



## ATHLETIC RETURN TO PLAY- GAME PROTOCOL

### Spring Sports - March 2021

### Pioneer Athletic Conference

As of 3/9/2021

#### Overview

While it is not possible to eliminate all risk of spreading and contracting COVID-19, current science suggests there are many steps schools can take to reduce the risks to students, coaches, and their families. The Pioneer Athletic Conference will take the necessary precautions to ensure the safety of students and staff while following the recommendations of federal, state and local governments as well as the CDC, NFHS and PIAA. As more information becomes available about COVID-19, this plan may be modified and updated.

Guidance within this document stems from information released by the PIAA on 3/3/2021 with regards to school participation in 2021 spring sports. Those guidelines from the PIAA can be found at the below link:

[PIAA Spring Sports Guidelines](#)

#### Attendance

Any student-athlete or coach attending a practice or competition should be in good physical condition. Anyone feeling sick or experiencing any unusual symptoms associated with Covid-19 must stay home to protect themselves and others.

If a student-athlete starts to feel sick at a practice or competition, the individual should immediately inform one of the coaches who should isolate the individual. The parent/guardian should be alerted immediately and the student-athlete should be sent home.

#### PPE Requirements/Face Coverings

All coaches directly interacting with student-athletes must wear face coverings at all times. Any exceptions to this – for medical reasons – must be approved by the Athletic Director.

Schools are required to follow the updated guidelines that require athletes to wear masks the entire time (with the exception of boys lacrosse and girls lacrosse goalies as listed below in their respective sports guidelines), unless they fall under an exception in Section 3 of the Order. **The home school rules will apply to the away school regarding masking.**

PA DOH – Strengthening Masking Order:

FAQs <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Guidance/Universal-Masking-FAQ.aspx>

**Does the order apply to athletics and sports activities?** *Yes. Everyone who participates in sport activities including coaches, athletes (including cheerleaders), and spectators must wear a face covering, such as a mask, unless they fall under an exception in Section 3 of the Order or in the sport of boys lacrosse and as a girls lacrosse goalie, athletes have a mouth guard and a helmet with a face shield in lieu of a face covering.*

**Indoors:** *Coaches, athletes (including cheerleaders), and spectators must wear face coverings, when indoors and where another person or persons who are not members of the individual's household are present in the same space, irrespective of physical distance. This includes while actively engaged in workouts, competition, and on the sidelines, etc.*

**Outdoors:** *Coaches, athletes (including cheerleaders), and spectators must wear face coverings at all times. This includes while actively engaged in workouts, competition, and on the sidelines, in the dugout, etc.*

### **Contest Screening**

The PAC screening process for home and away teams must be completed prior to any contest. During this screening process, coaches, athletic trainers and student-athletes must be wearing a face covering. Documentation will be done via a paper/computerized form or the use of online documentation. Responses of screening questions for each student-athlete is to be recorded and stored, and may be used to keep a record of everyone present, should a student, coach, or staff member develop COVID-19.

If a student-athlete or coach has symptoms, the situation will be handled per the schools health and safety plan.

If a student-athlete or coach gets sick, he/she will be isolated and sent home and must follow the student-athlete/coach return to play protocol.

### **Social Distancing**

While contact is permitted, coaches and student-athletes should stay 6 feet apart whenever possible. An example of this includes during warm-up runs and stretching. Student-athletes should continue to remain 6 feet apart when not actively participating (i.e. sidelines, bench).

### **Hygiene**

At the conclusion of contests, student-athletes should wash their hands or use hand sanitizer. Student-athletes will be encouraged to shower as soon as they get home from an athletic event. In addition, student-athletes should be encouraged to wash all garments and wash or disinfect equipment after each practice or contest.

### **Travel to Away Competitions**

The approved PAC screening process must be completed by athletic department personnel prior to a team leaving for an away event.

