

Appendix S: COVID-19 Protocol for Organized Youth Sports

Note: This document is frequently updated. Please check the date on the webpage for the most recent version .

Recent updates: (Any changes are highlighted in yellow)

11/8/22

- Revised to align with the updated LACDPH Health Office Order regarding indoor masking. For most individuals, masking may be based on individual preference. Exceptions are individuals who have returned before completing 10 days of isolation after a confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis and individuals who are within 10 days of close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19. Those persons continue to be required to mask around others. Also, individuals who are more vulnerable to developing severe COVID-19 disease are strongly recommended to wear a highly protective mask in crowded, indoor settings with poor ventilation.
- Option for youth sports and clubs to consider taking a more cautious approach and implement more protective masking or testing policies given the increased risk of viral transmission, especially indoors, from activities such as contact sports that involve physical exertion and increased or more forceful breathing.
- Additional safety measures included for outdoor sports teams to consider for higher risk interactions that happen indoors, including travel on team buses, weight training, sharing locker rooms, or watching game films, among others.
- Reporting of individual cases of COVID-19 in the youth sports setting is no longer required. Clusters of 3 or more linked cases within a 14-day period must be reported immediately and no later than 1 business day.
- Youth Sports Programs with 5 or more epidemiologically linked cases over a 14-day period should consider suspending activities for 5 days once the fifth linked case has been identified to control further spread.
- Changes in COVID-19 vaccination and booster age-eligibility.
- Updated section on screening testing. Routine testing is strongly recommended for indoor moderate-risk and indoor high-risk sports, regardless of vaccination status, during periods of high community transmission and should be considered for outdoor moderate risk and outdoor high risk sports during periods of high community transmission.

The Los Angeles County [Health Officer Order](#) strongly recommends the use of face masks in all indoor public settings when case rates are at or above 100 new weekly cases per 100,000 individuals. Refer to the Los Angeles County [COVID-19 Response Plan](#) for more details. Given the predominance of more easily spread Omicron subvariants of the COVID-19 virus in the community, masking indoors, regardless of vaccination status, remains an important mitigation strategy for slowing the spread of COVID-19 in the community.

Per published reports, factors that increase the risk of infection, including transmission to people more than 6 feet away, include:

- **Enclosed spaces with inadequate ventilation or air handling** that allow for build-up of exhaled respiratory fluids, especially very fine droplets, and aerosol particles, in the air.
- **Increased exhalation of respiratory fluids** that can occur when an infectious person is engaged in physical exertion or raises their voice (e.g., exercising, shouting, singing).
- **Prolonged exposure** to these conditions.

It is strongly recommended that all sports activities occur outdoors, **whenever feasible**, where the risk of exposure is lower due to the ventilation being better than indoors.

Below is a summary of requirements and best practices for youth sports leagues (including school sports teams) to enhance safety for participants, coaches, referees, and communities and to lower the risk of COVID-19 transmission within youth teams and between teams during competitions. Recommendations below apply to teams and sport activities based in LAC and to teams or players coming to LAC for a competition from other jurisdictions.

In addition to this information, please remember:

- ❑ Youth sports leagues must follow the [Los Angeles County Health Officer Order](#) and the [Los Angeles County COVID-19 Exposure Management Plan Guidance for Youth Recreational Sports Programs](#).
- ❑ Youth sports leagues that employ coaches, referees or other support staff must also adhere to the [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Emergency Temporary Standards \(ETS\)](#).
- ❑ Youth sports leagues operating concession stands should review and follow [LACDPH Best Practice Guidance for Food and Beverage Service](#).

Please be sure to read and follow the [general guidance for employers](#).
The best practices are intended to supplement the general guidance.

