



# THE CONNECTICUT INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETIC CONFERENCE

August 19, 2020

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Deidre S. Gifford, MD, MPH  
Acting Commissioner  
State of Connecticut, Department of Public Health

Dear Acting Commissioner Gifford,

On behalf of the CIAC, I would like to thank you and your department for the extensive efforts made in assisting Connecticut schools with establishing reopening protocols. The CIAC has been actively preparing for a safe return to interscholastic athletics since April. The input DPH provided in the ReOpen CT Rules Committee meeting on July 24 and our follow-up conversation on July 28 was valuable in finalizing CIAC's Official Fall Sports Plan, which our Board of Control approved on July 30. The CIAC is grateful for the detailed recommendations provided on August 13 and your availability to continue our collaboration tomorrow.

The purpose of this letter is to provide your department with the CIAC's major areas of inquiry in advance of tomorrow's meeting.

## Areas of Inquiry for Thursday's Meeting:

DPH's recommendations state, "Currently, the public health data in our state supports some initial level of in-person learning for the coming academic year." Governor Lamont has consistently stated that Connecticut's COVID health metrics support school districts returning in a full in-person model. However, it is left to districts to choose the model under which they will return.

- What has changed in Connecticut's COVID health metrics that would suggest only an initial level of in-person learning is supported?
- How have Connecticut's COVID health metrics changed since June 17, 2020, when competitive sports in Connecticut resumed?

DPH recommends a slow introduction of the lowest risk activities first.

- How does this guidance align with Phase 2 of Connecticut's Reopen Plan, which permitted sport competition of low and moderate risk activities beginning on June 17, and allowed for high risk activity practice sessions?
- The CIAC's fall sports plan is more restrictive than current sport guidance and provides daily monitoring for COVID symptoms among student-athletes. Is DPH recommending that CIAC activities pause, and then follow a gradual return two weeks after school begins, while non-CIAC clubs and teams are permitted to continue operating as they have since June 17, 2020?

DPH recommends that the period between now and two weeks after school reopens be used to educate coaches, athletes, and families on the importance of mitigating strategies.

- The CT ReOpen Rules Committee recommended that, based on Connecticut COVID health metrics, the best time to play may be now. What has changed in Connecticut COVID health metrics that would suggest no sport activity, including conditioning and practices, should take place until two weeks after the start of school?

## CENTRAL OFFICE STAFF:

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- Unlike recreational, club, or private sport business coaches, CIAC member school coaches are required to complete certification training. In addition, our coaches have successfully engaged our students in conditioning workouts since July 6, 2020. Prior to these activities starting, the CIAC provided athletic directors with written guidance and weekly collaborative zoom meetings, which included athletic trainers who are part of its sports medicine committee, to educate our schools on essential COVID mitigating steps and share best practices for implementation of all strategies. In addition, throughout the pandemic, the CIAC has engaged student-athletes in the development and distribution of public service announcements that inform their peers of the importance of following state and CDC mitigating strategies. It is CIAC's belief that continuing with the conditioning and practice sessions that we have already educated our coaches on and engaged our student-athletes in will be a motivating factor that enhances compliance to school-based return to learning protocols established within each local district.

DPH recommends limiting the total number of games and extent of travel for interscholastic athletics.

- The CIAC's Official Fall Sports Plan implements both recommendations with a shortened fall season and regional play. However, we do not believe that such recommendations were made of summer programs with teams playing a maximum number of games, including out-of-state competition. In what manner have Connecticut's COVID health metrics changed that would warrant restrictions placed on CIAC activities but not on non-CIAC activities during the fall months?

DPH recommends that volleyball be cancelled or postponed to the spring season.

- Non-CIAC volleyball clubs and programs continue to successfully run both outdoor and indoor experiences for youth and high school aged kids. How have Connecticut health metrics changed since June 24, 2020, when the CIAC plan was reviewed with no concerns raised, to suggest volleyball cannot be played in the fall? What medical or scientific data supports DPH's position that Connecticut COVID health metrics will be better in the spring than they are now, thus supporting the specific recommendation to move sports to that time of year?

DPH recommends that football be cancelled or postponed to the spring season.

- The CIAC recognizes that football is the only high-risk sport that is offered in the fall sports season. As such, particular attention has been given to football throughout the development of CIAC's fall sports plan. This is evidenced by DPH's collaboration with the CIAC on July 28, 2020, when our discussion, which included an infectious disease MD, explored DPH's position on youth, Pop Warner, and high school football. At that time, it was acknowledged that continued monitoring and evaluation of football was necessary, however, the current Connecticut COVID metrics did not prevent the sport from beginning practice. The CIAC agreed that continued collaboration with DPH on football was necessary as we approached the start of fall practices as well as throughout the fall season. As referenced in your letter, the CIAC reached out to DPH specific to your position on the sport of football on August 9, 10, and 12. The CIAC appreciates the complexity of high-risk sports, as well as all sports, and would like to further understand how DPH's position on football has evolved. Have Connecticut COVID health metrics changed since our July 28, 2020 discussion that would prohibit football practices, or is the position more grounded in the extensive work that DPH has done in assisting schools with reopening plans?

