

# Montana Chapter

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



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As experts in the health of children and adolescents, we understand the myriad of benefits that youth derive from participating in sports. While we navigate these challenging times together, we recognize the important role that sports can play in the physical and emotional well-being of youth. However, as COVID-19 infections continue to rise in our country and state, we appreciate the difficulty in weighing those benefits against the very real risks of COVID-19 to athletes, coaches, officials, their families, and our communities. This guidance is intended to inform schools, coaches, parents, and athletes on safer evidence-based strategies to mitigate risk during participation in youth sports.

The risk of transmission of COVID-19 during sports varies based on the disease burden within a local community as well as the nature of the individual sport. The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) classifies the winter sports of basketball, ice hockey, wrestling, dance, and competitive cheer as high to moderate risk because of the close physical contact that occurs between athletes, as well the fact that these sports are played indoors (For a full list of high and moderate risk sports see attached statement from the NFHS). **Given the high transmission rates of COVID-19 in our state, we support the decision made by the Montana High School Association (MHSА) to delay the start of the winter sports seasons. We urge elementary schools, middle schools, and sports leagues/clubs to follow the COVID-related guidance put forth by the MHSА. Furthermore, we support strict adherence to public health requirements put in place to protect local communities.**

In the absence of traditional competition between teams, we encourage sports programs to be creative in promoting exercise and developing skills among youth athletes. **It is important to recognize that transmission among athletes is not limited to practices and competition, but also occurs during sport-associated activities like team meetings, social celebrations, and workouts.** The MHSА has released comprehensive sport-specific COVID-19 guidance in their Winter Sports Requirements/Considerations. To compliment these MHSА recommendations, we have compiled the following additional considerations based on guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Public Health Policy Lab, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

1. Promote skill-building drills at home or outdoors when feasible.
2. Increase space between athletes in practice areas.

3. Organize consistent pods of small sizes (ideally from the same school) that do not mix youth. This is especially important in indoor areas such as gyms and weight rooms.
4. Face masks should be worn by all coaches and athletic staff as well as athletes when they are not actively competing.
5. Limit nonessential visitors, spectators, and volunteers.
6. Athletes, family members, and coaches should assess for COVID-19 symptoms daily and maintain a strongly enforced sick policy.
7. Support contact tracing efforts - encourage athletes and parents to be truthful about close contacts.
8. Limit the size or delay social gatherings associated with sports, such as team dinners.
9. Limit the use of carpools or van pools. When riding in an automobile to a sports event, encourage players to ride to the sports event with persons living in their same household.
10. Athletes who test positive for COVID-19 must have medical clearance before returning to competition (see attached statement from MTAAP).
11. Follow local public health department guidance regarding gathering sizes, spectators, and all public health measures.

More information about these and other strategies can be found in the following references:

- CHOP youth sports reference guide  
<https://media.chop.edu/data/files/pdfs/return-to-youth-sports-policy-statement.pdf>
- Considerations for Youth Sports. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/youth-sports.html>
- AAP interim guidance: Return to sports  
<https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-interim-guidance-return-to-sports/>
- National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Sports  
[https://www.nfhs.org/media/3812287/2020-nfhs-guidance-for-opening-up-high-school-athletics-and-activities-nfhs-smac-may-15\\_2020-final.pdf](https://www.nfhs.org/media/3812287/2020-nfhs-guidance-for-opening-up-high-school-athletics-and-activities-nfhs-smac-may-15_2020-final.pdf) [Medicine Advisory Committee \(SMAC\)](#)

Sincerely,

Committee on Child Health and COVID-19  
Montana Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics