

NJ Youth Soccer Return to Play Notice & Guidelines

Version as of June 17, 2020

The purpose of this document is to provide players, parents, coaches, and soccer organizations with guidelines to assist them with developing their return-to-play programming in the context of COVID-19. These guidelines focus on information provided by the NJ Governor's Office and the "Guidance for Sports Activities" issued by the New Jersey Department of Health.

These guidelines in this document are NOT intended or implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. The knowledge and circumstances around COVID-19 are changing constantly and, as such, NJ Youth Soccer makes no representation and assumes no responsibility for the completeness of this information. Further, clubs are encouraged to seek advice from medical professionals and/or public health officials in your area if you have specific questions.

Finally, although the young and healthy may be subject to less severe cases of COVID-19, every case of this disease is potentially life-altering or deadly, particularly in those with risk factors that may occur within our communities. Health consequences may be long-standing and only apparent weeks after initial infection and recovery. Until COVID-19 is either eradicated, a vaccine is developed, or a cure is found, there is no way of eliminating the risk of infection. This should always be at the forefront when designing return-to-activity.

The risks of participation should be clearly communicated to parents and participants in your respective programs (see FAQ's on section for details on insurance coverage). In addition, educational resources are provided incorporating guidance from US Youth Soccer and US Soccer.



A Phased Approach based on Federal, State and Local Guidelines & Orders

Phase 1: State health authorities require shelter in place, stay at home order.

- Individual training sessions can be held in participant home/residence using their own equipment.
- Coaching occurs virtually. No coaches or other athletes should be present during individual training.

Phase 2: Public health authorities lift shelter in place requirements but continue to prohibit group activities.

- Individual training sessions can be held in participant home/residence or outside (maintaining social distancing) using their own equipment.
- Coaching occurs virtually. No coaches or other athletes physically present during training.

Phase 3: Public health authorities allow contact sports, which includes soccer, with limiting activities exclusively to no-contact drills, practices, and simulations of game situations as of June 22nd.

- See NJ Department of Health's "Guidance for Sports Activities" (pages 3-7)

Phase 4: Public health authorities allow contact sports, which includes soccer, to resume traditional practices and competitions (expected to begin as of July 6th)

- No training or competition restrictions
- No sharing of water or equipment (exception for soccer balls)
- Physical contact should be minimized whenever possible
- Participants remain 6 feet apart off the field whenever possible
- Designated areas for each participant's gear should be clearly marked off the field
- Spectators permitted with proper social or physical distancing and no contact with players or teams. At risk individuals should still take precautions.
- Select guidelines from NJ Department of Health's "Guidance for Sports Activities" (pages 3-7)





Guidance for Sports Activities

*Executive Order No. 149, issued on May 29, 2020, permitted sporting activities, including organized sports, to resume on June 22, 2020. Permissible sporting activities must take place in **outdoor** settings only in a manner that **does not involve person-to-person contact** or routinely entail individuals interacting within six feet of one another, and may not resume until June 22, 2020 or later. However, as indicated below, we expect to be able to allow certain contact activities starting July 6, assuming we continue to make progress in our fight against COVID-19.*

This “Guidance for Sports Activities” published by the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) is intended to guide organizations that oversee sports activities as they resume operations to ensure the health and safety of staff, participants, and their families. The Guidance address skill-building drills and team-based practices as described in the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) Guidance on Youth Sports](#).

This guidance document does not apply to professional sports activities or US national team activities.

High school sporting activities under the jurisdiction of the New Jersey Interscholastic Athletic Association (NJSIAA) must abide by NJSIAA protocols, which shall consider NJDOH guidance. Per Executive Order No. 149 (2020), NJSIAA activities may not resume before June 30, 2020.

As a reminder, youth sports summer camps that are permitted to open on or after July 6, 2020, must follow all applicable summer camp guidance, available [here](#), in addition to these Standards for Sports Activities.

