



Rules Modifications & Guidelines

Gymnastics

Winter 2020-2021

General Information *(updated 12/11/20)*

Every school district/program should consult with their local health department to determine which risk level to start this program safely. Continued consultation with the local health department should be used to determine when progression to the next risk level can be initiated.

Playing sports come with inherent risks (twisted ankles to concussions). The COVID-19 pandemic has brought additional risks to group activities/sports. The MIAA has developed these modifications to lower risks from COVID-19 using National and State guidelines and input from medical specialists. Playing any sport (even with modified play) will continue to carry some risk of acquiring COVID-19 but these modifications were developed to help guide schools in best practices to limit exposure while offering an opportunity for interscholastic athletics for those sports approved for EEA Level 3 participation. The Mass Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) categorizes sports as: “Lower Risk”, “Moderate Risk”, “Higher Risk”. These categories are based on how the sport is traditionally played. Additional information can be found on their website: [EEA Youth and Amateur Sports Resources](#) & [EEA Guidance](#)

This document is to be utilized in compliance with all EEA, DESE and DPH guidelines in place.

Learn more about participation in athletics during the pandemic by taking the free NFHS online course: “[COVID-19 for Coaches and Administrators](#)”

Pre-Workout/Pre-Contest Screening:

Student-athletes, coaches, spectators and any others associated with the athletic program may not attend practices or games if they are isolated for illness or quarantined for exposure to infection.

Prior to attending practices or games, athletes and coaches should check their temperature. If a student-athlete or a coaching staff member has a temperature of 100.4 degrees or above, they should not attend practices or games. Likewise if they have any other symptoms of COVID-19 infection (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>), they should not attend practices or games. Student-athletes and coaches who have symptoms of COVID19 infection should test and isolate in accordance with DPH guidance.

For students with symptoms who test negative for COVID-19 infection, they may return to sport once they are approved to return to school (when afebrile for 24 hours and symptomatically improved).

Student-athletes and coaches who are diagnosed with COVID-19 infection should rest and avoid exercise for ten days from symptom onset. Procedures for return to activity/play should follow CDC, DPH, and local board of health guidelines (CDC link above). In addition, persons with COVID-19 infection need to receive written clearance from their health care provider and school administrator/designee to return to sport. Return to activity should be slow and graded. An example of a graduated return to play protocol can be found at this [link](#).

Student-athletes, coaches, spectators, and any others associated with the athletic program who were exposed to COVID-19 must quarantine, including no participation in practices or games following exposure, and should follow all CDC, DPH, and local board of health protocols. Athletes and coaches should receive written clearance from their school administrator/designee to return to sport.

Cohorts and/or Participants:

A record should be kept of all individuals present at team activities i.e. – practices, practice cohorts, competitions, etc.

Social distancing:

- **Practice** – Coaches are responsible for ensuring social distancing is maintained between players as much as possible. This includes additional spacing between athletes while stretching, warming up, chatting, changing drills, etc. Athletes must maintain spacing, and there should be no congregating of athletes while running drills. Workouts, when possible could be conducted in ‘pods’ of athletes, with the same 5-10 athletes always working out together. Ideally athletes should not move between pods for the entire season. This ensures more limited exposure if someone develops an infection. Records should be kept of who is in each group, each day.
- **Locker Rooms** –Locker rooms and changing areas must remain closed per EEA Guidance ([EEA Guidance Page 11](#)), except for toilet facilities. For sport activities that occur directly after school, locker rooms may be used for changing only, with no more than 10 users at one time and with social distancing and face coverings maintained. Locker rooms may not be used for storage. Facility Operators should ensure that users can abide by capacity restrictions and social distancing standards and establish signage and visual guidelines. Signage should remind users to limit time spent in enclosed area. If locker rooms are utilized, staggered use based on time and distance is recommended.

When possible, students should report to workouts in proper gear and immediately return home to shower, clean clothing, and equipment at the end of every workout.