### **Locker Rooms**

Currently, many schools have their locker rooms closed and student athletes are asked to come dressed for practices and games. Depending on the school, locker rooms may be made available on a limited basis for students to change. Locker rooms that are made available may have a capacity limit that must be monitored by coaches and staff to allow for proper social distancing. School administration will communicate availability and capacities with opposing schools prior to hosting events.

### **Team Meals**

Family-style team meals will not be permitted. If there are team functions that require meals, these should be individually packaged and participants must stay 6 feet apart when eating.

### **Home Competitions**

All home competitions will follow the parameters of this plan and the home schools health and safety plan. Individual sports will have specific guidelines based on the facility being used and the unique requirements of each sport.

The approved PAC screening process must be completed by athletic department personnel prior to entering the facility for a home event.

Contest sites will have sanitation supplies available for players, coaches, officials and games workers.

## **Competition Considerations**

The pre-game conference in all sports will be limited to one official, the head coach from each team and one captain from each team. These individuals should be a minimum of 6 feet apart and/or be wearing masks. This includes the coin toss as well. These conferences will be moved to the center of the court/field and away from other coaches or players warming up.

Coaches and players on the bench should be wearing masks and sitting 6 feet or more apart.

The scoring table will be limited to the home team scorer and/or timer. If space is available, the visiting team scorer will be permitted at the table. All seating will be 6 feet or more apart when possible.

During the pre-game introductions there will be no hand shaking. In addition, all players and coaches must be 6 feet apart during introductions. There will be no post-game handshake line between teams and officials.

## **Spectator Information**

The Pioneer Athletic Conference encourages all member school districts to comply with all federal, state, county, and local mandates regarding spectator attendance and indoor/outdoor gatherings for athletic contests. The conference permits school districts to set their own spectator protocols in consultation with their school solicitor.

All spectators will be required to wear face coverings at all times and will not be allowed to enter the playing surface or bench area.

The Pioneer Athletic Conference understands the importance of spectators being a part of the game and experience for our student athletes. We believe that spectators add an important piece to athletic events and serve as a venue for our student athletes to be supported, uplifted, and encouraged during and after the contest. Due to the limited approved spectators, schools are encouraged to livestream the event for everyone's viewing.

## **Gathering Limitations:**

All sports-related gatherings must conform to the most recent guidelines on safe gathering limits released by the Department of Health on March 1st, 2021 <https://www.pa.gov/guides/responding-to-covid-19/#COVIDMitigationinPennsylvania>. Under the new amendment, venues hosting events or gatherings must determine their established occupancy limit as defined by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Life Safety Code and then apply the attendee calculator to determine how many attendees are permitted to attend the event or gathering.

Please also review the All Sports Guidance document [All Sports Guidance Limit](#) which was released by the Governor's Office on June 10th and updated on November 19th.

## **Considerations for Spectators:**

Spectators are permitted.

Individuals are required to wear face coverings in accordance with the Secretary of Health's Order effective November 18th, 2020 [Face Coverings](#). FAQ's on Order- [FAQs on Order](#).

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- Caregivers or spectators should not enter the field of play or bench areas.
- Non-essential visitors, spectators, and volunteers should be limited when possible, including activities with external groups or organizations. Parents should refrain from attending practices or volunteering to assist with coaching.
- Caregivers and coaches should assess levels of risk based on individual athletes on the team who may be at a higher risk for severe illness.
- Caregivers should monitor their children for symptoms prior to any sporting event. Children and athletes who are sick or showing symptoms must stay home.
- Seating areas, including bleachers, must adhere to social distancing requirements of at least 6 feet of spacing for anyone not in the same household. To assist with proper social distancing, areas should be clearly marked.

### **Consideration for Coaches**

All facilities utilized will be cleaned and sanitized on a regular basis. The Director of Buildings and Grounds will establish a schedule for cleaning.

- Coaches may access the building at select doors utilizing their access cards in order to gather necessary equipment/materials for practices and games.
- Communicate your guidelines in a clear manner to students and parents.
- Consider conducting workouts in “pods” of same students always training and rotating together in practice to ensure more limited exposure if someone develops an infection.
- Keep accurate records of those athletes and staff who attend each practice in case contact tracing is needed.
- Coaches may have to limit game day squad sizes for social distancing purposes.
- Coaches should bring their own water bottle(s) and follow established guidelines for hydration.
- Coaches should emphasize the importance of social distancing, hydration and hygiene with their student-athletes.

