

1.20.2021

## Phase III youth, adult & school sports guidelines and indoor sports facilities

These guidelines are effective starting January 20, 2021.

In accordance with Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) [emergency regulations](#), youth and adult sport organizations and indoor sports facility operators should refer to and adhere to the [Reopening RI General Business/Organization Guidelines](#). The State prepared a [fillable checklist](#) to assist businesses and organizations in meeting the requirements outlined in these RIDOH regulations. Youth and adult sports organizations and indoor sports facility operators must comply with all applicable RIDOH regulations and active [executive orders](#).

Youth sports organizations should also refer to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [guidance on youth sports](#) and [guidance on visiting parks and recreational facilities](#). School sports organizations are also subject to the [Back to School RI guidance](#) and the rules and regulations of the sports organizations that govern school sports, such as local school committees and the [Rhode Island Interscholastic League](#). Higher education institutions, which are participating in sport activities, are expected to follow the [National Collegiate Athletic Association \(NCAA\) guidelines and protocols](#) and the rules and regulations which govern each institution of higher education.

This guidance refers to risk levels for sports. The sports risk categories are described below and are available at: <https://reopeningri.com/parks-recreation>.

**General Requirements** The guidelines below summarize additional steps Rhode Island strongly urges all individuals, public and private schools, municipalities, youth and adult sports organizations, leagues, and indoor sports facility operators and corporations to take during Phase III to reduce the spread of COVID-19 for the health and safety of athletes, coaches, officials and members of the public. If you have any questions about this guidance, please contact Cindy Elder, RI Department of Environmental Management, Division of Parks & Recreation, at [cynthia.elder@dem.ri.gov](mailto:cynthia.elder@dem.ri.gov).

- **Stable Group:** Organizations and individuals that operate sports leagues, camps, and clinics (including all interscholastic, “pick-up” games, and other informal athletic activities) are strongly encouraged to organize players and participants into “stable groups.” The term “stable groups” means the same individuals, including players, coaches, staff and volunteers, remain in the same group over the course of the entire program. Participants should not change from one group to another. When stable groups are not engaged in active play with one another, the stable groups should maintain a minimum physical distance of fourteen feet between stable groups.

Parents and caregivers are strongly encouraged to choose one stable sports group for their child to participate in during the sports season and to not allow a child to participate on more than one team or with more than one sports organization. Youth and adult sport

# REOPENING RI

organizations are strongly encouraged not to allow members to participate in more than one team, league, or camp per sports season.

- **COVID-19 Testing:** Athletes, coaches, and staff taking part in sports activities are encouraged to obtain a COVID-19 test weekly (or more frequently), except in cases where they have tested positive within the past 90 days. Rhode Islanders can schedule a free COVID-19 test for themselves or dependent children on [portal.ri.gov](https://portal.ri.gov) regardless of whether they have symptoms or insurance. All state sites require an appointment. More information about testing can be found on the [RIDOH Testing Webpage](#).

Sports leagues, organizations and indoor sports facilities are encouraged to promote weekly testing through education and outreach to participants and members. Sports leagues, organizations and indoor sports facilities are also encouraged to establish policies that require weekly COVID-19 testing of participants and members.

- **Pending Tests:** Coaches, staff, athletes, officials and spectators who are symptomatic or have been in close contact with someone who is COVID-19 positive should not attend games, practices, or any related sports activities while waiting for COVID-19 test results. Sports organizations and teams are strongly encouraged to establish strict disciplinary policies to penalize persons who violate this provision. This provision does not apply to coaches, staff, athletes, officials and spectators who are ordered to be tested routinely by RIDOH (e.g., employees of congregate care facilities).
- **Face Coverings:** Coaches, staff, officials, volunteers, players, spectators and any individual who enters an indoor sports facility or who plays a sport must wear a face covering at all times in accordance with current [executive orders](#) and [RIDOH regulations](#). This includes wearing a face covering during practices, scrimmages, competitions or other active play. A face covering is not required for activities that take place in a pool, for those whose health would be damaged by wearing a face covering, or who are developmentally unable to comply.

School coaches, staff, volunteers, players and spectators must wear a face covering in accordance with [Back to School RI guidance](#). Athletes are encouraged to bring extra face coverings and change into a clean, dry face covering in case their face covering becomes wet or soiled while engaged in sports activities.