- **Benches** – No benches should be used during practice. Players’ items should be separated as below for personal items, at least 6 feet apart. Benches should be permitted only during games with six feet of distancing required between participants. Athletes and coaches should maintain the same seat for the duration of the game. ([See EEA Guidance Page 12](#))

- **Playing Surface Access** – Only essential personnel are permitted on the practice/competition field. These are defined as athletes, coaches, medical personnel/athletic trainers, and officials (competition). All others (i.e. managers, photographers, media, etc.) are considered non-essential personnel and are not to be on the field of play.
- **Personal Items** – It is recommended that each athlete bring their own gym bag for personal items (see gym bag information below). All personal items should remain in the gym bag when not in use. Gym bags should be placed in a predetermined area 6 feet apart for the duration of practice.
- **Huddles** – Social distancing (6 feet between individuals) must be maintained and face coverings utilized at all times. Communicating with smaller groups is preferred. Huddles may not occur in locker rooms.
- **Team Handshakes** – Athletes shall NOT exchange handshakes before, during or following practices and competitions. Some MIAA sport specific modifications suggest sportsmanship recognition practices which replace handshakes.
- **Spectators** – Spectators must practice social distancing between different household units and accept personal responsibility for public health guidelines. The number of spectators is determined in compliance with EEA, DESE and DPH guidelines.
- **Media** – All social distancing and hygiene guidelines for spectators must be followed by media members planning to attend games. Media members should contact host school administrators prior to arriving at games to plan appropriate entry and available workspace
- **Travel** – Student-athletes, coaches, spectators, and any others associated with the athletic program (if not from the same household) are required to wear face coverings during travel to and from game locations. This is particularly important for car pool and bus situations.

Practice and Game Protocols:

- **Masks/Face Coverings** – Athletes are required to wear cloth face coverings/masks per EEA guidelines, including covering both the nose and mouth at all times. Gaiters are acceptable, if acceptable by local/school policy. Face coverings comprised of multiple layers and a tighter weave are more effective and mandatory. Masks with valves or filters are not permitted.

The most effective fabrics for cloth masks are:

- Tightly woven fabrics, such as cotton and cotton blends
- Breathable
- Two or three layers

Less effective fabrics for cloth masks are:

- Loosely woven fabrics, such as loose knit fabrics
- Difficult to breathe through (like plastic or leather)
- Single layer

Mask breaks may be taken for drinking, and when needed for breathing comfort. Mask breaks may only be taken when greater than 6 feet of distance can be maintained from all others.

All athletes, especially those that use mouthpieces, should prepare to have extra face coverings available. Athletes who have their masks become damp should change regularly. Masks should be exchanged when damp or soiled. Caution should be exercised when replacing a mask if hands are soiled or dirty. All individuals that are unable to wear a face covering due to a medical condition or disability must provide a medical note to the school administrator/designee excusing the player from wearing a mask. This note must always be in the possession of the head coach and available to the opposing head coach and/or game officials upon request. The head coach is the only participant that can submit documented permission of “non-mask” participation. Student-athletes cannot discuss or present non-mask permission to an official. It is recommended that athletic directors work to advise officials assignors in advance of a contest if their teams have non-mask participants.

It is the responsibility of the head coach to monitor and ensure that all players are wearing face coverings. Game administrators, home athletic director, or other designee may also assist in monitoring this.

Coaches and officials are also required to wear face coverings. Spectators, workers, and others are also required to wear face coverings and are expected to follow social distancing guidelines.

- **Player habits** – Coaches should work to break old habits and create new ones in an effort to minimize the spread of the virus. Spitting, nose clearing on the field, licking fingers, and spitting on gloves during practices and competitions is not permitted. The habit of minimizing any touching of the face and covering the cough should be practiced.