Follow mask **guidance** for participants, coaches, staff, and spectators

- ❑ **Mask guidance based on the setting and county weekly case rates.** Wearing face masks reduces the spread of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. At this time, in alignment with our Health Officer Order, use of masks in the youth sports setting is a personal preference. No person may be prevented from wearing a mask as a condition of participation in a youth sports-related activity unless wearing a mask would pose a safety hazard. Youth sports and clubs may consider taking a more cautious approach and implement more protective masking or testing policies given the increased risk of viral transmission especially indoors from activities such as contact sports that involve physical exertion and increased or more forceful breathing. Based on the Los Angeles County [COVID-19 Response Plan](#), in all indoor settings, when county case rates are greater than 99 new weekly cases per 100,000 people, it is strongly recommended that coaches, staff, volunteers, referees, officials, and spectators, regardless of

vaccination status, wear a mask at all times.

- ❑ **Participants:** While INDOORS, when county case rates are greater than 99 new weekly cases per 100,000 people, it is strongly recommended that all participants, regardless of vaccination status, bring and wear masks. Masks are strongly recommended to be worn indoors when participants are not actively practicing, conditioning, competing, or performing. Masks are also recommended indoors while on the sidelines, in team meetings, and within locker rooms and weight rooms. When actively practicing, conditioning, or competing in indoor sports, masks are recommended for participants even during heavy exertion, as practicable. Participants who choose to continue wearing masks should bring more than one mask to practice or games in case their mask gets wet or soiled during play. Any face mask that becomes saturated with sweat should be changed immediately.

Per the American Academy of Pediatrics, “Face masks have been shown to be well tolerated by most people who wear them for exercise.” However, masks should not be worn under the following circumstances.

- *For water sports.* Participants who are engaged in water sports such as swimming, water polo, or diving, may remove their face masks while they are in and preparing to dive into the water. It is strongly recommended that face masks be worn when participants are not in the water.
 - *For gymnastics.* Gymnasts who are actively practicing/performing on an apparatus may remove their masks because of the theoretical risk that the mask may get caught on objects and become a choking hazard or accidentally impair vision. It is strongly recommended that gymnasts wear masks when not actively practicing/performing on an apparatus.
 - *For competitive cheerleading.* Cheerleaders who are actively performing/practicing routines that involve tumbling, stunting, or flying may remove their masks because of the theoretical risk that the mask may get caught on objects and become a choking hazard or accidentally impair vision.
 - *For wrestling.* During wrestling contact, a face mask could become a choking hazard and is discouraged unless an adult coach or official is closely monitoring for safety purposes.
- ❑ **Spectators:** While indoors, when case rates are greater than 99 new weekly cases per 100,000 people, it is strongly recommended that all spectators, regardless of vaccination status, bring and wear [masks](#). Consider making masks available for those who request them.
 - ❑ **Coaches:** While indoors, when case rates are greater than 99 new weekly cases per 100,000 people, it is strongly recommended that all coaches, regardless of vaccination status, bring and wear [masks](#), even when engaged in intense physical activity.
 - ❑ **Referees and other game officials:** While indoors, when case rates are greater than 99 new weekly cases per 100,000 people, it is strongly recommended that all referees and officials, regardless of vaccination status, bring and wear masks at all times.

Employees: If the youth sports league employs coaches or other support staff, please note that employers are required to provide for voluntary use, well-fitting medical grade masks and respirators such as an N95 or KN95, to employees in close contact with others while indoors at the worksite or facility, including in shared vehicles. For more information about free and low-cost Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for businesses and organizations see <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/docs/FreeAndLowCostPPE.pdf>.

Vaccinate

- ❑ It is strongly recommended that all athletes, coaches and team staff stay up-to-date with their COVID-19 vaccines. At this time, you are **up to date** with your COVID-19 vaccines if you have completed a COVID-19 vaccine primary series and received the most recent booster dose recommended for you by CDC. Vaccination against the virus that causes COVID-19 is available for everyone 6 months of age and older. Booster doses are available for everyone 5 years and older. Please note: The updated (bivalent) boosters are called “bivalent” because they protect against **both** the original virus that causes COVID-19 **and** the Omicron variant BA.4 and BA.5. Vaccination is the primary strategy to reduce the burden of COVID-19 disease and protect all members of the community. Having all athletes and staff in your youth sports league fully vaccinated and boosted as soon as they are eligible will decrease the risk of transmission of the virus among teammates and between teams and, if they get infected, will provide excellent protection against severe illness, hospitalization, and death.

