

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ): Rhode Island Youth and Amateur Sports

Below are some of the questions the we have received regarding the *Return to Play RI: Phase III Indoor Sports Facilities and Youth, Adult & School Sports Guidelines* and answers to those questions. If you have a question that is not on this FAQ, please reach out to Cynthia.Elder@dem.ri.gov

How are the new executive order (EO), regulations and guidance on sports different from the previous Phase III regulations and guidance?

The new [executive order](#) effective November 5, 2020, [regulations](#) and [guidance](#) strengthen the current policies to help keep athletes, coaches, sport facility staff, and spectators safe, especially as the approaching winter moves most sports indoors. While the benefits of sports are clear, they also are settings where intensive activity and socializing can lead to community spread of COVID-19. The updated rules continue a prohibition on competition among teams for high-risk sports. Other areas of focus areas include:

- requiring face coverings at all times, including during active play;
- prohibiting hosting tournaments, matches, games, etc. with out-of-state teams for moderate- and high-risk sports;
- limiting spectators to two parents or guardians per athlete (plus siblings) for athletes under age 18;
- stricter requirements for opening locker rooms; and
- stricter contact tracing and record-keeping protocols for facilities and teams.

These new rules reflect input from many stakeholders who provided ideas and expressed concerns. We will keep working with facility owners, team leaders, leagues and schools to keep kids active and safe, and to allow adults opportunities to enjoy amateur sports.

What did you base your sports classifications on?

The sports classifications are based on two sources:

- National Federation of State High School Associations, Sports Medicine Advisory Committee: Guidance for Opening Up High School Athletics and Activities
- United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee, USOPC Guidance: Return to Training and Sport Event Planning

These organizations classify sports into “lower, moderate, and higher risk” based on what is known about the transmission of COVID-19 and the inherent nature of each sport or recreational activity

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as traditionally played. The factors considered in determining the categories include: the type and duration of contact between players, whether equipment is shared, if the sport takes place indoors or outdoors, the number of players on a team, etc. Other New England states and New York use the categories developed by these organizations. It is important to understand that we reserve the right to adjust the categories based on new information and COVID-19 transmission data.

Why are you prohibiting high-risk sports?

High-risk sports like wrestling, football, boys/men's lacrosse, and competitive cheer involve close, sustained contact between participants. That means that the respiratory particles that carry COVID-19 will travel more easily between participants. This is even more concerning as sports move indoors for the winter. Just as football was canceled this fall, we will not allow competition between teams for high risk sports.

Can athletes who play high-risk sports practice? What can they do?

Yes, athletes are allowed to practice, and even to scrimmage within their own team – but not with other teams. Teams playing higher-risk sports are not allowed to practice, compete or scrimmage with other teams.

Why are you prohibiting hosting tournaments, matches, games, etc. with out-of-state teams for moderate- and high-risk sports and prohibiting teams from traveling to other states for games?

With COVID-19 cases increasing nationwide, many states are discouraging travel to limit the spread of COVID-19 from one place to another. Traveling to another state for tournaments or games often means an increase in social gathering sizes and close contacts. The data show a number of positive cases have been the direct result of players participating in games and tournaments with teams from out-of-state.

Are athletes from Rhode Island allowed to play on out-of-state teams or at/in an out-of-state sports facility?

The new requirements do not prohibit a Rhode Island player from playing on an out-of-state team or at an out-of-state sport facility. However, a person who plays on an out-of-state team must comply with Rhode Island's and the other state's travel policies and orders.

Are athletes from other states allowed to play on Rhode Island teams or at/in a Rhode Island sports facility?

Yes, so long as they are complying with current Rhode Island travel restrictions. Currently, none of our neighboring states are on the restricted travel list. So, an individual from Massachusetts who plays on a Rhode Island team could continue to participate on that team and/or could play in a Rhode Island facility under Rhode Island law; however, that may not be allowed in that individual's home state. Check the current list of [states with travel restrictions upon entry to Rhode Island](#) as travel restrictions may change week to week. Any athlete traveling to Rhode Island from out-of-state to participate on a Rhode Island team would be subject to their home state travel policies or orders.