- **Screening:** All players, staff, coaches, officials, volunteers and spectators must be screened for symptoms related to COVID-19 prior to the beginning of each activity or before entry into an indoor sports facility. A screening tool is available, in [English](#) and [Spanish](#), to aid with proper screening at <https://health.ri.gov/covid/for/business/>. Any person exhibiting signs of illness and any person who has been exposed to a person with COVID-19 must be excluded from the activity in accordance with CDC and RIDOH guidelines at <https://health.ri.gov/diseases/ncov2019/>.

Active screening for COVID-19 symptoms of all individuals who enter sports facilities is strongly encouraged, including through use of electronic or phone applications (i.e., Google document or QR Code) that also track attendance and send COVID-19 related push messages and reminders.



# REOPENING RI

- **Contact Information:** For the purpose of contact tracing, and in accordance with RIDOH regulations, all indoor sports facilities must collect contact information (i.e., full name, telephone number, and date and times on site) for all organizations, players, coaches, staff, officials, spectators or visitors who enter the facility. The contact information must be maintained for thirty days after which the information must be destroyed.

Youth and adult sports organizations or teams, prior to entry to a sporting facility, must provide a current and complete roster of their respective players, coaches and staff to the sporting facility. The complete roster must include all contact information (i.e., full name, telephone number, date and time on site) for each player, coach or staff. Organizations or teams are encouraged to retain a copy of the roster provided to the sports facilities for at least thirty days. All organizations, participants, parents, guardians and spectators are strongly encouraged to cooperate with RIDOH in providing any information for contact tracing purposes. Organizations are strongly encouraged to adopt rules regarding the need for cooperation with RIDOH for contact tracing purposes.

- **Event/Assembly Size:** The gathering size for youth or adult sports practices or games (including players, coaches, volunteers and spectators) must be in accordance with the spectator limitations and other applicable executive orders and RIDOH regulations.
- **Spectators:** Sporting venues may allow a limited number of spectators for athletes under the age of 18, provided that the State's current rules for events/assembly size and individual facility capacity are not exceeded. Spectators for athletes under the age of 18 are limited to two parents or guardians and the athlete's minor siblings, provided that all other COVID-19 safety protocols are met including, screening, physical distancing, sanitization, and capacity limits for the sporting venue. Sporting venues may impose additional conditions or restrictions based upon the sporting venue's ability to comply with applicable executive orders, regulations and guidance. All other spectators are prohibited from attending any sporting event or practice.
- **Physical Distancing:** Six feet of physical distancing should be maintained between all players, coaches and participants during practices and active play when possible. When players, coaches and participants are not engaged in active play (e.g., on the bench or on the sideline), a physical distance of six feet must be maintained. A minimum of fourteen feet of physical distancing should be maintained between teams and any other individuals or groups within a facility.
- **COVID-19 Positive Case and Quarantine:** If a player, coach, official or member of a team, sports organization, or a stable group tests positive for COVID-19, all members of the team or group, who have been in close contact with the individual who tested positive for COVID-19 will need to quarantine for up to ten days or in accordance with [Executive Orders](#) and directions from the RIDOH. If RIDOH identifies a positive COVID-19 case or outbreak connected to an athlete, coach, official, or 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.

All out-of-state participants in youth, adult and school sports should adhere to current [executive orders](#) regarding the need to quarantine prior to participation in any sporting activity.



# REOPENING RI

All individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 should cooperate with the RIDOH and advise other close contacts to do the same and follow RIDOH's guidance to limit the spread of COVID-19.

- **Hand Cleaning:** Frequent handwashing or hand sanitizing should be promoted with all participants engaged in sports activities and spectators. If soap and water are not readily available, hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol may be used. Handwashing and/or sanitizing should occur upon entering and leaving an athletic facility and before, during, and after the sport activities. Athletes and coaches are encouraged to avoid backslapping, hugging, handshakes and fist bumps.