### **Consideration for Parents/Guardians**

(A family’s role in maintaining safety guidelines for themselves and others):

- Parents/Guardians should monitor their children of any symptoms prior to any sporting activities. Children who are sick or showing symptoms must stay home. (If there is any doubt, stay home).
- Parents/Guardians and coaches should assess levels of risk based on individual athletes on the team who may be at a higher risk for severe illness.
- Provide personal items for your child and clearly label them.
- Disinfect your student’s personal equipment after each practice or contest.
- Inform coaches if your student-athlete has been exposed to someone who is known to have COVID19.
- Be prepared with face coverings for members of your family if permitted to attend events.

### **Considerations for Media**

- Media members should complete a personal health assessment daily. Any media member who attends a game in person will be subject to school district Covid-19 screenings including having his/her temperature taken.
- The media must make contact with the school prior to attending to make appropriate arrangements for attendance.
- Media availability may be limited especially if there are limits on capacity. Use of the press box is contingent on the requirements by the teams and coaches.

- Media should be restricted to areas outside of the team areas.
- Interview requests may be limited and only permissible if social distancing is possible.

### **Consideration for Game Workers and Officials**

- Game workers and officials should complete a personal health assessment daily. Individuals working a game will be subject to school district Covid-19 screenings including having his/her temperature taken. Any official or game worker that feels sick should stay home.
- Officials may not have access to the locker room/changing rooms before, during, or after games. All officials should arrive ready to go.
- Maintain 6 feet of social distancing from players, game workers and other officials as much as possible.
- Officials and game workers are encouraged to wear a mask at all times. If any official is addressing a player or a coach less than 6 feet apart, a mask should be worn. This includes between periods/halves and before and after play.
- Officials should provide their own towels and hydration bottles. These should be labeled with each individuals' name on them and should not be shared with anyone.
- If you feel sick, please stay home! Contact the athletic director and your assignor ASAP.

### **Positive Case or Close Contact of COVID-19**

All participants must follow their schools health and safety plan guidelines with regards to a positive case or close contact of COVID-19.

### **Sport-Specific Accommodations:**

**Baseball** - Individuals are required to wear face coverings in accordance with the Secretary of Health's Order effective November 18th, 2020. [Secretary of Health's Order](#)

Outdoors: Coaches, athletes, and spectators must wear face coverings at all times. This includes while actively engaged in workouts, competition, and on the sidelines, in the dugout, etc.

### **PIAA Baseball Rule Considerations:**

- Have hand sanitizer and wipes available at the field.
- Wash stations or sanitizer at each dugout.
- No one touches the score sheet except the scorer.
- Disinfect the bench/dugout prior to competition.
- Stagger seating of fans.
- Each team may provide sanitized balls (bucket) while on defense.
  - Have a bucket of available for used balls so they can be sanitized after the game.
  - Note: If a school is required to provide game balls for their half-inning as the visiting team, this is to be communicated in advance of the contest.
- Sanitize bases after each contest.
- Limit attendees to head coach and one captain from each team plus the plate umpire. Coaches should stay outside the width of the batter's box at home plate, maintaining 6 feet of distance between each person.

### **Considerations for Coaches:**

- Eliminate handshakes post-game.

- Maintain 6' distance between players and umpires.
- No seeds, gum or spitting.

### **Considerations for Players**

- No seeds, gum or spitting.
- Players must clean and sanitize equipment after each game.
- Social distancing on the bench and/or dugout.
- No sharing of water bottles.
- The use of personal equipment is preferred. However, if equipment is shared, it is recommended to sanitize equipment between uses by players.
- Sanitize all equipment after each game.
- Eliminate handshakes post game.
- Eliminate handshakes with coaches/umpires pre-game.
- Pitchers are encouraged not to put their hands to their mouth.
- If the pitcher is wearing a face covering in the field, it must be a solid dark color.