What is the new policy on spectators?

For sporting events or practices with athletes under the age of 18, no more than two parents/guardians of the athlete and the athlete's siblings may attend, provided all other COVID-19 safety protocols are met including, capacity limits for the sporting venue. Spectators are prohibited from attending all other sporting events or practices, which means they are not allowed at amateur adult competitions.

Why the new policy on spectators?

Some facilities and leagues are experiencing issues with parents and families congregating without masks in parking lots, in vehicles, or at nearby restaurants while waiting for their children. We believe that allowing limited spectators under controlled conditions is preferable to these types of informal social gatherings. We also understand that parents may be concerned for the safety of their children while at a sports practice.

How are you going to enforce the limits on spectators?

We hope that parents and guardians of our young athletes will do the right thing and follow the executive order and sporting facilities rules. Facility owners are required to follow these rules and can bar teams who violate them from using their facilities. We will work with the facilities and the leagues to address any violations, which could lead to fines, prohibitions, and/or shutting down of facilities. Every facility has the right to establish spectator limits that are more restrictive, based on the capacity and configuration of the facility.

For indoor sports facilities, is the maximum capacity 125 people or 66% or 1 person per 100 square feet?

The capacity limit for indoor athletic facilities is up to 66% or 1 person per 100 square feet, whichever is less. The venues of public assembly indoor limit is 125 people. That limit would apply, for example, if you were allowing spectators at an indoor game. The total count of players and spectators would have to be less than 125 and also abide by the 66% or 1 person per 100 square foot limit. Note that no spectators are allowed for adult amateur sports, and there is a limit on the number of spectators per athlete for youth sports. Every facility has the right to establish spectator limits that are more restrictive, based on the capacity and configuration of the facility.

How do you expect athletes to play wearing masks, especially in a sport like hockey?

At present, high school team sports are being conducted with athletes wearing masks, and other states (like Vermont and Massachusetts) already have this rule for active play, and report that it is working well. Playing with a mask on may require some modifications (e.g., shorter shifts, more substitutes), but it is necessary to restrict the respiratory spread of COVID.

Wearing masks makes it hard for us to compete and practice. Are there any exceptions?

We know it may be uncomfortable or inconvenient to wear a mask while actively participating in athletic activities. However, the new rules on face coverings for sports are the most effective way to reduce the risk of COVID-19 among people who participate in sports. Masks must be worn for sports activities at all times, including during active play. There are exceptions for water sports, children under two years of age, those who are developmentally unable to wear a mask, and when wearing a mask would damage a person's health. We encourage you to find ways to modify sports activities in response to new rules, such as more frequent breaks, shorter games or other accommodations.

Are sports teams and athletic facilities required to obtain medical documentation for an athlete, coach, official, spectator or visitor who claims a “medical exemption” from the mask-wearing requirement?

The Rhode Island executive order has a provision exempting people (i) who are under two years of age, (ii) whose health would be damaged or (iii) who are developmentally unable to comply, from the absolute requirement that a person wear a mask or face covering in public. These exemptions are meant to be narrow, and the intent of the executive order is to have people wear a face covering or mask in public. We know that wearing a face covering is the easiest way to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19; as such, participants in athletic activities or at athletic facilities are encouraged to make modifications to play (such as more breaks from play or shorter or lower intensity drills) to allow the wearing of a face covering by all participants at all time,.

In regard to medical documentation (e.g., a doctor's note), that is not required under the current executive order to qualify for the limited exemption from the requirement to wear a face covering. However, sports teams, leagues and athletic facilities may have stricter requirements regarding the use of face coverings and/or may require documentation.

Is it necessary for household members to wear face masks when playing together at an indoor facility? What if I'm doing individual activities, like hitting tennis balls from a ball machine?

The current executive order requires the wearing of a face covering indoors and outdoors with limited exemptions. There is no exception to the wearing of a face covering if participating in a sporting activity with members of the same household or individually. You should wear a face covering or mask at all times when inside an athletic facility.

