) as high-contact football.

Is sideline cheer an allowable youth sport and recreational activity?

Yes, sideline cheer is considered comparable to competitive cheer as a moderate-contact sport, and as such, should follow all requirements of other outdoor moderate contact sports.

What does the March 4, 2021 update change in the guidance?

The update specifies that teams can return to competition earlier than otherwise authorized under the guidance issued on February 19, 2021, but only if they adhere to the stricter requirements in place for college teams. The guidance issued on February 19 is otherwise unchanged substantively.

As the updated guidance reflects, college teams for contact sports are subject to rigorous testing requirements around each competition, teams in all sports must have contact tracing protocols in place and coordinate with local health authorities, and all teams must develop site-specific plans for each facility the team uses, among other requirements not applicable to youth and recreational teams.

Why did the state update the guidance on March 4, 2021?

The state is supporting youth sports to safely return to play, guided by science. The February 19 guidance allowed competition in sports with lower risk of transmission to begin sooner if conducted outdoors, which current evidence shows is lower risk than indoors. The guidance also incorporated steps that cannot be reasonably implemented by youth and amateur teams, which do not have the same resources available to professional and college teams.

A court order issued in a lawsuit recently filed in San Diego, however, created significant confusion for youth and their families, and led to rushed returns to competition that put young people's health at risk. Similar cases were then filed in multiple counties, increasing the risk of similar confusion and unsafe returns to competition.

This update resolves the uncertainty that the lawsuits created, and it ensures no one is unnecessarily distracted from the important work of supporting youth sports to safely return to play.

Does this update mean indoor youth sports can resume immediately?

No. This update does not authorize indoor sports to resume at will. Teams can return to competition **only if** they implement and adhere to the rigorous requirements in place for college teams. Few amateur and high school teams are likely able to adhere to the college guidance, which includes substantially more than just testing requirements, such as contact tracing and site-specific protocols.