Given that indoor conditions and ventilation impact the playing of indoor sports, it is recommended that indoor participants and all in attendance work to refrain from active yelling due to the increased opportunity for droplet transmission. Coaches and game administrators are encouraged to monitor this and remind participants to eliminate any unnecessary shouting

- **Interaction with Officials** – Coaches must follow social distancing guidelines (6 feet) when interacting with an official or any other individual. Conversations can occur at a distance. Athletes should not approach a referee closer than 6 feet at any time.
- **Hand sanitizer and/or sanitizing wipes** – Athletes, coaches, and officials are encouraged to provide their own hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol) and/or sanitizing wipes and use them frequently – including prior to taking the field and upon return to the sideline. Additionally, it is emphasized to avoid touching the face throughout practice and competition.
- **Ventilation should be optimized:** [EEA Guidance Page 14](#)

- **Pre-Game Introductions and Preparation** – If pre-game meetings are necessary, they should be held with limited team representation – a single coach, single captain, etc. At the pregame meeting all participants are required to wear face coverings and to socially distance from all participants

If a school chooses to do introductions, players will take their position on the field prior to being introduced. Introductions are suggested to be limited or eliminated to decrease time of athletes on the competition field.

The National Anthem may be played before competition. Appropriate social distancing must be maintained by teams and all personnel during the National Anthem. Singing the National Anthem indoors should not be permitted.

Indoor musical performances at interscholastic athletic events are not permitted.

- **Ball Retrievers** – Ball retrievers for any sport ARE NOT permitted. See sport specific modifications for extra ball placement procedures.
- **Post-Game Procedures** – Refer to Team Handshakes in this guidance. Recognition of the other team, coaches and/or officials should be done from a distance greater than 6 feet and should not delay departure from the competition venue. Teams and group of players should maintain social distancing (6 feet between individuals) and/or staggering departure times at the conclusion of the contest.

Equipment:

- **General Equipment** – There should be no shared athletic equipment unless required by the sport rules, i.e. – one basketball is used during competition and must be used by all players. Individual sport modifications should be followed for planned and periodic disinfecting. Any equipment that is used for practice should be cleaned and disinfected prior to and immediately following practice. Only one individual should handle the set-up and break-down of equipment on any given day (i.e. goals, cones, etc.).
- **Balls - For moderate and high risk sports** - Each player should bring their own ball or use the same school-issued ball during practice. Skill training, conditioning, agility, etc. can be done with the one player/one ball concept. Balls must be sanitized before and after each practice/game. Sport specific modifications also list other ball cleaning practices during competition.
- **Personal Items** – Shoes, clothing, towels, and other personal items must not be shared among athletes. Any items that are not currently being worn/used should be stored inside a personal gym bag. Gym bags should be placed in a predetermined area 6 feet apart for the duration of practice/competition.

Hydration:

- All students must bring their own water bottle. Water bottles cannot be shared. Student-athletes should bring enough water for the entire game.
- Bench water may be provided by the facility host, but the visiting team/participants should supply their own coolers unless agreed upon by the

facility host. If used, water coolers shall be sanitized prior to use and frequently during the contest and disposable one-time-use cups shall be utilized.

- Hydration stations (water cows, water trough, water fountains, etc.) should NOT be utilized. If water coolers or other large volume water container is utilized, it can only be accessed by a “designated” refill person with proper PPE.
- Water fountains are to be used as refill stations ONLY.

COVID-19 Coach:

- Schools should designate a coach to be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns.
- All coaches, staff, officials, and families should know who this person is and how to contact them.
- All athletic directors/designee must follow established EEA guidelines for program and/or game management.
- Train coaches, officials, and staff on all safety protocols. Conduct training virtually and ensure that social distancing is maintained during training. (NFHS COVID-19 FREE Course)
- Coaches, athletes, officials, and spectators are required to cooperate with the local board of health whenever requested.