Now that we're wearing masks all the time, does the whole team have to quarantine if someone tests positive?

While it's important that athletes wear masks at all times, it doesn't change quarantine requirements determined by the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH). Generally, a close contact is someone you have been within six feet of for 15 minutes or more. Someone that you briefly interacted with from a distance of more than six feet would not be considered a close contact. Thus, the most effective way to reduce whole-team quarantines is to combine mask

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wearing with team “pods” that never get within six feet of each other. When RIDOH investigates contacts of a person who tested positive, players who were not in close contact may not have to quarantine, that is, as long as they have not been in close contact with the positive case outside of the sports experience.

Can you wear a face shield instead of a face mask for hockey or other high and moderate risk sports?

No. There is no scientific evidence that a full clear face shield, such as the ones sold for hockey helmets, provides sufficient protection from the coronavirus, and the CDC and the RI Department of Health (RIDOH) do not currently recommend them as a substitute for masks. For more information about masks, please visit RIDOH’s [COVID-19 and Wearing Masks webpage](#).

Is body checking allowed in ice hockey?

Ice hockey is considered a moderate risk sport, under the Rhode Island guidance, which also recommends that modifications be incorporated into sports to reduce the spread of COVID-19. While body checking is not prohibited under the rules, body checking is discouraged. Under the current guidance, moderate risk sports, such as ice hockey, may participate in practice and game play. Modifications to limit close physical and face-to-face contact are encouraged.

Is flag football considered a high-risk sport or a medium-risk sport?

It depends. Flag football played with its traditional rules would be considered a higher-risk sport. However, with significant modifications, it’s possible to lower the risk enough so that it can be considered a medium-risk sport. Some of these modifications include:

- No screening, blocking, charging, flag guarding, holding, stripping, pass interference, or illegal flag pull – with any attempt resulting in a penalty (e.g., loss of down, yardage penalty)
- No run plays – every play has to be shotgun formation (minimum three yards from center)
- Every player lines up at least five yards apart from one another (including defense)
- Each team has their own game ball and players wear the same set of flags throughout game

Why are you exempting colleges and professional sports?

College and professional indoor sporting facilities and teams are highly regulated with NCAA rules and league rules (i.e., Big East, Ivy League, etc.) or associated professional rules being followed. For example, starting in November, most college athletes are being tested for COVID-19 three times per week.

Locker rooms are germ incubators. Why not just close them?

We recommend closing locker rooms and arriving at practices and games ready to play. However, there are instances where doing that causes other problems, such as athletes changing clothes in open areas resulting in privacy issues. So, in order to provide an opportunity for student-athletes and others to change privately and take off wet bathing suits or put on protective equipment, we are allowing locker rooms to stay open, with the requirement that they adhere to strict standards, including limiting capacity, marking distancing, and sanitizing regularly.

What's the impact on martial arts and dance programs?

Martial arts and dance are considered high risk sports when performed competitively in any groups. In-person tournaments and competitions between teams are not allowed for higher risk sports. Martial arts and dance lessons and programs may conduct practices and lessons and in-team competitions; they should avoid sustained, close contact. Martial arts and dance programs may participate in virtual competitions, where all competitors remain in their home studio and submit video presentations.

Will indoor sports facilities and affected businesses receive any financial assistance for having to close for a week?

DEM is working to establish a program to reimburse indoor sports facilities for losses associated with the shutdown from November 2nd through November 8th. That program should be up and running by the end of November with payments made by the end of the year.

If we are an indoor facility offering a remote learning program or before/after school care program, can we continue to operate this portion of our programming?

If you hold a DHS license to legally operate a childcare and/or before/after school program, you may continue to operate these activities in accordance with DHS Child Care Licensing Regulations and CDC Guidelines. If you are currently operating a program that provides direct supervision to four or more unrelated children, you must become licensed with the Department of Human Services. Please visit the DHS website for more information or contact Nicole.Chiello@dhs.ri.gov