Screen for symptoms and isolate

- ❑ Ask participants and families to self-screen for COVID-19 symptoms prior to attending youth sports activities.
- ❑ Post signage to remind everyone who enters your establishment that they should NOT enter if they have symptoms of COVID-19 or if they are under isolation orders.
- ❑ Youth sports programs must exclude or, if onsite, isolate any participant, coach, or spectator that is showing symptoms of COVID-19 to prevent spread to others.
 - Take action to isolate participants who begin to have COVID-19 symptoms during youth sports activities away from other participants, coaches, and spectators.

Reduce crowding, especially indoors

- ❑ If possible, hold youth sports activities outdoors where the risk of COVID-19 transmission is much lower.
- ❑ If youth sports activities must be held indoors **during times of high transmission**, take steps to reduce the number of participants, coaches, and spectators in any indoor area.
- ❑ Physical distancing is an infection control best practice that may be implemented as an additional safety layer to reduce the spread of COVID-19. During practices, encourage activities that do not involve sustained person-to-person contact between participants and/or coaching staff and limit such activities in indoor settings. Instead, consider focusing on skill-building activities.
- ❑ Limit the number of participants who visit the restroom or locker room at any given time.
- ❑ Non-athletic team events, such as team dinners or other social activities, **will be safer** if they can

be held outdoors with distancing.

Routine Screening Testing for COVID-19

The virus that causes COVID-19 may infect any member of the youth sports league, regardless of vaccination status, although it is more likely to infect unvaccinated persons. Any infected person can potentially transmit the virus to others. One strategy to accurately identify infected individuals and then quickly isolate them is routine periodic screening testing for COVID-19 with a Nucleic Acid Amplification Test (NAAT) such as PCR, or an Antigen (Ag) test. Routine asymptomatic testing is a particularly useful strategy when community rates of transmission are higher and becomes less valuable as rates decrease and approach the low level of transmission. General guidance and recommendations about testing including the types of tests available can be accessed at our [Testing Information for Patients](#) page.

- ❑ Persons who have recovered (completed isolation) from a confirmed case of COVID-19 within the past 90 days should not be included in periodic COVID-19 screening testing if the person is asymptomatic. Screening for persons who were previously infected with COVID-19 should start 90 days after the first day of symptoms or from the day of collection of first positive test (if they were asymptomatic).
- ❑ Whenever a confirmed case is identified on any of your youth sports teams, follow instructions listed in the [Exposure Management Plan for Youth Sports](#) for isolation and post-exposure guidance. **Note current case reporting requirements:**
 - Youth sports programs are required to report clusters of 3 or more cases of COVID-19 in a pre-defined or identifiable group (i.e., teammates, club members, cohort, etc.) who were participating in team or club activities at any point within the 14 days prior to illness onset date. The illness onset date is the date COVID-19 symptoms started or the COVID-19 test date, whichever is earlier. All cluster notifications should be reported to DPH immediately, and no later than 1 business day of the program being notified of the cases by submitting a report online at: https://spot.cdph.ca.gov/s/?language=en_US Please refer to the [Los Angeles County COVID-19 Exposure Management Plan Guidance for Youth Recreational Sports Programs](#) for detailed guidance on how to manage this exposure event with respect to cases, identification of and actions for close contacts, and reporting and notification procedures. Programs can also refer to the public health guidance pages for [cases](#) and [close contacts](#) as an additional resource.
 - Youth Sports Programs with 5 or more epidemiologically linked cases over a 14-day period should consider suspending activities for 5 days once the fifth linked case has been identified to control further spread. Individual conditioning and skill building may continue during the suspension period if everyone on the team complies fully with any individual isolation or quarantine orders that apply. If outbreak criteria are met and DPH recommends an outbreak response, the Public Health Investigator can require a suspension period or extend a suspension period as warranted during an outbreak response.
- ❑ **When the level of community transmission of COVID-19 occurring in Los Angeles County is high, the following testing guidelines are strongly recommended** for all participating athletes and staff/coaches/ referees/volunteers. As the rate of community transmission decreases and approaches a low level, the value of screening testing decreases as well, but

remains a consideration for youth sports programs that wish to include testing as one of their layered prevention strategies to minimize risk of transmission and outbreaks among team members.

