

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Deidre S. Gifford, MD, MPH
Acting Commissioner



Ned Lamont
Governor
Susan Bysiewicz
Lt. Governor

January 8, 2021

Glenn M. Lungarini
Executive Director, CAS-CIAC
30 Realty Drive
Cheshire, CT 06410

Dear Mr. Lungarini and CAS-CIAC Board Members:

This past year has been extremely challenging for all of us, and we thank CIAC and their member schools for your patience and willingness to adapt quickly to the continuously changing dynamics of COVID-19 infections in our communities. Due to the rapid increases in community cases in the weeks leading up to the holidays, the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) and Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) recommended a “pause” on team sports activities on November 23, 2020. Although the sports pause is currently set to expire on January 19, 2021, DPH continues to recommend a cautious approach to any restart of athletic activities. This recommendation is based on what we know (that community transmission rates have been high in our state for several months), what we anticipate (that the combination of increased mobility and holiday gatherings will lead to another “bump” in cases in the first few weeks of January), and unknowns that we think could make things worse (introduction of new virus variants that are more transmissible and may lead to many more cases, hospitalizations, and deaths).

Below, we provide guidance for the reintroduction of activities in those sports traditionally played during the winter interscholastic sports season in Connecticut. Our understanding is that those include sports designated by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Sports Medicine Advisory Committee as “higher risk” (specifically wrestling, competitive cheer, competitive dance), “moderate risk” (specifically basketball, ice hockey, gymnastics, indoor track), and “lower risk” (specifically swimming). Guidance for restarting club, recreation, or other amateur sports and/or other interscholastic sports outside of the winter season will be provided under a separate cover. Given the current state of the COVID-19 pandemic and our expectations for the coming weeks, DPH recommends that CIAC consider the following schedule for the start of the interscholastic winter sports season.

For moderate and lower risk sports (basketball, ice hockey, gymnastics, indoor track), **practices** should begin no earlier than **January 19, 2021**. This includes any team activities that involve group aerobic conditioning, sport-specific non-contact skill development drills, team practices, and/or intra-squad scrimmages. Assuming community metrics continue an appropriate downward trend and athletic activities are not impacting in-person learning, interscholastic **in-state competitions** should begin no earlier than **February 1, 2021**.



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For higher risk sports (competitive cheer, competitive dance, wrestling), DPH does not recommend any activities beyond small group conditioning and non-contact skill building for the duration of the winter season.

In addition, DPH recommends against the operation of traditional large, multi-school indoor track meets for the winter season, as well as any athletic activities involving out-of-state facilities, teams, or athletes at least through the months of January and February. We would like to re-visit the question of out-of-state athletic activities after February at a later date.

Mask Wearing

Probably the biggest change to how organized team sports activities will operate when they do restart will be the need for all participants, coaches, and officials to utilize a mask that completely covers the nose and mouth, and that is worn directly on the face, at all times including during active play. DPH feels that the use of masks during athletic and other activities for “source control” (that is, to control the spread of respiratory droplets from the mouth and nose of the wearer) is necessary to protect participants, their families, and their school communities against the increasing risk of COVID-19 infection. DPH is aware that mask wearing during competitive play for several highly aerobic sports has been occurring in many states for several months with few, if any significant issues. In addition, the latest guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that youth athletes wear cloth face coverings when they are on the sidelines, in the locker room, and traveling as well as during group training and active competition (except in pools or while using certain gymnastics apparatus). The statement from AAP indicates that the coverings have been shown to be well-tolerated during exercise and can effectively prevent the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19.

Quarantine Requirements

Recently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published new risk-based guidance and procedures for shortening the required quarantine period for individuals identified as close contacts of a known COVID-19 case. As a result, DPH has revised its guidance as well to include options for reducing quarantine periods in some situations from the traditional 14 days. However, both CDC and DPH have made clear that the ability to end quarantine prior to 14 days is conditioned on a person’s ability to continue with daily COVID-19 symptom screening, continuous mask use when outside of the home, as well as avoiding gatherings with people who are not in their immediate household, who are over 65 years old, or who have medical conditions that place them at increased risk for COVID-19. This would preclude gathering with other athletes for engagement in team sports prior to completion of a full 14-day quarantine period.

Return-to-Play after COVID-19 Infection

Although the symptoms and disease course of COVID-19 in younger people appear on average to be somewhat milder than those of older individuals, there is the potential, and documented cases, of severe disease complications in people of all ages. Furthermore, the long-term health effects and impacts on organ systems function resulting from even mild or asymptomatic COVID-19 disease is still unknown, although there have been some studies implicating blood clotting and cardiac effects as potentially under-recognized longer-term sequelae. As such, DPH recommends that health screening and clearance requirements for allowing athletes to begin a phased return to activities after COVID-19 infection should incorporate the American Academy of Pediatrics’ (AAP) guidance for return-to-play and include specific cardiac evaluations. In addition, DPH recommends that CIAC

develop educational materials for distribution to member schools and participant families that reflect current AAP risk messaging regarding cardiovascular risks associated with COVID-19 infection and ensure informed consent by parents and athletes, similar to the procedures CIAC has in place for concussion education.

With the COVID-19 vaccination campaign underway in our state, we have hope for the future that we can be rid of this pandemic for good and get back to doing the things we all love. At this critical time in the pandemic, stabilizing the movements of individuals within our communities, reducing the number of person-to-person interactions occurring in indoor environments, and subsequently helping to flatten the curve is of utmost importance to maximizing the health of our residents and the preservation of lives. Thank you for your partnership in that endeavor.

Sincerely,



Deidre S. Gifford, MD, MPH
Acting Commissioner

cc: P. Mounds, Chief of Staff, State of Connecticut