



## **GUIDANCE FOR SPRING SCHOOL ATHLETICS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC (5/5/2021)**

### **Vermont Principals' Association (VPA)**

The following information and guidelines have been developed by the Vermont Principals' Association (VPA) utilizing guidance from the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE), Vermont Department of Health (DOH), Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR), and the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS).

NOTE: This guidance is meant to be a "living document" based on the best current evidence and data available. As such, changes may occur. Please check back with the VPA at [VPAonline.org](http://VPAonline.org) for any updates to this guidance.

Due to the wide array of learning models that schools will be offering this school year, the VPA strongly urges schools and athletic programs to understand and be sensitive to any barriers to student participation these differing learning models may present. Schools should make every reasonable accommodation to provide equitable access to opportunities for all students.

### **Schools/athletic departments shall no longer perform an on-site daily health screening.**

According to the most recent update of [A Strong and Healthy Year: Guidance for Vermont Schools](#) (revised 4/8/21):

*All students, their families and staff must comply with and ensure daily monitoring of COVID-19 exposure and COVID-19 symptoms (see below). Staff and students and/or their families should complete an exposure and symptom screening before departing for school. Anyone who has been exposed to COVID-19 (unless vaccinated) or who has COVID-19 symptoms should not come to school, and should follow Department of Health guidance regarding quarantine and testing.*

*Schools are no longer required to conduct temperature screening of students. Temperature checks should be performed at home before departing for school. Individuals with fever (100.4 or greater) should not come to school.*

*Close contact means being within six feet for a total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period, of someone with COVID-19 during their infectious period. The infectious period is when the person with COVID-19 is contagious. It starts two days before symptoms began and continues until they are recovered. For people who haven't had symptoms, the infectious period starts two days before they had a positive test.*

*COVID-19 symptoms include the following:*

- Cough
- Fever (100.4 or greater)
- Shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Muscle pain or body aches
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Loss of taste or smell
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea, vomiting or diarrhea (diarrhea is defined as frequent loose or watery stools compared to one's normal pattern)

Any person who has a need to quarantine, or is experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and/or has a temperature of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit shall not be allowed to take part in team activities and must stay home or be sent home immediately. Symptomatic persons must self-isolate at home and contact their primary care provider or other appropriate health-care professional.

Should data emerge that indicates evidence of COVID-19 transmission resulting from interscholastic games, meets or competitions, additional restrictions may become necessary, including but not limited to the widespread cancelation of games, meets and competitions. Such decisions will be made by the Department of Health after consultation with the Agency of Education (AOE), and may be made independent of any changes related to academic instruction under the AOE's [A Strong and Healthy Year: Health Guidance for Vermont Schools](#).

### **Facial Coverings**

Facial coverings are required to be worn by all players, coaches, officials, staff, and spectators when indoors and when outdoors if a minimum of 6 feet of physical distance between individuals from different households cannot be maintained. Students who have a medical or behavioral reason for not wearing a facial covering should not be required to wear one; these decisions should be made in partnership with the health care provider and school nurse.

### No and low contact spring sports (track and field, tennis, baseball, and softball)

Student athletes, coaches, and officials are not required to wear a facial covering during outdoor training and competition so long as 6 feet of physical distance can be maintained. Facial coverings must be worn in any indoor setting and when 6 feet of physical distance is not maintained. **Facial coverings must be worn by baseball and softball catchers and umpires during competition and by all individuals when in the dugout.** All individuals should keep a facial covering on their person for times when adequate physical distance is not maintained.

### Moderate contact and close proximity spring sports (lacrosse and ultimate)

Student athletes must wear facial coverings at all times during training and competition. "Mask breaks" are allowed but must be done in a way that ensures a minimum of 6 feet of physical distance between individuals. Coaches do not need to wear a facial covering during outdoor practices so long as they maintain 6 feet of physical distance from others. **Coaches do have to wear a facial covering during games due to their close proximity to players on the sideline.** Officials do not need to wear a facial covering so long as they maintain a minimum of 6 feet of physical distance from others. Officials must

keep a facial covering on their person for times when they need to approach others.