As of June 22, 2020:

***Inter-team games, scrimmages, and tournaments** are permitted for low-risk sports, such as golf and individual running events (a more complete list is available below).*

***Contact sports**, which are defined as any sports categorized as medium or high risk (a more complete list is available below), must limit activities exclusively to no-contact drills, practices, and simulations of game situations as of June 22. By July 6, it is anticipated that traditional practices and competitions will be able to resume for medium-risk sports, such as baseball, softball, basketball, and soccer, and by July 20, it is anticipated that competitions will be able to resume for high-risk sports, such as football.*

The public health data on which this document is based can and do change frequently. Organizers should check back frequently for updates. NJDOH also encourages organizers to keep informed of guidance from the CDC, which may change regularly.



Sports program operators must abide by the following timeline:

<u>Risk Level</u>	<u>Examples</u>	<u>Important Dates</u>
High Risk - Sports that involve close, sustained contact between participants	Rugby, boxing, judo, karate, taekwondo, wrestling, pair figure skating, football, group dance, group cheer.	No-contact practices: June 22 Contact practices and competitions: July 20
Medium Risk - Sports that involve some close, sustained contact, but with protective equipment in place between participants OR intermittent close contact OR group sports OR sports that use equipment that cannot be cleaned between participants.	Lacrosse, hockey, multi-person rowing, multi-person kayaking, multi-person canoeing, water polo, swimming relays, fencing, cycling in a group, running in a close group, group sailing, volleyball, soccer, basketball, baseball/softball, short track.	No-contact practices: June 22 Contact practices and competitions: July 6
Low Risk - Sports that can be done individually, do not involve person-to-person contact and do not routinely entail individuals interacting within six feet of one another	Archery, shooting/clay target, individual running events, individual cycling events, individual swimming, individual rowing, individual diving, equestrian jumping or dressage, golf, individual sailing, weightlifting, skiing, snowboarding, tennis, individual dance, pole vault, high jump, long jump, marathon, triathlon, cross country, track and field, disc golf, badminton.	Practices and competitions: June 22

Guidance for Operations

Outdoor Sports and Athletic Facilities Organizations, businesses, schools, and government entities that operate outdoor sports facilities, such as athletic fields, courts and other playing surfaces, outdoor pools, and sailing and boating facilities that are permitted to reopen their premises and facilities to adult sports and supervised youth sport leagues, summer sports camps, and other athletic activities should follow the safety measures outlined below. As a reminder, municipalities retain the discretion to open or close municipal fields or facilities.



1. Preparing a Sports Program for Practices

- a. Each sports program shall create a plan (“program preparation plan”) to ensure the following:
 - i. Identify adult staff members or volunteers to help remind coaches, players and staff of social distancing. Use of signs, tapes or physical barriers can be used to assist with guiding social distancing requirements.
 - ii. Within the program, consider creating consistent groups of the same staff, volunteers, and athletes, and avoid mixing between groups.
 - iii. Individuals shall remain 6 feet apart from one another whenever impossible. This applies to athletes, coaching staff, parents/guardians, and other spectators.
 - iv. Coaching staff and parents/guardians should wear cloth face coverings. Athletes are also encouraged to wear cloth or disposable face coverings when not engaging in vigorous activity, such as when sitting on the bench, when interacting with an athletic trainer, etc. Face coverings should **not** be worn by staff or athletes when engaging in high intensity aerobic or anaerobic workouts or while in the water, or where doing so would inhibit the individual’s health.
 - v. Create staggered schedules to limit contact between groups and/or players.
 - vi. All staff should be educated on COVID-19 health and safety protocols prior to the resumption of athletic activities, including:
 1. Revised practice rules and regulations in place during COVID-19;
 2. The importance of staying home when experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 or residing with someone experiencing symptoms of COVID- 19;
 3. Social distancing and face coverings;
 4. Proper hand hygiene;
 5. How to address a situation in which an athlete presents with symptoms of COVID-19; and
 6. How do address situations in which social distancing or other necessary requirements are challenged by athletes or parents/guardians/visitors.
 - vii. Educate athletes and coaching staff about when they should stay home and when they can return to activity.
 1. Actively encourage sick staff, families, and players to stay home. Develop policies that encourage sick employees to stay at home without fear of reprisal, and ensure employees are aware of these policies.
 2. [Individuals, including coaches, players, and families, should stay home](#) if they have tested positive for or are showing COVID-19 [symptoms](#).
 3. Individuals, including coaches, players, and families, who have recently had a [close contact](#) with a person with COVID-19 should also [stay home and monitor their health](#).
 4. Immediately separate coaches, staff, officials, and athletes with COVID- 19 symptoms at any sports activity. Individuals who have had close contact with a person who has symptoms should be separated and sent home as well, and follow [CDC guidance for community-related exposure](#).
 5. Establish procedures for safely transporting anyone who is sick to their home or to a healthcare facility.

