The State of Rhode Island is encouraging all sports organizations, teams, groups, coaches, and athletes to follow the public health guidance and best practices below to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 while engaging in sporting activities.

Youth sports organizations should also refer to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance on sports and recreation, guidance on COVID-19 vaccines, and guidance on indoor and outdoor activities. School sports organizations should refer to K-12 Outbreak Response Playbook and the rules and regulations of the sports organizations that govern school sports, such as local school committees and the Rhode Island Interscholastic League (RIIL).

Playing sports has both physical and psychological health benefits for children and adults. However, playing sports may increase the risk of transmission of COVID-19. Participants, athletes, and the parents of minor athletes should consider the risks of playing sports and steps they can take to protect against COVID-19. Factors to take into consideration include the sport, setting, local COVID-19 Community Level, personal vaccination status, and individual circumstances, such as underlying health conditions, which may increase the severity of the effects of COVID-19.

If you have any questions about this guidance, please contact the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) at RIDOH.COVID19Questions@health.ri.gov.

General Requirements and Guidelines

CDC recommends the following sports-related risks be considered when individuals engage in sports:

- **Setting of the Sporting Event or Activity.** In general, the risk of COVID-19 transmission is lower when playing outdoors than in indoor settings. Consider the ability to keep physical distancing in various settings at the sporting event (e.g., fields, benches/team areas, locker rooms, spectator viewing areas, spectator facilities/restrooms);

- **Physical Proximity.** COVID-19 spread is more likely to occur in sports that require sustained close contact (such as wrestling, hockey, football);

- **Number of People.** The risk of COVID-19 spread increases with increasing numbers of athletes, spectators, teachers, and staff;

- **Level of Intensity of Activity.** The risk of COVID-19 spread increases with the intensity of the sport;

- **Duration of Time.** The risk of COVID-19 spread increases the more time athletes, coaches, teachers, staff, and spectators spend in close proximity or in indoor group settings. This includes time spent traveling to/from sporting events, meetings, meals, and other settings related to the event; and

- **Presence of People More Likely to Develop Severe Illness.** People at increased risk of severe illness might need to take extra precautions.

Sports Leagues, Teams, and Organizations

As more data and information have become available about the contagiousness of COVID-19 and its
variants, the CDC guidance for school and sports and prevention strategies have been updated. These strategies focus on vaccination; staying home when sick and getting tested; ventilation; handwashing and respiratory etiquette; cleaning and disinfection; masking; screening testing; physical distancing where possible; and contact tracing in combination with quarantine and isolation.

- **COVID-19 Vaccination:** All individuals are strongly encouraged to stay up to date with their COVID-19 vaccines, including recommended booster doses. Information regarding vaccines, vaccine boosters, and/or vaccine appointment scheduling can be found on the RIDOH vaccination information page.

  If you are interested in hosting a vaccination event for your league, team, or organization, please contact the RIDOH Office of Immunization at RIDOH.C19VaxClinics@health.ri.gov.

- **Symptom Screening:** All players, staff, coaches, officials, volunteers, and spectators should be screened for symptoms related to COVID-19 prior to the beginning of each activity or before entering an indoor sports facility during periods of medium or high COVID-19 Community Levels. Any person exhibiting signs of illness should be excluded.

- **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 limit backslapping, hugging, handshakes, and fist bumps.

- **Masks:** It is recommended that well-fitting masks should be worn indoors during periods of high COVID-19 Community levels. To find your community’s current risk level, please visit CDC’s COVID-19 Community Levels web page. Additionally, private establishments and organizations may require participants to wear masks. When utilizing masks, athletes are encouraged to bring masks and change into a clean, dry mask if their mask gets wet or soiled while engaged in sports activities.

- **COVID-19 Testing:** Athletes, coaches, and staff taking part in higher-risk and indoor sports activities are encouraged to obtain a COVID-19 test weekly (or more frequently if not up to date with their vaccines) when COVID-19 Community Levels are medium or high. If athletes, coaches, staff have tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 90 days, weekly screening testing is not recommended.

  During medium and high COVID-19 Community Levels, sports leagues and organizations that participate in or host indoor and higher-risk sports are encouraged to establish policies that require weekly COVID-19 testing for all participants.

  **Pending Test Results:** Coaches, staff, athletes, officials, and spectators who are symptomatic should not attend games, practices, or any related sports activities while waiting for COVID-19 test results.

  There are many ways for Rhode Islanders to get a COVID-19 test. Find the location most convenient for you and more information on at home tests at covid.ri.gov/testing.

  All organizations, participants, parents, guardians, and spectators are strongly encouraged to enter self-test results online at portal.ri.gov/s/self-test.

- **COVID-19 Positive Case and Quarantine:** All coaches, staff, athletes, officials, and spectators who have been in close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19 should follow recommendations on RIDOH's quarantine and isolation page.
If RIDOH identifies a positive COVID-19 case or outbreak connected to an athlete, coach, official, sports team or organization, all participants and organizations should fully and promptly cooperate with the RIDOH as requested. Those connected to a case or outbreak should also follow instructions provided from RIDOH regarding quarantine and the resumption of activities.

- **Interstate Sporting Events:** All sports organizations, teams and groups should follow any current RIDOH travel recommendations.

- **Spectators:** There are no current state restrictions on spectators at sporting events. Sporting venues may impose additional conditions or restrictions such as requiring proof of vaccination or wearing of face masks.

**Best Practices for Improved Ventilation for Indoor Sports Facilities**

COVID-19 spreads from person to person when an infected individual breathes out droplets and small particles that contain the virus. This happens when we breathe, talk, yell, or simply move around. Ventilation and good air circulation inside buildings, schools, and homes reduce the spread of COVID-19. During colder months, as more sports take place indoors, available windows may be closed. Improving ventilation in facilities with indoor sports can reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Each facility has different needs for ventilation and airflow. When assessing ventilation, it is important to consider the size of the area, the number of individuals in the area at any given time, the level of activity transpiring in the area (e.g., are people breathing heavily, talking loudly, moving around, or sitting still), and access to operable windows and doors to the outside.

Best practices include increasing outdoor air ventilation instead of using recirculated air and increasing air filtration as much as possible for the ventilation and filtration system.

Improved ventilation is even more effective against COVID-19 when combined with other steps to reduce the amount of airborne virus, such as masking, vaccination, testing, and distancing. If you are a sports facility owner and would like more information on how to improve your facility’s ventilation and air filtration, please review RIDOH’s guidance on airflow, ventilation, and air filtration.

**School Sports**

In partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Education and RIDOH, RIIL has provided high school sports COVID-19 guidance on its website. All sports organizations are encouraged to follow RIIL guidelines, the K-12 Outbreak Response Playbook, or any guidelines that the sport’s national governing body puts forth to limit the spread of COVID-19.

- **Specific School Sports Provisions:** The following applies to high school, middle school, and elementary school sports:
  o School districts may develop guidance and/or policies that are more restrictive than those established here.
  o All school districts, regardless of distance or in-person learning policies, may offer sports in accordance with this guidance.
  o Athletes, coaches, and staff should check with their school athletic director for specific information on the school’s specific testing protocols.
  o When traveling, teams should follow any busing and student transportation provisions.