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## Guidelines

# Health Guidelines for Resumption of Sports/Athletic Activities in the wake of COVID-19

### Objective

To provide the health guidelines for coaches, athletic trainers, organizers, players/participants (of all ages), spectators and other relevant staff to support youth or adult sporting activities (including practices). This guidance document outlines prevention strategies to reduce the spread of COVID-19 during sports and establishing minimum set of standards to assist athletic programs in resuming participation amid COVID-19.

### Rationale

The participation in sporting activities is crucial and has known health benefits, including promoting physical fitness, mental wellbeing and benefits to immune system (when performed for the right amount of time and intensity). Besides health benefits, these activities also provide a social construct and interaction which is necessary to provide a template for young athletes to learn concepts of teamwork, leadership, work ethics and integrity.

Though we are fully aware of the significance of sport and social interaction, we also recognize there are ongoing infection risks and concerns regarding “COVID-19.” As the medical and public health community continues to deal with the pandemic and its impact on the society, much of the effort has been spent on how to safely return to a “new normal” in the wake of flattening epidemic curve in Pakistan. It is therefore, vital to plan for the safety of athletes and spectators in multiple settings to avert the potential risk of disease transmission.

### Instructions

#### A) Guiding Principle/Phased Approach

The sports activities should be resumed in a phased and staggered manner to help prevent the potential spread of infection.

- **Phase 1:** Groups of only 10 or less people should be at team workouts or practices. Social distancing should remain during these practices.
- **Phase 2:** Team practices can begin (maximum 25 individuals). They should be limited to one on one drills and individualized equipment. Social distancing should be in place for most of the practice.



- **Phase 3:** Full team practices and scrimmages can begin (If community disease load is on a downward trend and there were no confirmed cases of COVID-19 during phase two).
- **Phase 4:** Full competition can begin, but it should be limited to local and regional teams.

## **B) Risk Assessment**

The way sports are played, and the way equipment is shared can influence the spread of COVID-19 among players. It is highly desired to assess risk of disease spread before organizing any tournament/competition of any sport by considering;

- Physical closeness of players, and the length of time that players are close to each other or to the staff/organizers.
- Amount of necessary touching of shared equipment and gear (e.g., protective gear, balls, bats, racquets, mats, or water bottles)
- Ability to engage in social distancing while not actively engaged in play (e.g., during practice, on the side-line, or in the dugout)
- Age of the player/Players at higher risk of developing diseases
- Size of the team
- Travel outside of the local community

Manage the mentioned risks before organizing game related to any sport.

## **C) General Considerations/Key Preventive Approaches**

All players/athletes, coaches/trainers, volunteers, and employees should adopt following measures;

- In general “Contact sports” should be avoided at this stage
- Maintain at least 6 feet/2 meters distance between any two persons.
- Wear a face mask (disposable/cloth face covering) if feasible and whenever people are within six feet of each other. Masks should not be placed on:
  - Anyone who has trouble breathing.
  - When engaging in activities where the mask might become wet
  - When directly participating in the athletic activity.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.
- Follow standard operating procedures for the containment and disposal of used PPE.
- Wash hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or clean hands with an alcohol-based hand rub/sanitizer (70-90% alcohol content), before eating or after touching any surface
- Do not allow spitting and practice respiratory hygiene i.e. sneezing or coughing into a tissue/handkerchief followed by discarding it immediately and hand washing, OR coughing into own elbow.
- Clean and wipe down any equipment, before and after practice or competition.
- Discourage sharing of items that are difficult to clean, sanitize, or disinfect like towels, clothing, or other items players use to wipe their faces or hands.



- Vulnerable group including elderly (age > 65) or people of any age who have underlying medical conditions, should avoid visiting playgrounds/play areas
- Anyone participating in sporting events or practices should for the next 14 days minimize in-person contact with any person 65 years of age or older and people with chronic health conditions such as diabetes and heart disease. This include;
  - maintaining social distancing of at least 6 feet from those individuals,
  - wearing a face covering or mask when near them, and
  - not sharing utensils or other common objects with them.
- Sport events are to be held without spectators.
- Educate the players/athletes, coaches/trainers and other staff to self-monitor for signs and symptoms and stay home, if unwell

