



# Rules Modifications & Guidelines

## Unified Basketball

Fall II 2021

### General Information

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](#)

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](#)

#### **Mitigation of COVID-19 Spread:**

It is important to note that COVID-19 infection related to youth sports seems to spread from outside the field play. Coaches are encouraged to remind athletes about mitigation strategies including distancing and mask wearing. Athletes are encouraged to support the active cooperation of all students within the school community by adhering to social distancing and mask wearing in all settings.

#### **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.

The links below are examples of Graduated Return to Play protocols. These examples are not required protocols mandated by the MIAA, rather resources for information.

[British Journal of Sports Medicine Infographic](#)  
[MA Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics](#)

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.

Should a player be quarantined because of a COVID-19 designation, he/she must participate in a minimum of one practice before returning to interscholastic competition. Should a player being quarantined because of a positive diagnosis of COVID-19 the ATC/Athletic Director should consider a more extensive return-to-play protocol for the individual player(s). It is necessary for all athletes to complete all other state guidelines.

#### **COVID-19 Testing:**

Recent developments in COVID-19 testing have become more prevalent within the Commonwealth. For Higher Risk sports, the use of COVID-19 testing may help to support the continued participation throughout the entire season of play.

#### **Cohorts and/or Participants:**

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

#### **Weather Resources:**

Extreme caution should be exercised when making decisions to participate in athletics when temperatures may present challenges to athletes' health and safety. The

following links will help to offer information in planning for safe practice and play during extreme temperature conditions.

- [MIAA SMC Cold Weather Reference Document](#)
- [NATA: Environmental Cold Injuries](#)
- [NFHS: Participating in Cold Weather – Minimizing the Risk](#)
- [NFHS: Guidelines for Competition in the Cold](#)
- [MIAA Heat Modification Policy](#)

### **Indoor Competition and Practice Capacity Limits**

On Thursday, Feb. 11 the MIAA Board of Directors supported a Sports Medicine Committee recommendation to limit the number of players on an indoor playing surface. This is a modified restriction to the current EEA guidance of Feb. 8. This limitation is identical to EEA guidance of Jan. 22 and earlier.

- No more than 25 players on any indoor surface/playing area for team/group sports.

Not only is this limit for competition but also for indoor practice.

### **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 9](#)), 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. ([EEA Guidance Page 11](#))

- **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.

#### **COVID-19 Coach/Site Supervisor:**

- Schools must designate a coach/site supervisor to be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns and supervising adherence to established COVID-19 protocols.
- 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.

### Practice and Game Protocols:

- **Masks/Face Coverings** – Athletes are required to wear cloth face coverings/masks per EEA guidelines, including always covering both the nose and mouth. Gaiters are acceptable, except in the sport of football, 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
- Those that are 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. If mouthguards are removed on the sidelines or bench area, the athlete should use hand sanitizer each time after touching the mouthguard. Athletes are reminded that mouthguards must remain inserted in the mouth at all times for those sports that require mouthguards.

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 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 everyone 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.

- It is required that teams delineate with a physical marker (cone, spray paint etc.) the social distancing requirements (6 ft) for their players and coaches while on the sideline area.
- **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 12](#)
- **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. The



squirting of water by anyone but the person drinking from their own water bottle is not permitted.

- Water fountains are to be used as refill stations ONLY.

#### **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

### **Unified Basketball Specific Modifications**

#### **Pre-Game Protocol**

- **Pre-Game Meeting**
  - Limited to one official and a single coach from each team.
  - Participants stand on the center circle on each side of the division line. All individuals maintain a social distance of 6 feet or greater at the center circle.
  - No handshakes prior to and following the Pre-Game Meeting.
- **Starting Lineups/National Anthem**
  - Starting lineups are announced only – Players and coaches will refrain from high fives, handshake lines, and other physical contact with teammates, opposing players, coaches, officials, and fans.