- viii. All athletes, coaches, and staff should bring their own water and drinks to practice activities. Team water coolers for sharing through disposable cups should not be permitted
- ix. Encourage athletes to use their own equipment to the extent possible.
- x. Discourage sharing of equipment as much as possible. If equipment is shared, coaching staff should be aware of the sanitation procedures for team equipment (balls, bats, etc.) and sufficient disinfecting wipes or similar products should be made available. Consult CDC guidance for cleaning and disinfection.
- xi. Discourage use of locker rooms or facility showers. If facility showers need to be used, only allow shower and locker room use if there are partitions or signage in place to ensure that athletes maintain proper physical distancing of 6 feet.
- b. Communicate applicable details of the plan to parents/guardians and/or participants before commencing practices.
- c. Organizers should further consult and implement, as appropriate, recommendations listed in the CDC guidance regarding assessing risk, promoting healthy behaviors, and maintaining a healthy environment during youth sports.

2. Preparing a Facility for Sports Practices

- a. Each facility that will be used for practices should ensure:
 - i. Signage posted in highly visible locations with reminders regarding social distancing protocols, face covering requirements, and good hygiene practices (e.g., hand hygiene, covering coughs);
 - ii. Reduced crowding and proper social distancing around entrances, exits, and other high-traffic areas of the facility;
 - iii. Routine and frequent sanitization and disinfecting, particularly of high-touch surfaces in accordance with CDC recommendations;
 - iv. Limit occupancy in restrooms that remain open to avoid over-crowding, maintain social distancing through signage and, where practicable, utilize attendants to monitor capacity;
 - v. Have hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, soap and water, or other sanitizing materials readily available at entrances, exits, benches, dugouts, and any other area prone to gathering or high traffic.

On any given field or space, there must be sufficient space between designated groups to prevent any interaction between the groups.

3. Conducting Sports Practices

- a. Coaches, staff, visitors and athletes will be required to abide by the gatherings limitations outlined in Executive Order No. 152 (2020), or the Order in effect at the time of competition.
- b. Screen athletes, coaches, staff and others participating in practice sessions, via temperature check and health questionnaire, at the beginning of each session. Players, coaches, staff, and volunteers showing symptoms of COVID-19 shall not be permitted to participate. If any individual develops symptoms of COVID-19 during the activity, they should promptly inform organizers and must be removed from the activity and instructed to return home.
- c. Limit practice activities to those that do not involve person-to-person contact between athletes and/or coaching staff. For example, focus on individual skill-building activities.
- d. Adhere to precautions outlined in the program preparation plan.