- Cloth facial coverings must be at least 2 layers thick and cover both the nose and mouth without any gaps around the edges.
- Surgical face masks may be worn and must cover both the nose and mouth without any gaps around the edges.
- Vented masks are not permitted.
- At this time the NFHS does not permit the use of plastic shields covering the entire face, or attached to a helmet during competition. They are also not recommended for use during a practice.
- During competitions, the coaches, officials, and site administrator are equally responsible for enforcing all COVID-19 safety rules. **Teams found to be in non-compliance with safety rules will be warned and if behavior continues, the competition may be forfeited. Individual students or staff found to be non-compliant after two warnings shall be ineligible for the remainder of the competition.**
- School administrators and athletic directors are encouraged to report non-compliance issues to the VPA. Repeated non-compliance with COVID-19 safety rules may result in exclusion from participation in interscholastic competition for the remainder of the season.

### Physical Distancing

- During times when athletes are not actively participating in practice or competition, appropriate physical distancing shall be maintained. Teams must structure team meetings to limit congregation and ensure physical distancing between players and staff on the sidelines or benches. Consider using tape or paint as a guide for spacing.
- Place personal belongings and water bottles at least 6 feet apart for safe breaks.
- During competition, alter spacing of players, coaches, officials, and staff to achieve physical distancing to the greatest extent possible.
- Locker rooms must be monitored to ensure safe physical distancing, with a minimum of 3 feet between individuals at all times and use of approved facial coverings. Locker rooms should be used to change clothes and use the restroom. **Locker rooms shall not be used for gathering, socializing, or team meetings.** To the extent possible, athletes should arrive at practices and games already dressed for participation.

### Personal Hygiene

- Individuals must wash their hands for a minimum of 20 seconds with warm water and soap before touching any surfaces or participating in training. If hands are not visibly soiled, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol can be used in the absence of soap and water.
- Hand sanitizer must be plentiful at all contests and practices and available to individuals as they transfer from place to place.
- There shall be no shared personal gear (i.e. towels, clothing, shoes, water bottles) between students. Personal gear must be washed after every session.
- Discourage unnecessary physical contact such as high-fives, handshakes, fist bumps, or hugs.
- Students and coaches must wash their hands at the end of training sessions and contests.
- Students must be encouraged to shower and wash their workout clothing immediately upon returning to home.
- Facial coverings must be washed daily.

## Team-Based Social Gatherings

The VPA recognizes that team-based social gatherings are an important part of the high school athletic experience. However, due to the state of Vermont's current mask mandate, team-based social gatherings involving food and beverage are not permitted during the spring 2021 season.

## Conduct of Training Sessions and Contests

Steps are in accordance with guidelines published by Vermont's Agency of Education and Department of Health entitled [A Strong and Healthy Start: Safety and Health Guidance for Reopening Schools, Fall 2020](#). Movement from one step to another will be dependent upon information provided by these agencies and steps may change periodically in both content and timing.

**Step I:** Schools are closed for in-person instruction. Remote learning opportunities should be provided for all students. Support provision of student services such as school meal programs, as feasible. **No school sponsored athletic activity is permitted.**

**Step II:** Schools are open for in-person instruction with enhanced physical distancing measures and for children who live in the local geographic area only. **Athletic teams approved by the State Administration may conduct normal training activities including intrasquad scrimmages.**

**Step III:** Schools are open for in-person instruction with distancing measures. Restrict attendance to those from limited transmission areas (other Step III areas) only. **Athletic teams approved by the State Administration may conduct normal training and interscholastic contests.**

When schools are operating under Step I of the Agency of Education's Strong and Healthy Start guidance or if a decision is made by the local superintendent to restrict or eliminate in-person instruction as a result of confirmed COVID-19 illness in student(s) or staff, all school-based athletic activities shall cease until at least such time as the decision to resume in person academic instruction under Step II of the Agency of Education guidance is made by the local superintendent after consultation with the Department of Health.

## Spectators

Spectators are allowed at outdoor sporting events and measures should be put in place to ensure physical distancing between households. Interactions between spectators and participants should be minimized before, during and after events. At no time shall the total number of spectators exceed limits on event size--**currently 300 people and anticipated to be 900 people beginning June 1st**, for outdoor events. Teams, team staff, and competition officials are a separate group and do not count against the gathering limit providing the groups do not interact.

- Consistent with the Vermont Forward Plan, one unvaccinated person per 100 square feet up to 150 unvaccinated people (whichever is less), plus any number of vaccinated people, can attend indoor sports events as spectators.
- Spectators must wear a facial covering at all times while attending an indoor sports event.