Gym Bag – Supplies recommended for your personal gym bag:

- Reusable facial coverings/masks – The mask/face covering must be worn at all times. Sport specific modification may have further guidance for face coverings. All participants should have at least multiple back-up face covering.
- Warm-up clothing, electronic devices, and other personal items that are used by the athlete, prior to practice/competition, must be placed back in the gym bag before practice/competition begins.
- Athletes are recommended to always have a personal bottle of hand sanitizer available. There will be less chance of possible cross contamination and less time standing around waiting to use a shared hand sanitizer. Be sure to have this inside a sealable bag, in case it leaks. This will be used when you enter and exit the practice/competition site, and at other necessary times in between.
- Athletes are recommended to have disinfectant wipes for personal use. When using a restroom area, it is best to disinfect any surface that may be touched, before and after using the facilities.
- Athletic braces, tape, inhalers, or any other sports-medical item used before, during or after practice/meets should be stored in a personal gym bag when not in use.
- Additional shoes should also be stored in a separate compartment or bag inside a gym bag to prevent possible cross contamination with other items in the gym bag.
- Any other item that is deemed necessary for practice or competition must be stored in the gym bag when it is not being used.

Gymnastics Specific Modifications

General Information

- All participants are required to wear masks and maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet as they enter the facility. Staggered arrival of teams is recommended. Once in the facility, hands must be washed, or hand sanitizer used.
- If an athlete chooses to wear a mask during competition, there will be no deduction for improper uniform.
- There will be no physical contact at any time during the meet. Gestures of sportsmanship must be verbal only.
- The guidelines/modifications presented in this document are to be adhered to for both practices and competitions.

Event Management and Warm-up

- To lessen the exchange of paperwork, it is suggested that school ADs contact officials prior to the meet to obtain any information they may need for accounting/payments purposes.
- Athletes must come dressed for competition, use of locker rooms will be for rest rooms only with a limit of one person at a time.
- Athletes will supply their own water bottles, grips, and chalk. Community chalk buckets/trays will not be available. Athletes are reminded to wash or sanitize hands after using chalk, prior to putting their masks back on.
- All personal belongings must be kept in a designated area.
- Open warm-up/stretch must be socially distanced by a minimum of 6 feet from other teams.
- Equipment must be cleaned/sanitized between warm-up and competition and/or between teams in the “warm-up, compete” model

Meet Protocol

- Schools may opt for remote meets; all guidelines and modifications will remain in place.
- Competitions will be dual meets only.
- No JV routines.
- Teams will go directly to their first event for announcements and the playing of the National Anthem.
- There will be no march-in by the teams. It is recommended that meets use the “warm-up, compete” model for competitions.
- Masks must be worn by non-competing athletes and all meet personnel including coaches, judges, medical staff, runners/flashers and scorers. Competing athletes may remove masks only while performing on the apparatus.
- Non-competing athletes must be in a designated area not near competing athletes and judges that are socially distanced by at least 6 feet.
- Judges must be at least 6 feet from events, athletes/crowd. Judges workstations will be cleaned in between events.
- Runners/scorers flashers must remain at least 6 feet away from judges/events and will remain with the same judges throughout the competition.
- There must be a designated waiting area, socially distanced, for athletes waiting to compete.

- Each team must have all floor music on a device and managed by only one coach/athlete (per team).
- Athletes must be sanitizing hands prior to and after competing on an event. Equipment must be cleaned/sanitized at the completion of the rotation, prior to another team using the apparatus. Be aware of drying time of cleaning products so that there is no hazard to the participants.

Post-Meet Protocol

- Masks must be worn. Per EEA guidance 11/12/20 - Low risk sports are exempt from wearing masks during active play when participants can consistently maintain at least 14 feet distance from each other throughout the duration of active play (singles tennis, when XC runners are more than 14 feet apart, a solo gymnastics performance).
- At the completion of the meet, prior to leaving the facility, hand sanitizer should be used by all event participants.
- Teams must stagger departure from the building and try to social distance if space allows.

EDUCATIONAL ATHLETICS

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