



St. Lawrence County Public Health Department

Dana Olzenak McGuire, PT, PhD ■ Public Health Director
80 State Highway 310, Suite 2 ■ Canton, New York 13617-1476
Phone: (315) 386-2325 ■ Fax: (315) 386-2203

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Contact: 315-386-2325

Higher Risk Sports in St. Lawrence County

Canton, NY – January 28, 2021 - On Friday, January 22, 2021, Governor Cuomo recently announced that effective February 1, 2021, participants in higher-risk sports may participate in individual or distanced group training and organized no/low-contact group training and other types of play, including competitions and tournaments, if permitted by local health authorities. New York State’s [Interim Guidance For Sports And Recreation During The Covid-19 Public Health Emergency](#) categorizes sports and recreation activities as lower risk, moderate risk, and higher-risk. Wrestling, football, ice hockey, basketball, contact lacrosse, competitive cheer/dance and volleyball are among the sports categorized as higher-risk. The St. Lawrence County Public Health Department is providing guidelines for higher risk sports, should organizations and schools choose to offer them.

The resumption of these activities does not mean that they are safe or without risk. Dana McGuire, St. Lawrence County Public Health Director, states “Contact sports increase the risk of COVID-19 transmission. If schools and other organizations, athletes, and their parents/guardians choose to resume higher risk sports, they must do so in a safe manner and give considerable thought to prevent the spread of COVID-19. We must work collaboratively during this pandemic to ensure that our athletes have the opportunity to participate in athletics safely.” More than a dozen counties in the Capital region, North Country and Mohawk Valley have consulted with subject matter experts from local health departments (LHDs), healthcare providers, and healthcare facilities to establish a set of recommendations.

Higher risk sports are allowed subject to NYS Department of Health's [Interim Guidance For Sports And Recreation During The Covid-19 Public Health Emergency](#). The State’s guidance establishes the minimum requirements imposed on entities wishing to engage in the activities however local leagues, facilities, organizations, and schools may issue additional guidance.

The St. Lawrence County Public Health Department is also recommending the following practices be instituted by organizations seeking to recommence high risk sporting activities:

- Each parent/guardian, as a part of any school sponsored or agency sponsored activity, should be required to sign an agency/school developed COVID-19 informed consent clearly explaining the heightened risks associated with participation in the events.
- Sports organizations including schools must prepare a COVID safety plan in accordance with the interim guidance, post it on their website, and submit an email with a link to the plan to SLCCOVID19SharedMailbox@stlawco.org.
- If the organization does not have a website, an electronic or hard copy of the plan must be submitted to the St. Lawrence County Health Department to be kept on file.
- Each safety plan must be approved by the respective agency/school board and school medical director.
- Plans must address how compliance with requirements will be assured.

- Pursuant to the [Interim Guidance For Sports And Recreation During The Covid-19 Public Health Emergency](#), High Risk sporting Tournaments are currently not allowed. Please note that the revised guidance does currently permit tournaments for lower and moderate risk sports.
- High Risk sport activities sponsored or hosted by a local school district must comply with the corresponding school's transportation plan. Separate buses are required for each team. Carpooling is strongly discouraged.
- As a part of the developed COVID safety plan, the [Interim Guidance For Sports And Recreation During The Covid-19 Public Health Emergency](#) mandates that health screenings be required for all employees, coaches, players and spectators prior to any sporting activity.
- As a part of the developed COVID safety plan, the Interim Guidance For Sports And Recreation During The Covid-19 Public Health Emergency requires a system for logging attendance by all individuals associated with the practice or competition, including referees/officials and spectators. The system must capture names, phone numbers, email addresses and counties of residence, and be kept on file with the host district/agency for 15 days.
- While not mandated, it is recommended that each student/athlete, coach, manager, referee/official, or other individual associated with the higher-risk sport undergo weekly testing (unless the individual has documentation of a positive PCR-based SARS-CoV-2 test within the previous 90 days.) PCR-based SARS-CoV-2 testing is recommended. (Antigen testing, such as Abbott Binax Now is not an acceptable substitute for testing asymptomatic individuals due to documented poor performance in this population, unless high frequency testing is implemented).
- While not mandated, maintenance of practice pods in small sizes without mixing athletes is recommended.
- Pursuant to the [Interim Guidance For Sports And Recreation During The Covid-19 Public Health Emergency](#), responsible parties must ensure that for any indoor sport or recreational activity, capacity is limited to no more than 50% of the maximum occupancy for a particular area as set by the certificate of occupancy. While the same guidance currently permits up to two (2) spectators per participant, it is currently recommended that each participant be limited to one (1) spectator—other capacity restrictions may apply.
- Outside of competitions, practices, and the like, responsible parties should establish plans that ensure all participants, staff, and spectators maintain a 6' social distance at all times possible. This is of special concern in common areas such as lobbies, locker rooms, bathrooms, etc.
- Pursuant to the authority currently vested in the Governor of the State of New York via Executive Law § 29-A, the mandates of the New York on P.A.U.S.E. protocol require all individuals not actively participating in sports to wear acceptable face coverings when in common areas or when unable to physically distance.
- Masks that conform to recommendations from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) must be worn at all times, by all students/athletes, coaches, managers, referees/officials, spectators, individuals dropping off or picking up students/athletes, etc. If students/athletes are unable to wear a mask because of difficulty breathing during high intensity activities or swimming, they must wear a mask at all times when not actively playing, including when on the bench or pool deck.
- Signage, distance markers, and flow control are required.
- Pursuant to the [Interim Guidance For Sports And Recreation During The Covid-19 Public Health Emergency](#), responsible parties must include in any plan developed protocol to clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces on the field, court, or play surface, as well as drinking fountains on a daily basis.
- Each parent/guardian, student-athlete, coach, manager, referee/official must sign an agreement that a condition of ongoing participation includes full cooperation with case investigations and contact elicitation and adherence to isolation and quarantine orders.

Travel for practice or play for lower, moderate, and higher risk sports is prohibited outside of the North Country Region and contiguous counties/regions. Interstate travel is strongly discouraged and must strictly comply with the New York State Executive Order 202.5 and its progeny.

These recommendations for higher risk sports may be modified based on an increase in the positivity rate and/or the presence of more transmissible variants of the COVID-19 virus. Please see the entire Interim Sports and Recreation guidance and safety plan template available at:

- Sports summary guidance:

<https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/SportsAndRecreationSummaryGuidance.pdf>

- Sports detailed guidance:

<https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/SportsAndRecreationMasterGuidance.pdf>

- NYS safety plan template:

https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/NYS_BusinessReopeningSafetyPlanTemplate.pdf

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