## Sports Leagues, Teams and Organizations

- **COVID-19 Testing:** Sports leagues and organizations are strongly encouraged to promote weekly COVID-19 testing through education and outreach to participants and members. Sports leagues and organizations are also encouraged to establish policies that require weekly COVID-19 testing of participants and members.
- **Shared Objects:** Discourage sharing of items that are difficult to clean, sanitize, or disinfect between use (e.g., bats, racquets). Participants should bring and use their own equipment where possible, or have equipment designated and labeled for individual use by the organization. Shared equipment should be limited and sanitized between users. Equipment should be staged to allow physical distance between users and to limit multiple touches. Cups, bottles, or other food/beverage items should not be shared, and water bottles should be clearly marked with the individual's name. Coaches, staff, and officials are encouraged to use electronic whistles to encourage consistent face covering use.
- **Transportation/Ride Sharing:** Coaches, volunteers, staff, and other team or stable group members should not transport any athlete(s) who are not in their immediate household. In the event that transportation or ride sharing is necessary due to an emergency situation, all parties must wear a face covering over their nose and mouth, and space seating as feasible to maintain maximal distance from each other. It is recommended that the vehicle have external air circulated by opening windows or through the vehicle ventilation system.

Transportation for high school sports teams should follow [Back to School RI guidance](#). Higher education institutions should follow the rules and guidance provided by the NCAA.

- **Risk Level of Sports:** The United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee, [National Federation of State High School Associations \(NFHS\)](#) and numerous other sports organizations have categorized sports based on the risk of transmission of COVID-19 inherent in the sport or recreational activity itself as traditionally played. For the purposes of this guidance, the State recommends sports organizations and indoor sports facility operators follow the categories established by NFHS in its [Guidance for Opening Up High School Athletics and Activities](#) as follows:
  - **Higher Risk:** Includes sports that involve close, sustained contact between participants, lack of significant protective barriers, and high probability that respiratory particles will be transmitted between participants. Examples: wrestling, football, boys/men's lacrosse, competitive cheer, rugby, boxing, martial arts, and pairs figure skating.

# REOPENING RI

- **Moderate Risk:** Includes group sports or sports that involve intermittent close contact or close, sustained contact, but with protective equipment in place that may reduce the likelihood of respiratory particle transmission between participants or sports that use equipment that can't be cleaned between participants. Examples: basketball, volleyball\*, baseball\*, softball\*, soccer, water polo, gymnastics\* (if equipment can't be sufficiently cleaned between competitors), ice hockey, field hockey, tennis\*, swimming relays, pole vault\*, high jump\*, long jump\*, girls/woman's lacrosse, fencing, competitive group cycling, crew with two or more rowers in shell, 7-on-7 football, team sailing, non-competitive dance, and solo competitive dance.  
\*Could potentially be considered "Lower Risk" with appropriate cleaning of equipment and use of masks by participants.
- **Lower Risk:** Includes sports that can be done with physical distancing or individually with no sharing of equipment or the ability to clean the equipment between use by competitors. Examples: individual running events, throwing events (javelin, shot put, discus), individual swimming, golf, weightlifting, alpine skiing, sideline cheer, single sculling, cross country running (with staggered starts), archery, shooting, individual cycling, equestrian, snowboarding, singles figure skating and solo sailing.

The risk assessment level for an individual sport and the current lists of categorized sports are subject to change. A complete list of sports and risk categories is available at: <https://reopeningri.com/parks-recreation>.

- **Lower and moderate risk sports:** Games and competition between stable groups for low and moderate risk sports may occur and should incorporate modifications that reduce close physical or face-to-face contact. See **Modifications to Play** below. It is strongly encouraged that no more than two teams occupy a venue during a game.
- **Higher Risk Sports:** Participants in higher risks sports shall not participate in games, scrimmages, or competitive play. Rather, teams, sport organizations, and athletes should focus on practice and drills that avoid sustained, close contact and to focus on individual conditioning and to exercise, train, and develop skills at home, alone, or with their household members. Coaches are encouraged to connect with team members virtually and to encourage athletes to exercise and train, review game strategy, etc.
- **Modifications to Play:** There will always remain an inherent risk in participating in sports. To minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission, sports that may resume playing games are strongly encouraged to identify measures that can be taken to significantly limit contact and increase physical distancing between players. In general, these include:
  - Modify play and practice as much as possible to keep players spaced six feet apart for most of a game or practice.
  - Stagger team arrival and drop-off times or locations or put in place other protocols to limit contact between groups, guardians and spectators as much as possible. Examples include increasing the amount of time between practices and competitions to allow for one group to depart before another group enters the facility, allowing for more time to clean the facility between uses. Staggering entry times for athletics and spectators or designating entry and exits for each organization and/or spectators.
  - Conduct the activity or sport outdoors where possible, as outdoor activity is generally safer than indoors and allows for greater distancing. Consider rescheduling practices or games due to inclement weather rather than relocating the sport indoors.