### **Background on CIAC Fall Sports Plan Development and Rationale**

On July 24, 2020, the CIAC presented its fall sports proposal to the ReOpen CT Rules Committee. DPH staff were part of that meeting and were able to provide feedback. Feedback from the committee was largely positive and recognized the success of summer sport competitions that began on June 17, 2020, in accordance with phase II of Governor Lamont's reopening plan. This included competition for low to moderate risk sports and practices for high risk sports. It was recognized by the committee that COVID health metrics in Connecticut support the continuation of sport competition and that CIAC should consider moving the season up and playing now. While recognizing that Connecticut COVID metrics are favorable now, and that there can be no medical or scientific guarantee that such favorable metrics would continue

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into the fall, the CIAC maintained that it was necessary to get our schools back on campus prior to assembling full sport teams and engaging in competition. Also discussed in that meeting was the topic of fan attendance. The CIAC's position was to prohibit fan attendance at all interscholastic events. The committee's feedback suggested that fan attendance had been allowed throughout the summer and that it would be appropriate for the CIAC to allow fan attendance in accordance with phase II ReOpen CT sport guidelines. In addition, the DPH provided expert consultation to the CIAC on July 28, 2020, with a member of your staff as well as an infectious disease MD. During each of those meetings, the CIAC also detailed the COVID mitigating steps it had taken in returning students to conditioning on July 6, 2020, and would continue into the fall season.

As part of the CIAC's Official Fall Sports Plan, a number of COVID mitigating strategies are required of our member schools. Conducting conditioning and initial practice sessions in cohorts of no more than 15 student-athletes is designed to limit the number of kids in any one group to a manageable number for a coach to enforce COVID safety precautions; to provide an accurate screening process for all student-athletes on a daily basis and allow school personnel to attend to any student demonstrating COVID symptoms efficiently and effectively; to provide a recorded traceable log of student-athletes; and to maximize appropriate social distancing during training session. Additionally, student-athletes are required to bring their own water bottles to reduce transmission while emphasizing the need for proper hydration. All activities are encouraged to take place outdoors, although a school may individually choose to allow students into their weight rooms in accordance with Governor Lamont's guidelines for gyms and fitness facilities. Locker rooms are limited to essential use only and must limit the number of people to maximize social distancing. These are examples of the mitigating strategies enforced by our member schools. Since that meeting on July 24, 2020, each of our individual sport committees has made sport specific recommendations to further support safe competition for all sport offerings. Additional football mitigating strategies will be developed prior to the start of competition. Below are links to these documents:

Soccer - <https://www.casciac.org/tp/soc.pdf>

Cross Country - <https://www.casciac.org/tp/xc.pdf>

Field Hockey - <https://www.casciac.org/tp/gfh.pdf>

Girls Volleyball - <https://www.casciac.org/tp/gvb.pdf>

Girls Swimming - <https://www.casciac.org/tp/gswim.pdf>

Another significant mitigating strategy enforced by the CIAC is restricting play to within our state and establishing regional competition that limits travel while reducing the number of interschool interactions. This strategy will further assist in maintaining positive COVID response in Connecticut regions and reduce the risk of transmission beyond a designated area. The CIAC regions for each sport can viewed at <https://www.casciac.org/fallregions/>.

CIAC's fall sports plan recognizes the significant level of deconditioning that our student athletes have experienced since the cessation of activities in mid-March. A prescribed three-week conditioning program is included as part of CIAC's return guidance to ensure injury risk reduction and heat acclimatization for all athletes. Conditioning activities have successfully occurred since July 6, 2020. The immediate suspension of those activities, as recommended by DPH, has negatively impacted the gains Connecticut student-athletes have acquired over the past month. Not only does this negatively impact our student-athletes' physical preparation, but it also has a negative impact on their social, emotional, cognitive, and mental health.

The CIAC has required our member schools to cohort student-athletes in groups of 10 since July 6, 2020, and has allowed that cohort to increase to 15 as of August 3, 2020. It is our position that, in addition to the mitigating benefits previously mentioned, this strategy aligns with the cohort efforts of our schools as they prepare for a return to instruction. On any given year, approximately 39,000 student-athletes compete in fall interscholastic athletics. According to EdSight, there are approximately 166,000 high school students in Connecticut. This means that if sports are permitted to proceed according to CIAC's plan, approximately 23% of our high school population will have been screened for COVID symptoms on a daily basis prior to the opening of school. If athletes experience COVID symptoms, they will be identified and put into proper DPH protocols without

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entering a classroom or school building where a larger student population will be present. It is more safe for athletes to be screened on a daily basis in controlled small group settings than it is to simply abandon the effective cohorts that have been established since July 6, 2020, only to bring kids into a full-team sport setting two weeks after school begins.

The CIAC appreciates the extraordinary work accomplished by DPH in collaboration with the State Department of Education, Connecticut school districts, and CIAC as we prepare for the reopening of schools. The CIAC believes that providing COVID safe learning opportunities for our students requires our collaborative commitment to curricular and extracurricular programs. For many of our students, it is participation in extracurriculars such as band, theater, debate, student council, Honors Society, etc. that provides our students with social, emotional, physical, and mental health balance, as well as authentic experiences to apply curricular concepts. Athletics stands alone as the most widely participated in extracurricular experience with approximately 70,000 athletes, more than 40% of Connecticut high school students, participating on an annual basis. If supported by Connecticut COVID health metrics, the CIAC hopes to partner with DPH to provide safe and meaningful athletic experiences that enhance our students' connection to their school community while building positive relationships with peers and coaches. A safe simultaneous return of curricular and extracurricular activities will motivate all students to engage in learning experiences, whether in-person or virtual, while addressing their cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and mental well-being.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss interscholastic athletic opportunities for Connecticut students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Glenn Lungarini". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Glenn Lungarini  
Executive Director  
CAS-CIAC