

FAQs – RHODE ISLAND YOUTH AND AMATEUR SPORTS November 2020

How are the new executive order (EO), regulations and guidance on sports different from the previous Phase III regulations and guidance?

The new executive order effective November 9th, regulations and guidance strengthen the current policies to help keep athletes, coaches, sport facility staff, and spectators safe, especially as the approaching winter moves most sports indoors. While the benefits of sports are clear, they also are settings where intensive activity and socializing can lead to community spread of COVID-19. The updated rules continue a prohibition on competition among teams for high-risk sports. Other areas of focus areas include:

- requiring face coverings at all times, including during active play;
- prohibiting hosting tournaments, matches, games, etc. with out-of-state teams for moderate and high-risk sports;
- limiting spectators to two parents or guardians per athlete (plus siblings) for athletes under age 18;
- stricter requirements for opening locker rooms; and
- stricter contact tracing and record-keeping protocols for facilities and teams.

These new rules reflect input from many stakeholders who provided ideas and expressed concerns. We will keep working with facility owners, team leaders, leagues and schools to keep kids active and safe, and to allow adults opportunities to enjoy amateur sports.

What did you base your sports classifications on?

The sports classifications are based on two sources:

- National Federation of State High School Associations, Sports Medicine Advisory Committee: [Guidance for Opening Up High School Athletics and Activities](#)
- United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee, [USOPC Guidance: Return to Training and Sport Event Planning](#)

These organizations classify sports into “lower, moderate, and higher risk” based on what is known about the transmission of COVID-19 and the inherent nature of each sport or recreational activity as traditionally played. The factors considered in determining the categories include: the type and duration of contact between players, whether equipment is shared, if the sport takes place indoors or outdoors, the number of players on a team, etc. Other New England states and New York use the categories developed by these organizations. It is important to understand that we reserve the right to adjust the categories based on new information and COVID-19 transmission data.

Why are you prohibiting high-risk sports?

High risk sports like wrestling, football, boys/men’s lacrosse, and competitive cheer involve close, sustained contact between participants. That means that the respiratory particles that carry COVID-19 will travel more easily between participants. This is even more concerning as sports move indoors for the winter. Just as football was canceled this fall, we will not allow competition between teams for high risk sports.

Can athletes who play high-risk sports practice? What can they do?

Yes, athletes are allowed to practice, and even to scrimmage within their own team – but not with other teams. Teams playing higher-risk sports are not allowed to practice, compete or scrimmage with other teams.

Why are you prohibiting hosting tournaments, matches, games, etc. with out-of-state teams for moderate- and high-risk sports and prohibiting teams from traveling to other states for games?

With COVID-19 cases increasing nationwide many states are discouraging travel to limit the spread of COVID-19. Traveling to another state for tournaments or games often means an increase in social gathering sizes and close contacts. The data shows a number of positive cases have been the direct result of a players participating in games and tournaments with teams from out-of-state.

Are you prohibiting out-of-state travel for sports? Can hockey teams travel to NH to play in tournaments?

With COVID-19 cases increasing in Rhode Island, the state is strongly discouraging travel out of state– as are other states who are looking to limit the spread of COVID-19. The current executive order prohibits all high and moderate risk sports teams, which includes ice hockey, from participating in tournaments, games, matches, practices or competitive play with out of state teams.

There is a limited exception for professional and intercollegiate athletic programs which follow very strict COVID-19 protocols.

Are athletes from Rhode Island allowed to play on out-of-state teams?

The new requirements do not prohibit a Rhode Island player from playing on an out-of-state team. However, a person who plays on an out-of-state team must comply with Rhode Island's and the other state's travel policies.

Are athletes from other states allowed to play on Rhode Island teams?

Yes, so long as they are complying with current Rhode Island travel restrictions. Currently, none of our neighboring states are on the restricted travel list. So, an individual from Massachusetts who plays on a Rhode Island team could continue to participate on that team.

What is the new policy on spectators?

For sporting events or practices with athletes under the age of 18, no more than two parents/guardians of the athlete and the athlete's siblings *may* attend, provided all other COVID-19 safety protocols are met including, capacity limits for the sporting venue. Spectators are prohibited from attending all other sporting events or practices, which means they are not allowed at amateur adult competitions.

Why the new policy on spectators?

Some facilities and leagues are experiencing issues with parents and families congregating in parking lots, in vehicles, or at nearby restaurants while waiting for their children. We believe that allowing limited spectators under controlled conditions is preferable to these types of informal social gatherings. We also understand that parents may be concerned for the safety of their children while at a sports practice.

How are you going to enforce the limits on spectators?

We hope that parents and guardians of our young athletes will do the right thing and follow the executive order and sporting facilities rules. Facility owners are required to follow these rules and can bar teams who violate them from using their facilities. We will work with the facilities and the leagues to address any violations, which could lead to fines, prohibitions, and/or shutting down of facilities.

How do you expect athletes to play wearing masks, especially in a sport like hockey?

At present, high school team sports are being conducted with athletes wearing masks, and other states (like Vermont and Massachusetts) already have this rule for active play, and report that it is working well. Playing with a mask on may require some modifications (e.g., shorter shifts, more substitutes), but it is necessary to restrict the respiratory spread of COVID.

**Wearing masks makes it hard for us to compete and practice.
Are there any exceptions?**

We know it may be uncomfortable or inconvenient to wear a mask while actively participating in athletic activities. However, the new rules on face coverings for sports are the most effective way to reduce the risk of COVID-19 among people who participate in sports. Masks must be worn for sports activities at all times, including during active play. There are exceptions for water sports, children under two years of age, those who are developmentally unable to wear a mask, and when wearing a mask would damage a person's health. We encourage you to find ways to modify sports activities in response to new rules, such as more frequent breaks, shorter games or other accommodations.

Why are you exempting colleges and professional sports?

College and professional indoor sporting facilities and teams are highly regulated with NCAA rules and league rules (i.e., Big East, Ivy League, etc.) or associated professional rules being followed. For example, starting in November, most college athletes are being tested for COVID-19 three times per week.

Locker rooms are germ incubators. Why not just close them?

We recommend closing locker rooms and arriving at practices and games ready to play. However, there are instances where doing that causes other problems, such as athletes changing clothes in open areas resulting in privacy issues. So, in order to provide an opportunity for student-athletes and others to change privately and take off wet bathing suits or put on

protective equipment, we are allowing locker rooms to stay open, with the requirement that they adhere to strict standards, including limiting capacity, marking distancing, and sanitizing regularly.

What's the impact on martial arts and dance programs?

Martial arts and dance are considered high risk sports when performed competitively in any groups. In-person tournaments and competitions between teams are not allowed for higher risk sports. Martial arts and dance lessons and programs may conduct practices and lessons and in-team competitions; they should avoid sustained, close contact. Martial arts and dance programs may participate in virtual competitions, where all competitors remain in their home studio and submit video presentations.

Will indoor sports facilities and affected businesses receive any financial assistance for having to close for a week?

DEM is working to establish a program to reimburse indoor sports facilities for losses associated with the shutdown from November 2nd through November 8th. That program should be up and running by the end of November with payments made by the end of the year.

If we are an indoor facility offering a remote learning program or before/after school care program, can we continue to operate this portion of our programming?

If you hold a DHS license to legally operate a child care and/or before/after school program, you may continue to operate these

activities in accordance with [DHS Child Care Licensing Regulations](#) and [CDC Guidelines](#). If you are currently operating a program that provides direct supervision to four or more unrelated children, you must become licensed with the Department of Human Services. Please visit the [DHS website](#) for more information or contact Nicole.Chiello@dhs.ri.gov