#### **Game Modifications**



- **Masks:** Mandatory facial coverings for all participants, coaches, and personnel.
  - The host school is required to setup designated areas for students from each team to take mask breaks when coming off the court.
  - If a player is in violation of the mandatory mask rule, the referee has the authority to send the player off the court.
- **Process Between Quarters**
  - Games will be played in four (4), ten-minute quarters with running time.
  - Halftime will be eliminated.
  - The length of time between quarters will be extended to 2:30.
  - The game ball will be changed at the end of each quarter.
- **Timeouts**
  - Teams are responsible to run their timeout meetings following socially distanced protocols.
  - The length of timeouts will be increased to 1:15 to provide extra time for sanitizing and appropriate social distancing.
- **Player Interaction**
  - Players should refrain from picking up another player by hand if a player has fallen to the court surface. (Unless deemed necessary to help player off court due to injury).
  - Players will refrain from huddling on court as a team prior to, during or following free throws or other game situations.
  - Players will refrain from any hand touching (high fives, handshakes) during substitutions.
  - The postgame handshake is suspended. See MIAA Board of Directors recommendation.
- **Roster and Participation Limits**
  - Game day roster cannot exceed 15 athletes and partners (active or injured) as long as teams can adequately social distance.
  - No more than 5 adults (coaches and aides) will be allowed on the bench at any time
  - A maximum of 20 individuals (including athletes/partners, coaches and aides) are allowed on the bench
  - Team benches should be set up on opposite sides of the gym/court whenever possible.
  - Teams cannot exceed the roster size limitation. More than one team may be created at a school if necessary. It is strongly discouraged for players to participate on more than one team and should only be utilized in situations to sustain a program.
  - \*\*Please note the limit of 25 participants on the court during warmups.
- **Game Balls**
  - The home team is required to provide at least 4 game balls.
  - Basketballs will be wiped with disinfectant at the end of each period. A disinfected or new game ball will be used to start each quarter and overtime.
  - The visiting team is responsible for providing their own basketballs for warmups.

### **Game Modifications/Points of Emphasis**

- **Jump Ball**
  - The jump ball will be eliminated to start the game and replaced with a throw-in at the division line.
  - A coin toss will be used (visiting team calls) to determine which team is

awarded the ball to start the game. The alternating possession arrow will be set for the opposing team.

- Note – the team that begins the game on defense will retain the A-P arrow even if they secure possession on the initial throw-in.
- To start an overtime period, a coin toss will be used (visiting team calls) to determine which team is awarded the ball. The A-P arrow will be set to the opposing team in the same manner as to start the game.
- **Substitution Process**
  - One player reports to the scorer's table/midcourt on team side when a team intends to substitute. Multiple substitutions can be made. When the horn sounds, players must enter through the scorer's table and utilize hand sanitizer.
  - Players must use hand sanitizer when entering or exiting the court at any time (i.e. before game, during substitutions, between quarters, after game).
- **Closely Guarded/5 Seconds**
  - To minimize the amount of time that opponents are face to face, officials will emphasize NFHS Rule 9-10-1-a, *"A player shall not, while closely guarded: A. In his/her frontcourt, hold the ball for five seconds or dribble the ball for five seconds. B. In his/her frontcourt, control the ball for five seconds in an area enclosed by screening teammate."*
- **Freedom of Movement**
  - Point of emphasis is to enforce the rule that defenders will not physically impede the progress of offensive players (off the ball; see reference NFHS Rules 4-24, 4-26, 4-37 and 10-7).
- **Free Throw Situations**
  - To limit congestion and contact, free throw lanes will be limited to two defensive players (one athlete and one partner).
  - On two/three shot fouls, free throw lanes will remain empty and players can only enter lanes prior to the final attempt.
  - For one-and-one and single free throw attempts, the two defensive players may position themselves on the first attempt.
- **Sideline Out of Bounds Plays**
  - To eliminate congestion and contact under the basket during dead ball situations, offensive plays in the frontcourt will be inbounded at the foul line extended (not under the basket/end line).
- **End of Game Foul**
  - In order to avoid unnecessary contact while managing time at the end of the game, a team representative will notify the official if they are planning to foul a player receiving the inbounds pass; once the defensive team lightly tags the receiving offensive player the official will stop the play and administer a foul.
- **Quick whistle for a loose ball/tie up**
  - Point of emphasis - officials will quickly stop play/whistle during a loose ball/tie up between players in order to limit close contact.
- **Inbound Play/Throw-In**
  - On all throw-in/inbound plays, the defender will maintain a distance of 6 feet from the player inbounding the ball.