**Boys Lacrosse** - Individuals are required to wear face coverings in accordance with the Secretary of Health's Order effective November 18th, 2020. [Secretary of Health's Order](#)

Outdoors: Coaches, athletes (including cheerleaders), and spectators must wear face coverings at all times. This includes while actively engaged in workouts, competition, and on the sidelines, in the dugout, etc.

Using football as an example, wearing a mask in addition to a mouth guard and a helmet would likely create a medical issue for the athlete whether the athlete is a professional or youth player even if a previous medical issue was not present. For example, the CDC says that "wearing a mask with these types of protective equipment is not safe if it makes it hard to breathe." There are other sports where there are similar concerns that a mask would create a medical issue where one would otherwise not exist in an athlete.

### **PIAA Boys Lacrosse Rule Considerations:**

- Boys Lacrosse Rules Book Modifications (The Field (1-2-7)): The Scorer's Table.
  - Provide adequate spacing for 6-foot social distancing between individuals.
- Boys Lacrosse Rules Book Modifications (The Field (1-2-8)): Players' and Coaches' box.
  - Extend the players' box to end line to ensure proper social distancing.
- Boys Lacrosse Rules Book Modifications (Player Equipment (1-9-2)):
  - Optional Equipment, Face Shields and Masks – Clear, molded, and non-rigid face shields approved by the helmet manufacturer are allowed.
- Boys Lacrosse Rules Book Modifications Players, Coaches, and Other Game Personal:
  - Coaches and officials should attempt to maintain social distancing whenever possible during a game including stick checks, official's meetings, etc.
- Boys Lacrosse Rules Book Modifications (Facing Off (4-3-1, 2, and 3)): Starting Play with Facing Off.
  - The mechanic for faceoffs will be:
    - Place the ball on the ground with players 6+ feet away from each other and the official.
    - The official instructs both players to get into position by saying "Down".
    - When players are positioned, the FO and Lead left officials will check the player's alignment (FO official checks neutral zone and "top to stop" alignment, Lead Left checks verticality by

looking down midfield line) after both officials have backed away, FO official says "Set" (players may not move after "Set")

- The whistle shall be blown quickly with the expectation that the ball is moved quickly into play by the players.

o After a goal, the goalkeeper shall throw or roll the ball out to the official.

#### **Points of Emphasis and Pre/Post Game Considerations:**

- Optional pre-game checks shall occur at or near the wing line opposite the scorer's table.
  - o Players requesting a stick check shall remain socially distanced at all times while waiting. When the official is ready, the player will place their stick on the ground for the official. An official will check the stick and place it back on the ground for the player to retrieve it.

#### **Pregame**

- Limit attendees to head coach and one captain from each team and lead official.
- Make sure athletes are socially distant during the lineup, no handshakes.
- Officials should wear a mask when instructing table personnel. Table personnel should wear mask.
- Minimize table personnel – official scorer and timekeeper, visiting team personnel should be at their team bench and not at the table. Extend the table if needed.

#### **Substitution/Sideline**

- Team bench areas should be more clearly marked to remind players of proper location.
- Split substitution box with a cone so that each team subs in from their own half of the box.
- Players serving a penalty should sit in the back of each team's side of the substitution box to allow for social distancing from others.

#### **Postgame**

- Eliminate post-game handshakes.

**Girls Lacrosse** - Individuals are required to wear face coverings in accordance with the Secretary of Health's Order effective November 18th, 2020. [Secretary of Health's Order](#)

Outdoors: Coaches, athletes (including cheerleaders), and spectators must wear face coverings at all times. This includes while actively engaged in workouts, competition, and on the sidelines, in the dugout, etc.