## Spring Sports

School-based spring sports programs may initiate full team-based, coach-led practices sessions, including drills involving incidental contact and intrasquad scrimmages no earlier than April 15, 2021; a limited exception is provided for baseball pitchers and catchers to begin coach-led practice sessions no earlier than March 29, 2021.

Students and staff traveling out-of-state no longer need to quarantine upon return. Any unvaccinated individual must have a COVID-19 test within 3 days of return and follow the direction of the Department of Health if the test is positive. Current travel guidance can be found on [Vermont's Department of Health COVID-19 Travel site](#).

### **Competitions**

**The first day of interscholastic competition for spring sports is April 17, 2021.** Contests may only occur between Vermont-based teams and interstate teams where the school fully adheres to the [AOE A Strong and Healthy Year](#) guidance. Home teams must keep a record of all people present (teams, staff, game personnel) for a minimum of 14 days following any contest. This information must be made available to the Department of Health upon request for contact tracing.

### **Transportation**

Parents/caregivers or other appropriately designated adults should be encouraged to transport participants to off-site, interscholastic games to minimize the number of participants requiring bus transportation. Anyone utilizing bus transport is required to wear facial coverings on the bus and comply with all other relevant guidelines in the most current health guidance published by the Agency of Education related to buses and transportation. **There shall be no eating or drinking on buses.** Regardless of weather conditions, maintain constant airflow through the interior of the bus by:

- Having at least 4 windows open: 2 windows in the front of the bus (each of the front passenger seats), 2 windows in the rear of the bus (very last windows on each side of the bus).
- Keeping the driver's window open, basing the opening amount on weather conditions. Preferably the windows should remain fully open, however, if inclement weather mandates window openings be reduced to prevent snow, ice, rain from coming in then the opening should be reduced.
- If window openings are reduced more windows should be opened. Leaving roof hatches partially open, weather permitting. Hatches should be opened on the rearward side.
- Recommend students and coaches wear weather appropriate clothing
- Utilize heaters, per vendor instructions, to maintain a suitable interior

Concerns related to compliance with these guidelines are best addressed to school administration or the local facility manager; on-going concerns may also be submitted via the Executive Order Reporting Tool on the Department of Public Safety website at <https://dps.vermont.gov/home>

### **Guidance for Specific Types of Sports**

The risk associated with different types of sports programs is a function of the degree of contact between participants and the type of setting or venue in which the contest is held. In all cases, athletes should arrive for practices, games, meets and competitions dressed to play to the maximum extent practicable in order to minimize or eliminate time spent in locker rooms. Avoid congregating before, during, and after practice; promote an **"Arrive, Play, and Leave"** mentality. Any locker room use must adhere to all physical distancing and masking requirements.

### **Outdoor Sports with No or Low-Contact**

Baseball, softball, tennis, and track and field may hold team practice sessions and interscholastic competitions. Teams must implement measures to ensure a minimum of 3 feet of physical distance is maintained between individuals who are wearing facial coverings and a minimum of 6 feet of physical

distance is maintained between individuals who are not wearing facial coverings. If it can be done safely, teams should provide additional seating for teams outside of dugouts to promote distancing.

The number of participants at a track and field meet may not exceed current limits on event size-- currently 300 people and anticipated to be and 900 people on June 1st, for outdoor events. A meet may involve multiple groupings throughout the day if the groups do not interact with each other.

- Track and field athletes shall remain in their designated team area when not actively engaged in an event.
- The maximum number of people present in the start area or an individual event area shall be kept to no more than 25 at any point in time.

### **Outdoor Sports Involving Close Proximity, Moderate, or High Contact**

Lacrosse and ultimate teams may hold practice sessions, intrasquad scrimmages, and interscholastic competitions. Teams must implement measures to ensure that a minimum of 3 feet of physical distance is maintained between individuals who are wearing facial coverings and a minimum of 6 feet of physical distance is maintained between individuals who are not wearing facial coverings.