- e. Ensure that athletes and coaches adhere to social distancing while not actively involved in practice activities (on the bench, in the dugout, etc.). Consider assigning coaching staff to monitor sideline social distancing.
- f. If any equipment is provided by the operator, operators must minimize equipment sharing and clean and disinfect shared equipment at the end of a practice session using a product from the list of disinfectants meeting EPA criteria for use against the novel coronavirus. Do not permit athletes to share food, beverages, water bottles, towels, pinnies, gloves, helmets or any other equipment or materials that is involved in direct bodily contact.
- g. Consider dividing larger teams into smaller groups and staggering practices at different times or across different days.
- h. Limit any nonessential visitors, spectators, staff, volunteers, vendors, members of the media, and activities involving external groups or organizations as much as possible. Visitors and spectators should wear face coverings at all times, unless doing so would inhibit the individual's health or the individual is under the age of two.
- i. Operators are encouraged to mark off spectator/chaperone viewing sites to allow for social distancing. Visitors showing symptoms of COVID-19 shall not be permitted to attend.
- j. Restrict spitting, handshakes, high-fives, team huddles, and any other close-contacting activities.

4. Preparing for games and tournaments

Competitions, tournaments, and other activities or events that involve interaction between athletes from the same team or between teams carry [significant risks](#) that operators, towns, coaches, parents and others should carefully consider before proceeding. If participating in or organizing a competition:

- a. Follow protocols listed above under “conducting sports practices.”
- b. When competitions are permitted, based on the dates outlined in the chart above, coaches, staff, visitors and athletes will be required to abide by the gatherings limitations outlined in Executive Order No. 152 (2020), or the Order in effect at the time of competition. It is anticipated that the permissible number will increase to 250 on June 22 and 500 people on July 3 if the downward trends in the state's COVID-19 outbreak continues.
- c. Concession stands should meet the requirements for outdoor dining outlined in Executive Order No. 150 (2020) and Department of Health Executive Directive No. 20- 014.
- d. Consider social distancing requirements when scheduling contests and events. Social distancing will need to be maintained on buses/vans. Thus, multiple buses/vans and/or individual parent/guardian transportation will likely be required. Games should be scheduled at intervals that allow for proper sanitation of facilities and equipment following each game.

Additional notes:

Programs that are governed by formal league rules or other binding agreements or affiliations should comply with any COVID-19 and other health and safety rules applicable under those authorities but must abide by the timeline regarding permitted practice activities and competition dates.



Additional Resources:

[NJ Department of Health](#)

[NJYS Phase 3 “Return to Play” Guidelines Video](#)

[NJYS “Return to Play” Infographic](#)

[NJYS “Return to Play” FAQs](#)

[US Youth Soccer](#)

[CDC](#)

[Move United](#)

[Special Olympics](#)

[Federation for Children with Special Needs](#)

[Autism; Wearing a Mask Social Story](#)

Return to Play: At a minimum, the NJYS insurer has advised us that the state association and its member organizations need to adhere to state/local guidelines on resumption of sporting activities. Following these guidelines & directives will position us to operate in a reasonable and prudent manner from a risk management standpoint. NJYS can decide to be more restrictive than the state of New Jersey with respect to return to play but may not be less restrictive. It will be a priority to document the positive actions taken (e.g. at the state, league and club level) to demonstrate that reasonable and prudent steps were undertaken and completed to keep players, staff, and spectators as safe from infection as possible.

Insurance Coverage: NJYS membership (includes clubs, coaches, and players) are provided General Liability and Excess Accident Medical coverage while conducting sanctioned and approved NJYS activities. (e.g. practices, training, scrimmages, clinics, tryouts, games and tournaments). The current NJYS policy does not have a Communicable Disease exclusion. Any liability coverage determination regarding coverage for COVID-19 liability claims can only be made once facts regarding any alleged occurrence are presented to the insurer. The NJYS Excess Accident Medical policy does not provide coverage for sickness or disease unless the proximate cause of the illness emanated from a covered accidental injury.

Protective Masks (Coverings): From the NJ Department of Health, “Coaching staff and parents/guardians should wear cloth face coverings. Athletes are also encouraged to wear cloth or disposable face coverings when not engaging in vigorous activity, such as when sitting on the bench, when interacting with an athletic trainer, etc. Face coverings should **not** be worn by staff or athletes when engaging in high intensity aerobic or anaerobic workouts or while in the water, or where doing so would inhibit the individual’s health.”