



# Rules Modifications & Guidelines

## Football

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 COVID-19 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

## **Football Specific Modifications**

### **Competition/Game Management**

- Facial coverings worn at all times during play and on sidelines; Tube style “gaiters” are not permitted. Balaclava style face coverings that are multi-layered and are extended over the full head are permitted.
- “Splash guards” are acceptable in addition to face masks
- No pregame/postgame handshakes
- Team rosters for game day competition on the field cannot exceed 45 players and a maximum of 6 coaches. Teams are required to 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.

- In order to limit the total number of people in proximity to the field of play, game day personnel with an assigned responsibility are the only people permitted on the sidelines.
- Teams must work to reduce the number of players on the sideline. Injured players with no ability to play in a contest are not permitted on the sidelines. Dressed players should be those with a potential opportunity or need to play. Coaches must not have players in uniform on the sideline for the sole benefit of dressing and being with the team.
- It is recommended that swing players should be limited when possible.
- Team Box: The Team Box for players ONLY is expanded to the 10 Yard Lines. Players must maintain proper social distancing of 6ft while on the sideline
- Chains, pylons, and other field equipment should be sanitized after setup/before the contest and after the contest is over
- Each team is responsible for their own:
  - Sanitizer
  - Face coverings
  - Towels, water, ice, med kit, footballs
- ~~According to EEA guidelines, no more than 25 players or participants can be on one half of the playing field at any one time. Teams that have more than 25 players can still allow additional players to wait on the sidelines or bleachers to substitute for players on the field. To ensure group separation, opposing teams must be spaced at least 14 feet apart while sharing the field.~~
- Coin Toss/pregame/overtime
  - Limit attendees for the player/officials' conference
    - Ref, 1 umpire, 1 player from each team
    - All conferences will be held at midfield with 6ft social distance between participants
- Huddles
  - Spacing between players and facing the same direction
    - Consider hand signals/signage from sideline (wristbands)
    - Eliminate hand holding in huddles/during the anthem
    - Limit close contact and/or huddles when possible
- Spectator limitations
  - Based upon current EEA/state guidelines for large crowd gatherings
- Mandatory water breaks at the halfway point of each quarter signaled by the referee at first change of possession after the 6:00 mark in the quarter.
- 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.
- Team Time-outs are extended to 2 minutes.
- The intermission between periods (first/second and third/fourth) as well as the time period following a try, successful field goal or safety and prior to the succeeding free kick will also be extended to a maximum of two minutes.
- Authorized team time-out conferences will take place near the bottom of the field numbers between the 25 Yard Lines.
- To allow for 6' social distancing for all game officials, the coaches' area minimum of 2-yard belt between the front of team box and the sideline becomes a restricted area when the ball is live. No player, non-player, or coach shall be in the restricted area when the ball is live. First offense warning, second 5-yard

penalty and subsequent violations result in a 15-yard penalty.

- Clock operators and all personnel in the press box must maintain 6' social distancing from all other personnel as well as wear face coverings at all times.
- Halftime is 10 minutes. Teams will be assigned an area to gather outside of locker room based upon EEA guidelines.

### Game Officials

- Positioning can be altered to maintain social distancing (i.e. line judges)
- Officials shall use alternative whistles such as electronic whistles; air horns are permissible.
- Water: Officials will need to bring their own water containers to the game.
- The Mechanics for a U will be working the CJ Position with a Crew of 5 Officials this year.
- When possible, schools should provide a designated area for officials to prepare and use restroom facilities before the game, break during halftime and at the end of the game.

### Practices

- ~~No football team activities may take place indoors.~~ Team planning should consider innovative coaching methods, with zoom meetings and film sessions in lieu of group/in-person meetings.
- Overall recommendations:
  - Athletes will follow school protocols for daily reporting of symptoms/illness
- Before/After Practice:
  - Athletes will maintain social distancing on the sidelines (min. 6 feet apart)
  - Each athlete will have a designated area for their bag/water/personal belongings
  - Coaches must maintain social distancing when addressing the team (avoiding close huddles, etc.)
  - Athletes must bring their own water, masks, personal sanitizing materials (no sharing between athletes)
  - Avoid group contact among teammates (high fives, group huddles, etc.)
- **During practice, from March 10 through the end of the season:**
  - A coach may only conduct full contact drills up to 30 minutes per week (45 minutes during a week without a scheduled game). The intent of this rule is to limit full contact participation of each student to 30 minutes during a week of practice (45 minutes during a week without a scheduled game). During this time, full contact is allowed in no more than 2 practices per week, no more than 15 minutes per day, and consideration should also be given to limiting full contact on consecutive days
  - **According to EEA guidelines, no more than 25 players or participants can be on one half of the playing field at any one time. Teams that have more than 25 players can still allow additional players to wait on the sidelines or bleachers to substitute for players on the field. To ensure group separation, opposing teams must be spaced at least 14 feet apart while sharing the field.**
- Drill work with Footballs:

- As per the EEA guidelines, all equipment (blocking pads, footballs, etc.) must be disinfected at the end of each practice.
- Limit contact drills (tackling, blocking, etc.)
- Modify group size - work with smaller groups where possible
- Per EEA guidance, practice or team activities indoors are only permitted at Level 1. From EEA guidelines, “For the avoidance of doubt, football and rugby may conduct Level 1 play indoors but must only engage in Level 2 and 3 activities outdoors.”
- Practice or team activities are not permitted indoors. From EEA guidelines, “Sports and activities included in the Higher Risk category that require intermittent close proximity or moderate contact (basketball, lacrosse, ice hockey, ultimate frisbee) or sports that require high contact but are only performed outdoors (football and rugby) can participate in Level 1, 2 and 3 type of play. For the avoidance of doubt, football and rugby must only engage in the permissible activities outdoors.”

### Additional School Considerations

- Predetermine area for shelter in case of inclement weather
  - Recommend a space for players/coaches/officials where social distancing can still take place
- Assign a ball sanitizing person(s) for each team when possible
- Establish seat markings in the bleachers for spectators to maintain social distancing
- Maintain a record of all individuals present at team activities
- Home team is responsible for sanitizing and prepping all facilities and equipment

# EDUCATIONAL ATHLETICS



MIAA | 33 Forge Pkwy | Franklin, MA 02038 | 508-541-7997