### **Weight Rooms and Other Indoor Training Facilities**

Prioritize outdoor training sessions as much as possible for all sports programs. Use of indoor training facilities, such as weight rooms and gymnasiums, must adhere to the most current guidance published by the [Agency of Commerce and Community Development for fitness centers](#) and similar exercise facilities, which currently limits use to 25% of approved fire safety occupancy or one person per 200 square feet. Usage must be structured in a manner that ensures three feet of physical distance between individuals for any activity that will occur for more than a few moments (e.g. spotting a lift). Facial coverings must be worn indoors.

### **Return to Play After Illness**

All children and adolescents ages 12-22 who are diagnosed with COVID-19 infection, regardless of symptom severity, may not return to play until asymptomatic and cleared by their primary care provider. Children and adolescents who meet clinical criteria will need to undergo the graduated Return-to-Play protocol overseen by the patient, their family, and their health care provider, with input from the school nurse and/or athletic trainer.

Adult athletes or others (e.g., referees) who exercise vigorously during an athletic event diagnosed with COVID-19 infection should not return to play or vigorous exercise until asymptomatic for 14 days and cleared by their physician.

### **Facilities Cleaning:**

- Adequate cleaning schedules shall be created and implemented for all athletic facilities to mitigate any communicable diseases.
- Weight equipment must be wiped down thoroughly before and after an individual's use of equipment.
- Any equipment such as weight benches, athletic pads, etc. having holes with exposed foam must be covered.
- Hydration stations (water cows, water trough, water fountains, coolers, etc.) must be cleaned daily. Hand sanitizer must be used prior to handling/dispensing from water coolers.

- No spitting on the playing surface or sideline.
- If restroom facilities (including portalets) are provided for competitors or spectators, they must be cleaned and disinfected regularly, consistent with CDC guidance. If restroom facilities will not be available for public use, notify spectators ahead of time so they can prepare appropriately.

**Concessions:** Concession operations must fully adhere to the most current guidance published by the Agency of Commerce and Community Development for [food service operations](#).

- All those working at the concession must wear a facial covering at all times.
- Concession patrons must wear facial coverings and maintain safe physical distancing while waiting in line.
- All food and beverage available at the concession stand shall be prepared and pre-packaged for take away.
- Food and beverage consumption may only take place when safe physical distancing can occur. Schools may wish to designate a separate area for food consumption.

**Administrative Considerations:** The following points of emphasis should be considered by school administrators.

- Athletic trainers in high schools are positioned to play a vital role as sports return during this pandemic. As health-care professionals, they can work with school nurses and other health officials to develop and implement infection control policy throughout the school. Whenever possible, an athletic trainer (or other approved medical professional) should be available at practices and games.
- The VPA recommends that schools do not in any way sanction, encourage, or condone "Captain's Practices". Teams should not practice without a member of the school's coaching staff present. **Additionally, open gym/open ice type activities before the first day of the season are not permitted.**
- The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the cancellation of essentially all "in person" educational courses in areas such as AED/CPR and First Aid Training. The VPA will accept online training courses for meeting Coaches Education requirements in the areas of AED/CPR and First Aid for the 2020-21 academic year. **Schools shall ensure that all coaches/activity and club advisors have completed the VOSHA training: [Protecting the Safety and Health of Workers, Coronavirus 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#).**
- Schools shall develop policies and procedures to prepare for possible school closure this school year due to recurrent outbreak(s). Policies regarding training and/or contests must account for deconditioning of student athletes if school closure is 2 weeks or longer. Once school and athletic activity resumes there must be adequate time to allow for students to recondition prior to competition. This may require cancellation or postponement of contests.
- It is recommended that middle school and high school programs build schedules against local teams to reduce travel.
- School campuses and other venues with multiple facilities (such as multi-rink locations, multi-court gyms) may have more than one unit of the maximum event size as long as those units are in distinct portions of the facility (a different gym, unique and distinct rinks) and the distinct gatherings have no interaction with one another (for example, a basketball team and a cheer team should not have access to the same locker room at the same time).

## References

“A Strong and Healthy Year: Health Guidance for Vermont Schools.”

<https://education.vermont.gov/documents/guidance-strong-healthy-year-health-guidance> 4/17/2021

“Spring Sports Programs for the 2020-2021 School Year.” <https://education.vermont.gov/spring-sports-programs-for-the-2020-2021-school-year>. 3/23/2021

“Guidance for Opening Up High School Athletics and Activities.” *National Federation of High School Associations*. 5/15/2020