# REOPENING RI

- Explore virtual options to reduce contact among players during competition (e.g., swim meets, indoor track meets and gymnastic meets).
- Shorten activities, practices, and game play or perform the activity with fewer participants to the extent possible.
- Eliminate or reduce the sharing of equipment or clean shared equipment between users and participants.
- Incorporate additional protective equipment, whenever possible, to further reduce the spread of respiratory particles or contact.

Specific examples of modifications include:

- Rules Modification: Establish rules to discourage close contact whenever possible.
  - Stagger Starts: In race-like activities where players typically start or finish together, modifications can include staggered starts or six feet distancing between participants (e.g., have runners in every other lane, spacing competitors on start line six feet apart).
  - Eliminate Deliberate Contact: Deliberate close contact could be eliminated. Deliberate close contact includes but is not limited to collisions, body checking, tackling, blocking, and racing/riding in packs. Officials should blow the electronic whistle more quickly than in traditional play to limit close contact.
  - Minimize Intermittent Contact: Game situations that result in intermittent close physical or face-to-face contact could be modified or eliminated including restarts, face-offs, throw-ins, scrums for the ball/puck, or similar activities. These activities may be allowed if face masks are used during contact (e.g., face-offs could take place with face masks worn by each player involved).
- **Interstate Sporting Events** – All sports organizations, teams and groups are prohibited from participating in tournaments, matches, games, competitions, camps, clinics and practices with out-of-state teams or sporting groups, except for professional and intercollegiate athletic programs. This does not prohibit Rhode Island-based schools who own or use out-of-state athletic facilities associated with their schools from continuing to use said sporting facilities for competitions or practice under Rhode Island law.

## School Sports

The Rhode Island Interscholastic League (RIIL) in partnership with RIDE and RIDOH has developed [modifications for high school sports](#). All sports organizations are encouraged to follow RIIL modifications or any modifications that the sport's national governing body puts forth to limit or decrease close physical or face-to-face contact.

- **Specific School Sports Provisions:** The following applies to high school, middle school and elementary school sports:
  - Nothing in this guidance shall interfere with the [Back to School RI](#) guidance; in the event of a conflict, the [Back to School RI](#) guidance shall prevail.
  - RIDE and RIDOH may work with Rhode Island school districts, and RIIL may develop more restrictive guidance and policies than those established here to meet the specific needs of the community.
  - All school districts, regardless of distance or in-person learning policies, may offer sports in accordance with this guidance.
  - It is strongly encouraged that RIIL require athletes, coaches, and staff taking part in RIIL high school sports activities to obtain a COVID-19 test weekly, except in cases where they have tested positive within the past 90 days. Athletes, coaches and staff

# REOPENING RI

should check with their school athletic director for specific information on the school's specific testing protocols.

- Teams must follow the Busing and Student Transportation provisions in the [Back to School RI](#) guidance when traveling to off-site practices or games in other jurisdictions.

## Indoor Sport Facilities (such as indoor ice rinks, athletic complexes, etc.)

- **Capacity:** Indoor sports facilities are subject to capacity limits of one person per 150 square feet in accordance with current executive orders or RIDOH regulations.
- **COVID-19 Testing:** Indoor sports facilities are encouraged to promote weekly COVID-19 testing through education and outreach to participants and members. Indoor sports facilities are also encouraged to establish policies that require weekly COVID-19 testing of participants and members.
- **Cleaning/Sanitation:** A cleaning schedule and record must be implemented and kept documenting at least a daily cleaning of the facility, including all areas or equipment. Frequent cleaning of commonly touched surfaces on the field, court, or play surface and cleaning and sanitization between users is strongly encouraged. See CDC guidance on [cleaning and disinfection](#) and in the CDC [guidance on youth sports](#).

Additionally, all shared equipment and seating must be thoroughly cleaned between uses by separate individuals. If said cleaning is unable to be accomplished, for any reason, the activity must be prohibited.

- **Physical Distancing:** Common areas, such as entrances, exits, bleachers, stands or spectator areas should be marked to indicate proper physical distancing of six feet between individuals. Also, take steps to avoid overcrowding on team benches to allow six feet of distance between players as often as possible. If the players box is designed with an exit/entry door at the back of the bench, have players wait behind the players box for their next shift.

