

UPMC Playbook Update: December 2020

In Nov 2020 the PA DOH released revised recommendations based on extensive increases in COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths in the Pennsylvania community. One of these orders is to wear a mask when indoors and outdoors “at all times”. This includes while actively engaged in workouts, competitions, and on the sideline, etc. The PA DOH recognizes in these orders when the mask impedes breathing or creates an unsafe condition (noting that “mere discomfort” is not considered a risk) other alternatives can be considered. The following is an excerpt from the American Academy of Pediatrics Return to Sports Guidelines, published in Sept 2020: “The World Health Organization does not recommend use of a cloth face covering during vigorous exercise, and the CDC cautions that some people who are engaged in high-intensity activity may not be able to wear a cloth face covering. When no vigorous exercise is being performed and physical distancing is not possible, a cloth face mask should be worn. Cloth face coverings should not be worn in water activities (e.g., swimming, diving) or in activities where they could pose an injury risk as a result of catching on equipment or accidentally impairing vision during performance of sport (e.g., gymnastics, cheer). Special considerations may be appropriate when there is an increased risk of heat-related illness.”

[Link to the American Academy of Pediatrics Return to Sports Guidelines](#)

Since the development of the Playbook in May 2020, the science of COVID transmission has not substantially changed. However, given the current community disease load (December 2020) the likelihood of exposure has considerably increased. Each school, sport, and program will need to individually determine their risk level based on COVID disease prevalence, sport level of contact (high vs low), venue (indoor vs outdoor), and athlete tolerance of masking. It continues to be imperative that even if a mask is not tolerable during activity due to safety and or physiologic concerns, that ALL individuals when not active be appropriately masked without ANY exception. This includes all coaches, staff, parents, and players at all times while not participating. All individuals should continue to maintain 6-foot social distancing anytime possible (locker rooms, sidelines, benches etc.). Sanitizing procedures with frequent hand washing, equipment cleaning, and venue disinfection procedures should be diligently enforced.

Finally, while we recognize the immense benefits of athletics to individuals and communities, from youth through professional sports, teams need to have flexibility and willingness to pause all activities for periods of time if the health and safety of participants is in question. Activity cessation decisions should be based on COVID contact and or community disease prevalence. These circumstances will need to be evaluated on a team by team basis by the administration and coaching staff, with guidance from the medical team at each individual school or program.

We at UPMC are committed to working together to get to the other side of the COVID pandemic. The challenges have been constantly changing and test everyone’s physical and mental stamina. UPMC will continue to be your partner as we navigate this storm together and we will continue to provide guidance and updates as they evolve.