### Team Benches

- The home team/host school is responsible for providing socially distanced

bench areas.

- Team benches should be set up on opposite sides of the gym/court whenever possible.
- Additional chairs or rows may be added when possible to allow bench personnel and players to observe social distancing of 6 feet or greater.
- Players and coaches are required to be assigned a specific seat on the bench for the duration of the contest where feasible. In instances where assigned seating is not possible, the person exiting the court is required to disinfect the seat.
- It is the responsibility of the host school to provide disinfectant and disinfecting wipes for each team.
- Consider seating fans opposite of team benches and separated from one another to promote social distancing.
- If spectator seating is available behind team benches, it must be separated by at least 20 feet.
- The host school is required to setup designated areas for students from each team to take mask breaks when coming off the court.
- All players must bring their own water bottles which must not be shared.
- Follow school protocols to clean/disinfect bench area between games.
- All non-uniformed team members who are not essential to game management shall be seated in the bleachers or general seating and socially distanced from other groups. Aides are considered essential personnel and must be counted within the 20 person limit on the team bench.

### Game Officials

- Must wear a mask at all times.
- Electronic whistles/artificial noisemakers are required.
- Throw-in: Official may stand 6 feet or greater away from player making the throw-in and bounce the ball to that player on a front court throw-in.
- Free Throw Administration: The lead official shall stand on the end line and bounce the ball to the free thrower.
- If a player is in violation of the mandatory mask rule, the official has the authority to send the player off the court.
- Address broken/damaged masks when the play advantage has subsided (similar to how injuries are handled).
- Must arrive at the facility dressed in uniform.
- Must bring their own water bottles.

### Scorer's Table

- Personnel must be socially distanced and are required to wear masks. (Announcer, timer, shot clock, scorer, etc.)
- Home team/host school provides hand sanitizer for each team at the scorer's table and disposable PPE.
- Limit seats at the table to essential personnel which includes home team scorer and timer with a recommended distance of 6 feet or greater between individuals. Other personnel (visiting scorer, statisticians, media, etc.) may not be deemed essential personnel and consider an alternate location for them.

### Game Management

- **Spectators:** Spectator limitations must follow EEA guidelines.

- The home team administrator will keep spectator attendance records.
- **Cheerleaders**
  - To limit the number of people on the sidelines during games, cheerleaders are not permitted.
- **Locker Rooms**
  - Locker rooms are closed.
- **Media**
  - Location determined by host school, must wear mask and follow all social distancing guidelines for spectators. Advance notification to host school administration is required.
- **Post-Game**
  - Adequate time should be provided between games to allow for social distancing of teams and spectators during entry/exit in multi-team and multi-game settings.
- **Between games**
  - Cleaning of the court, benches, scorer's table and playing surface areas takes place.
- **Concessions**
  - Concessions are not allowed for basketball games.

### Training/Practice

- Practices are limited to small group trainings in accordance with current EEA guidelines.
- All cohorts must be more than 14 feet apart on the playing surface.
- Players cannot share any personal equipment – shoes, towels, water bottles, etc.
- Basketballs and other instructional equipment used for warm ups/practices must be cleaned before storing for next game/practice.

### Other Considerations

- Host schools are encouraged to optimize air exchange and/or filtration where possible such as opening windows.
- Floor markings for desks/classroom settings can remain on the court.
- To the extent possible, it is recommended that schools play only one opponent per week (home/away).
- Virtual or live stream broadcast options are encouraged (i.e. NFHSNetwork.com)
- Online ticket sales/paperless tickets should be utilized whenever possible to limit the handling of cash.

**EDUCATIONAL ATHLETICS**

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