- **Indoor Moderate-Risk and High-Risk Sports.** Routine testing at least weekly is strongly recommended during times of high community transmission for all athletes, staff, coaches, and volunteers participating in indoor moderate and high-risk sports regardless of vaccination status. Results from over-the-counter test kits, including self-administered, self-read tests performed at home, verified or not, are acceptable.
- **Outdoor Moderate-Risk or High-Risk Sports.** Consider routine COVID-19 testing for all athletes and staff during times of high community transmission. Although the risk of viral transmission falls considerably when sports activities occur outdoors compared to indoors, the degree of direct and close contact between players can affect that risk. In addition, even a sport that is considered primarily outdoor, such as football, will have periods of increased transmission risk when team members are interacting in indoor settings for prolonged periods. Some examples include long bus rides on charter transportation where windows do not open and ventilation is limited; conditioning sessions inside weight rooms; time spent in locker rooms before and after practice or competitions, and watching game films. Sports programs should consider if additional safety measures are appropriate, such as masking in these settings, requiring vaccination, limiting number of participants using weight rooms and locker rooms at the same time, and moving activities outdoors whenever possible.

- ❑ For players on moderate-risk and high-risk sports teams who are regularly transported together via buses/vans, periodic testing during times of high community transmission is strongly recommended.
- ❑ If players are participating in multi-county, multi-day competitions of moderate-risk or high-risk outdoor sports, a negative test within the three days prior to their first game at the competition is recommended during times of high community transmission.
- ❑ If there is a positive case among players, coaches, and/or staff on an outdoor sports team, it is strongly recommended that all players, staff/coaches/volunteers (regardless of vaccination status) have a weekly test for two weeks from exposure.
- ❑ Team staff/volunteers whose role or functions do not include any direct interaction with athletes, coaches, or other staff (e.g., lending administrative support to the team or league but not working directly with youth or other team members) do not need to be included in screening testing.
- ❑ Occasional volunteers who have very limited direct interaction with athletes, coaches, or other staff (e.g., a volunteer referee or umpire who officiates only once or twice during the season) do not need to be included in weekly screening testing, but it is strongly recommended they be fully up-to-date on their vaccination status against COVID-19. During times of high community transmission, it is also strongly recommended that they have a negative test within the 3 days prior to their volunteer activity.

Ventilate

- ❑ If youth sports activities are taking place indoors, make sure your building's Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) system is in good, working order.
- ❑ Consider installing portable high-efficiency air cleaners, upgrading the building's air filters to the highest efficiency possible, and making other modifications to increase the quantity of outside air and ventilation in all working areas.
- ❑ When weather and playing conditions allow, **consider** increasing fresh outdoor air by opening windows and doors. Consider using fans to increase the effectiveness of open windows – position window fans to blow air outward, not inward.
- ❑ **Ventilation in gymnasiums can be improved with strategic placement of floor fans. See [Best Practices for Gymnasium Ventilation](#) for details.**
- ❑ **Consider** decreasing occupancy in areas where outdoor ventilation cannot be increased.
- ❑ If your team or youth sports league utilizes transport vehicles, such as buses or vans, **consider** opening windows to increase airflow from outside **if weather conditions, air quality and rider safety concerns allow**. See [State Interim guidance for Ventilation, Filtration, and Air Quality in Indoor Environments](#) and [CDC Ventilation in Schools and Child Care Programs](#) page.