#### **D) Holding of Games, Scrimmages, and Practices**

- Athletes, coaches, officials, referees, and umpires **MUST** undergo a healthcare screening prior to starting any activity (practice, scrimmage, or games).
- Coaches and athletic staff must also proactively screen and monitor athletes for symptoms during games and practices. If individuals participating in sporting activities show symptoms, consistent with COVID-19 (temperatures equal to or greater than 99°F, cough or shortness of breath), they must be isolated and health authorities should be notified.
- The suspected/confirmed COVID-19 individual should not allowed to return in practice or game until they have a negative PCR test or a clearance letter from their medical provider.
- Create protocols that minimize crowding at practices.
  - Friends and family should not attend practices to avoid crowding.
  - If necessary for spectators to be at practices, ensure that six foot social distancing is being adhered to and venue/facility guidance is being followed.
- Prioritize outdoor, as opposed to indoor, practice and play as much as possible.
- Limit any nonessential visitors, volunteers, and activities involving external groups or organizations.
- If multiple games are to be held at the same facility, adequate time shall be scheduled between contests to allow for facilities to be cleaned and disinfected, and to minimize interaction between athletes.
- Sports complexes with multiple fields may operate simultaneous games or practices on fields within a complex only if social distancing can be maintained.
- Each individual game or practice at a complex must adhere to the gathering occupancy limits (25 or fewer people indoors, 100 or fewer outdoors, inclusive of players, coaches, staff, etc.), and the facility as a whole may not exceed 50 percent of total occupancy.
- Downtime between events at a tournament should be limited. Discourage teams/athletes from congregating between competition periods.
- When at practice or in competition, any unnecessary contact should be avoided such as handshakes, high fives, fist bumps, or elbow bumps.
- Make sure there are adequate supplies of shared items to minimize sharing of equipment to the extent possible (e.g., protective gear, balls, bats, water bottles); otherwise, limit use of



- supplies and equipment to one group of players at a time and clean and disinfect between use.
- Keep each player's belongings separated from others' and in individually labeled containers, bags, or areas.
  - Hand hygiene should occur before and after each activity.
    - Hands should be cleaned before and after using sporting gloves.
    - Gloves should be cleaned after each use
  - All athletes, coaches, and officials must bring their own water and drinks to team activities. Team water coolers for sharing through disposable cups are not allowed. Fixed water fountains should not be used.
  - If unavoidable, coolers should be properly sanitized after each use, and a new cooler should be used for each team or group.
  - Activities that increase the risk of exposure to saliva must not be allowed including chewing gum, spitting, licking fingers etc.
  - Ice towels should be used only once, then thrown out or washed properly.
  - If food is offered at any event, have pre-packaged boxes or bags for each attendee instead of a buffet or family-style meal. Avoid sharing food and utensils. Offer hand sanitizer or encourage hand washing.

#### **E) Management of Environment/Facility/Venue**

- Use at a game site, when practicable, a clearly designated entrance (deputed with trained personnel for "thermal screening") and a separate clearly designated exit to help maintain social distancing.
- Wherever possible, activities should be re-located to outdoor settings. Otherwise, facility ventilation systems should be both operational and appropriate for the activities practiced within.
- Provide natural ventilation by opening windows and doors wherever possible to increase air flow.
- Post signs in highly visible locations (e.g., at entrances and exits, and in restrooms) to promote everyday protective measures and mitigation strategies.
- Provide visual indication of physical distancing measures to assist players/coaches such as by floor/playing fields markings.
- Make hand sanitizer (70-90% alcohol content), disinfecting wipes, soap and water, or similar cleaning or washing materials readily available at game sites and at entry and exit points.
- The use of locker rooms is not recommended. If they must be used, proper social distancing should apply within the locker room. (i.e. use only every third locker). Proper area for equipment storage and cleaning is recommended.
- Restrooms should be sanitized more frequently by appointed staff.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces on the field, court, or play surface at least daily, or between uses as much as possible.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces, sinks and toilets regularly.
- Increase the frequency of cleaning of gymnasium floors to reduce the risk of transmission from shared objects (e.g., balls)



- Use gloves when removing garbage bags or handling and disposing of trash. Wash hands after removing gloves.
- Devise a mechanism for periodic testing and sentinel surveillance according to public health guidelines to detect outbreaks early in sports settings.
- Designate a responsible person to oversee activities to ensure public health guidelines are followed.

#### **F) Contact Tracing/Surveillance**

- Athletes, staff, trainers and other attendee's contact record must be kept securely for at least 14 days to aid in public health officials in contact tracing if any attendee contract COVID-19 and should contain at a minimum:
  - Full Name
  - Phone or Mobile Number
  - Email Address (Residential , if not available)
  - Data and Time of Visit
  - Carer's name and contact detail for children
- Electronic system or hard copy sign in registers may be used.
- Sentinel Surveillance to be carried out at every event as per guidelines/local public health authority directions.

*Note: The above recommendations are being regularly reviewed by the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations & Coordination and will be updated based on the international & national recommendations and best practices.*

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## References:

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**For more information, please contact:**

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<http://nhsrcofficial.gov.pk/>

<https://www.facebook.com/NHSRCOfficial>

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