Using football as an example, wearing a mask in addition to a mouth guard and a helmet would likely create a medical issue for the athlete whether the athlete is a professional or youth player even if a previous medical issue was not present. For example, the CDC says that "wearing a mask with these types of protective equipment is not safe if it makes it hard to breathe." There are other sports where there are similar concerns that a mask would create a medical issue where one would otherwise not exist in an athlete. This face covering exemption will apply only to goalies in girls lacrosse who have a mouth guard and a facemask with a face shield.

#### **PIAA Girls Lacrosse Rules Considerations**

##### **Pregame**

- Pre-Game Meeting (3-5-3)
  - o Limit attendees to head coach and one captain from each team and lead official.
  - o Ensure the pre-game meeting is away from sideline and all individuals maintain a social distance of 6 feet.
  - o Eliminate handshakes following pre-game meeting and at the conclusion of the game.

## Equipment and Protective Clothing

- Equipment and protective clothing (2-4-1, 2-7-3, 2-9-5)
  - Players and officials may wear gloves and long undergarments.
  - Stick Checks:
    - All players will put their sticks on the ground, in a line (not a pile) and players step back to their bench.
    - Officials will then come through and conduct the stick checks without interaction or proximity to the players, and the players will not be in prolonged proximity to one another.

## Table Personnel

- Table Personnel (3-6-1, 3-7-1)
  - Limit to essential personnel only at the table. Statisticians or visiting scorer personnel are not essential. Home team scorer and timer are essential.

## The Draw

- The Draw (5-2)
  - No change from traditional draw mechanics.
  - The goalie should roll or throw the ball to the official after a goal.

## Substitution/Sideline

- Team bench areas should be more clearly marked to remind players of proper location.
- Split substitution box with a cone so that each team subs in from their own half of the box.
- Players serving a penalty should sit in the back of each team's side of the substitution box to allow for social distancing from others.

**Softball** - Individuals are required to wear face coverings in accordance with the Secretary of Health's Order effective November 18th, 2020. [Secretary of Health's Order](#)

Outdoors: Coaches, athletes, and spectators must wear face coverings at all times. This includes while actively engaged in workouts, competition, and on the sidelines, in the dugout, etc.

## PIAA Softball Rule Considerations:

- Face Shields (1-7-1, 1-8-4): Per guidance from the NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee, Plastic shields covering the entire face (unless clear and integrated into the face mask and attached to a helmet) shall not be allowed during contests. Their use during practices increases the risk of unintended injury to the person wearing the shield or teammates.
- Additional Equipment (1-8): Pitchers cannot wear optic yellow cloth facial coverings.
- Pregame Conference (2-14-2): Limit attendees to head coach and one captain from each team plus the plate umpire. Coaches should stay outside the width of the batter's box at home plate, maintaining 6 feet of distance between each person.
- Substitutions: (3-3-3): The verbal exchange should occur 6 feet from the coach to scorer and opposing team when making lineup changes.
- Coaching (3-5-1 NOTE): Umpires should not handle equipment on the field during play. Contact with the game balls should be as limited as possible.
- Coaching (3-5-3, 3-6-14): Coaches who wish to discuss a rule or a ruling on the field must maintain at least 6 feet of physical distance from the umpire.

- Bench and Field Conduct (3-6-6): The number of individuals in the dugout is dependent on the size of dugout. Players and coaches must maintain 6 feet of social distance. NFHS rules allow for dugouts/designated warm up areas to be extended toward the outfield to provide for social distancing; extension must be outside the field of play and away from spectators and general public. (Safety precautions should be taken).
- Exchange of Lineup Cards (4-2-1b): Lineups should be handed to the umpire, and the umpire will verbally approve or ask any questions about the lineup.
- Infractions by the Pitcher (6-2-2): Pitchers are encouraged not to lick fingers or blow into their hands prior to pitching the ball.
- Plate Umpire (10-2-1): The plate umpire is required to wear a face covering behind the plate. The field umpires shall follow the universal masking order. (Plate umpires will follow mechanics as listed in the NFHS rules book.)