Indoor sport facility operators should consider having a dedicated staff member (i.e., a safety officer) to prompt, monitor and enforce the requirements for screening, physical distancing and the wearing of face coverings for staff, volunteers, athletes, spectators and visitors to the indoor sports facility. For larger facilities, multiple staff members may be required to accomplish this requirement.

- **Locker Rooms:** Participants should be encouraged to come to the facility dressed and ready to play as locker rooms must remain closed unless a facility operator can:
  - Limit occupancy to no more than the number of occupants able to maintain a physical distance of six feet between users within the locker room at any given time and the facility operator ensures that the occupancy limit is not exceeded.
  - As applicable, visual markers are used to indicate six feet of physical distancing between each individual or arrange furnishings or benches to allow physical distancing of six feet.
  - Adequate ventilation, in accordance with RIDOH guidance, is available.
  - A thorough cleaning and sanitization of the locker rooms in between use by different occupants.
  - All group shower stalls must be closed. Single-occupancy showers are permitted only where showers can be thoroughly cleaned between uses.

# REOPENING RI

- **Snack Bars and Club Rooms:** For any indoor sporting facility that operates a snack bar, concession stand, restaurant or bar within its facility, applicable executive orders, regulations and guidance for restaurants must be followed. Use of club rooms, meeting rooms, or other common areas used for congregating are prohibited unless physical distancing of six feet between all individuals is easily and continuously maintained.
- **Discourage or Prohibit Congregating and Gatherings:** Indoor sports facilities should take steps to reduce areas of congregating or congestion, such as entrances, exits, and parking lots. Facilities are also encouraged to take additional measures to reduce opportunities to congregate and to limit any overlap of players and spectators, by increasing the time between sports organizations' or teams' use of the facility to allow one organization or team to completely exit the facility prior to another entering, making entrances and exits one way, and having spectators and athletes use different doors to the extent possible. It is recommended that no more than two teams be at any indoor sports facility playing area at one time.

Sports organizations, leagues and teams should discourage coaches, parents and players from gathering before and after games, practices, or related sport activities for in-person meetings, team social events, and other social gatherings.

- **Water Fountains/Bubblers:** Water fountains and bubblers must not be used. Turning the water fountains or bubblers off or blocking their use is encouraged. Automatic water bottle filling stations may still be used.
- **Spectators:** Indoor sporting facilities that choose to allow leagues and organizations who have players under the age of eighteen years old may allow a maximum of two parents or guardians for the athlete and the athlete's minor siblings provided:
  - The facility does not exceed its current allowable capacity;
  - The facility is large enough to ensure a minimum of six feet of physical distancing between spectators;
  - The facility and/or the league or organization has protocols in place and the same are enforced to ensure spectator compliance with current requirements. Facilities and leagues or organizations are encouraged to have spectators acknowledge compliance with all COVID-19 related requirements and acknowledge that their non-compliance may result in the corresponding athlete being prohibited from participating in the sporting activity.

All other spectators are prohibited, including for all amateur adult practices and games.

- **Signage:** In accordance with applicable RIDOH regulations, all indoor sports facilities must have signs reinforcing the requirements to screen for COVID-19 symptoms, wear a face covering and physically distance. Copies of acceptable posters can be found [here](#). Additional signage regarding sports to [Play it Safe](#) are also available.

## Plan and communication

- Indoor facility operators and youth, adult and school sports organizations are encouraged to provide participants with their COVID-19 plan.
- Pledge: Organizations are strongly encouraged to have administrators, players, staff,



# REOPENING RI

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coaches, officials, volunteers and spectators sign a pledge, affirming that they understand and agree to abide by the current executive orders, RIDOH Regulations and current guidance and encourage opposing team to sign and adhere to the pledge as well.

- Leagues and organizations are encouraged to treat violations of COVID-19 guidance and rules like other league disciplinary matters.
  - Organizations are encouraged to appoint a volunteer to support coaches in monitoring compliance with COVID-19 plans during practices and drills.

**Resources:** Additional resources can be found in [CDC's youth sports guidance](#) and at the Aspen Institute's ["Return to Play COVID-19 Risk Assessment Tool."](#)