Support handwashing

- ❑ Place handwashing stations or hand sanitizer at entry and outside communal bathrooms with signage promoting use.
- ❑ Encourage frequent handwashing.

Communicate

- ❑ Consider posting **signage** so that visitors who are entering your facility are aware of your **COVID-19 safety policies, including, when community transmission is greater than 99 new weekly cases per 100,000 people, the strong recommendation that everyone wear a face mask while indoors.**
- ❑ Use your online platforms to communicate your COVID-19 safety policies to the public.

Consider taking additional precautions around team travel and multi-team tournaments

- ❑ When traveling in vehicles with other members of the youth sports team not from the same household, **keeping windows open as weather conditions, air quality, and rider safety concerns allow is recommended. Masking during travel in shared team vehicles is based on individual preference but should be considered, and is strongly recommended when community transmission is high. This guidance also applies when members not from the same household are carpooling using family vehicles.**
- ❑ If traveling outside Los Angeles County for an event, adhere to the [Travel Advisory and Guidance](#).
- ❑ When traveling overnight, **consider having** team members not from the same household sleep in separate rooms and wear masks when visiting other members' hotel rooms.

- ❑ Socializing with other teams may increase the risk of introducing COVID-19 into your group as you increase the number of new individuals that your team interacts with. Consider discouraging these activities when community transmission is high and/or the CDC Community Level is designated as High either in Los Angeles County or at the travel destination, or both.

Understanding the Risks Associated with Sports during the Pandemic

Sports and physical activities that allow for 6-8 feet between other competitors, like golf or singles tennis, are going to be less risky than sports that involve frequent close contact, like basketball or wrestling. Those where athletes do not share equipment, like cross country, will likely be less risky than which have shared equipment, such as football. Those with limited exposure to other players may be a safer option. A sprint in a track race, for example, may be less risky than sports that put someone in close contact with another player for an extended period of time, like an entire half of a game.

The specific location where athletes train, practice and compete also impacts risk. Choose outdoor venues for sports and classes whenever possible. COVID-19 is more likely to spread in indoor spaces with poor ventilation. Indoor sports and activities will likely present an increased risk of transmission, especially if the sport or physical activity also involves close contact, shared equipment, and more exposure to other players, such as basketball.

The more people someone interacts with, the greater the chance of COVID-19 exposure. So small teams, practice pods or classes that stay together, rather than mixing with other teams, coaches, or teachers, will be a safer option. This will also make it easier to contact individuals if there is an exposure to COVID-19.

Staying within your community will be safer than participating on travel teams. Traveling to an area with more COVID-19 cases could increase the chance of transmission and spread. Travel sports also include intermixing of players, so athletes are generally exposed to more people.

Table 1. Examples of Sports Stratified by Risk Level

Low Risk	Moderate Risk	High Risk
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archery • Badminton (singles) • Band • Biking • Bocce • Bowling • Corn hole • Cross country • Curling • Dance (no contact) • Disc golf • Drumline • Equestrian events (including rodeos) that involve only a single rider at a time • Golf • Gymnastics • Ice and roller skating (no contact) • Lawn bowling • Martial arts (no contact) • Physical training (e.g., yoga, Zumba, Taichi) • Pickleball (singles) • Rowing/crew (with 1 person) • Running • Shuffleboard • Skeet shooting • Skiing and snowboarding • Snowshoeing • Swimming and diving • Tennis (singles) • Track and Field • Walking and Hiking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Badminton (doubles) • Baseball • Cheerleading • Dance (intermittent contact) • Dodgeball • Field hockey • Flag Football • Kickball • Lacrosse (girls/women) • Pickleball (doubles) • Squash • Softball • Tennis (doubles) • Volleyball 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basketball • Boxing • Football • Ice hockey • Ice Skating (pairs) • Lacrosse (boys/men) • Martial Arts • Roller Derby • Rugby • Rowing/crew (with 2 or more people) • Soccer • Water polo • Wrestling