

# RETURNING TO SPORT DURING COVID-19

Returning to sport during the COVID-19 pandemic will not be a simple or overnight process. Administrators, coaches, parents, and athletes are making tough decisions about what participation will look like. These decisions are likely to change as our understanding of the virus and its trajectory develops. While many people are excited about the potential to return to in-person practice and competition, they also have concerns about how to do it safely.



*You should always follow guidance and requirements from federal, state, and local authorities, departments of public health, and your organization regarding sport participation during COVID-19.*

## **ABUSE AND MISCONDUCT**

Remember that **child abuse**, **sexual misconduct**, **emotional misconduct**, **physical misconduct**, **bullying**, **hazing**, and **harassment** are prohibited under the [SafeSport Code](#).

Online safety continues to be important because many sport-related interactions are still happening online. Keep following the guidelines in the U.S. Center for SafeSport's [Keeping Your Kids Safe Online During COVID-19](#) resource.



The COVID-19 environment also provides new avenues for abuse and misconduct. Examples of behaviors that could be considered abuse or misconduct include:

- Repeatedly making fun of someone who wears a mask, chooses online participation options, or takes other COVID-19 related health precautions.
- Intentionally violating requirements regarding physical distancing, sharing of equipment, and other prevention measures.
- Penalizing an athlete for following health department guidance or state regulations regarding COVID-19.
- Intentionally touching someone (such as hugging or high fiving them) who has said they do not want to be touched.
- Intentionally exposing others to COVID-19 after having been exposed to others who tested positive, and not disclosing their exposure.

**The U.S. Center for SafeSport suggests coaches, parents, and athletes keep the following in mind when considering or returning to in-person sport participation:**

### **COACHES**

- Remember that many families and individuals are still struggling with their basic life needs (such as food, housing, and protecting at-risk family members). Be as flexible as possible with participation options.
- Pay attention to athletes' mental health and continue to provide support.
- Keep in mind that athletes had different levels of access to training and conditioning while they were at home. Adjust workout and practice plans to minimize injury.
- Athletes who had COVID-19 may have continuing health challenges that keep them from performing at their pre-COVID level. Do not push them into harmful or unhealthy behavior.
- For coaches who work with minors: Make sure your practice and training activities comply with all COVID-19 safety guidelines AND your organization's one-on-one policies.



- Consider creative activities to increase team cohesion that do not rely on in-person gatherings (such as online scavenger hunts, physically distant walks or runs, etc.).
- Establish ongoing communication with athletes and parents about their concerns and suggestions for safely returning to sport. Remember their feelings may change as the COVID-19 environment and knowledge changes.
- Take the precautions you need to protect your own health, even if those are more restrictive than required.
- Be a role model in following public health guidance, such as wearing a mask, staying home when sick, and finding alternatives to high fives and fist bumps.

## PARENTS/GUARDIANS

- Put your family's health first, even if others are pressuring you to let your child return immediately. Each family is different, and you need to do what is best for your family.
- Communicate with your child's coach about your concerns for safely returning to sport.
- Ask your child's coach or sport administrator how they plan to follow requirements for returning to sport. Talk to your child to determine if those plans are being followed.
- Talk with your child about their feelings about returning to sport. Keep in mind your child may be excited and concerned at the same time. Validate their excitement and talk about their concerns.
- Encourage your child to be involved (in an age-appropriate way) with decisions about returning to sport.
- Teach your child proper health and safety precautions, such as physical distancing, mask wearing, equipment cleaning, hand washing, and not sharing food or drink.
- Make a plan with your child on what they can do if someone on their team does not follow health guidelines.
- Check in with your child as the season progresses, especially as they return to in-person practice or competition.
- Pay attention to your child's mental health and look for **signs of depression, anxiety, or changes in behavior.**



## ATHLETES

- Take care of yourself and your mental health. Reach out for help if you are feeling depressed, anxious, or suicidal. Both the [Crisis Text Line](#) and the [Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) offer free, 24/7 support.
- Find safe ways to stay connected with your teammates and friends.
- Respect other people's boundaries and choices related to physical interactions.
- Say something to your coach, parents, or another trusted adult if you notice bullying or harassment among your teammates.
- Say something to your parents or another trusted adult if your coach or another administrator violates health and safety guidelines. Examples include refusing to let someone wear a mask, having athletes share equipment without proper sanitization, or not obeying physical distancing requirements.



## RESOURCES

- From the USOPC: [U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee Coronavirus Guidance](#)
- From the CDC: [Considerations for Youth Sports](#) and [Youth Sports Program FAQs](#)
- The Aspen Institute, Project Play: [COVID-19 Risk Assessment Tool](#) and [Family Checklist](#)
- [Return to Sports and Exercise during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Guidance for High School and Collegiate Athletic Programs](#)