### **Softball Umpires Manual Modifications**

- Mechanics Sections 3, 4b and c
  - Base umpires should maintain 6 feet from any player as a starting position when rotated and/or counter rotated.
- Section 2E
  - Keep the catcher and batter at a 6-foot distance when dusting off the plate

**Boys Tennis** – Individuals are required to wear face coverings in accordance with the Secretary of Health’s Order effective November 18th, 2020. [Secretary of Health's Order](#)

Outdoors: Coaches, athletes, and spectators must wear face coverings at all times. This includes while actively engaged in workouts, competition, and on the sidelines, in the dugout, etc.

### **Tennis Match Considerations**

- **PRE-MATCH CONFERENCE:**
  - Limit attendees to any pre-match conference between athletes and coaches. Make sure to maintain social distancing of 6 ft.
  - Instead of shaking hands, tap racquets.
- **TEAM AREAS:**
  - Make sure team personnel observe social distancing of 6 ft.
- **DURING MATCHES:**
  - While there is no evidence that COVID-19 can be transmitted by touching tennis balls, sanitary precautions, such as hand-washing, should still be utilized.
  - Maintain physical distancing if changing ends of the court.
  - Avoid touching your face after handling a ball, racquet, or other equipment.
    - Wash your hands promptly if you have touched your eyes, nose, or mouth.
  - When playing doubles, coordinate with your partner to maintain physical distancing, where possible.
  - Wash your hands thoroughly or use a hand sanitizer before, during (between sets), and after play.
  - Clean and wipe down your equipment, including racquets and water bottles. Use new balls and a new grip, if possible.

- o Use only your own towels and water bottles. Avoid sharing food and touching common surfaces such as court gates, fences, benches, etc.

**Girls and Boys Indoor Track** – Individuals are required to wear face coverings in accordance with the Secretary of Health’s Order effective November 18th, 2020. [\*Secretary of Health's Order\*](#)

Outdoors: Coaches, athletes (including cheerleaders), and spectators must wear face coverings at all times. This includes while actively engaged in workouts, competition, and on the sidelines, in the dugout, etc.

#### **TRACK AND FIELD CONSIDERATIONS:**

- SP, DT, JT should enforce social distancing for all athletes and officials.
  - o To limit contact: athletes can provide their own implements (that pass inspection) and retrieve their own implements after all throws.
  - o If athletes cannot provide their own implements, then it is recommended that implements be sanitized between each use.
- LJ, TJ, HJ, PV should enforce social distancing for all athletes and officials.
  - o To limit contact: athletes should not share vaulting poles.
- Sprint, Hurdle, relay events run entirely in lanes, may use every other lane to assist with distancing.
  - o Blocks should be disinfected after each heat / race.
  - o Recommend not using baskets at start line for apparel.
- Middle Distance and distance races on the track of 800m and longer (any event not run entirely in lanes) are considered moderate risk activities. To minimize contact, events are recommended to be run in alleys or minimally one turn staggers. To limit contact: athletes can provide their own implements (that pass inspection) and retrieve their own implements after all throws.

#### **RULE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS:**

(States should abide by all NFHS rules as a default, adjusting relevant rules as needed to allow for COVID-19 risk mitigation factors where necessary for this year).

- Rule 5-10-5 Current rule: The baton is the implement which is used in a relay race and is handed by each competitor to a succeeding teammate. Gloves are not permitted in relay events.
  - o The use of disposable gloves for the 2021 season by relay participants is permitted.
  - o Schools can bring their own batons, or they should be disinfected after each heat/race.
- Rules 6-4-11 and 6-5-24: Schools may consider alternate ways to conduct the vertical jumps. Lowering the cross bar after competition has begun may be one-way states may modify rules. With small numbers of competitors, schools may wish to jump each athlete to completion.
- **Point of Emphasis:** Rule 4-2-4a. In dual meets, each school is entitled to enter three contestants in individual events, but it is recommended each school be permitted to enter as many contestants as conditions warrant.
  - o This permits additional sections to be run to maximize participation in the event. Schools should communicate the anticipated number of additional sections with their opponent and officials in advance of the meet for planning purposes.