

January 29, 2021

TO: Public School Superintendents, Private School Leaders, School Medical Directors, and School Athletic Directors

FROM: Chenango County Department of Health

HEALTH ADVISORY: HIGHER-RISK K-12 SCHOOL SPORTS

SUMMARY

- 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, ice hockey, basketball, contact lacrosse, and volleyball are among the sports categorized as higher risk.
- On January 22, 2021, Governor Cuomo announced that effective February 1, 2021, participants in higher risk sports and recreation activities may partake in individual or distanced group training and organized no/low-contact group training and may partake in other types of play, including competitions and tournaments, only as permitted by their local health departments.
 - The [Interim Guidance For Sports And Recreation During The Covid-19 Public Health Emergency](#) stipulates that the following factors should be considered regarding higher risk sports, which may weigh against permitting such activities:
 - Whether a more-transmissible variant of SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19 disease) has been identified by New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) in the area.
 - NYSDOH’s Wadsworth Center performs SARS-CoV-2 sequencing. In general, SARS-CoV-2 sequencing is not performed by hospital or commercial laboratories.
 - Local rates of SARS-CoV-2 transmission or rate of positivity.
 - Local health departments are not able to estimate the effective reproduction number (Rt), which characterizes the SARS-CoV-2 transmission rate. NYSDOH no longer publishes Rt estimates.
 - The Department of Biostatistics at the [Harvard Chan School of Public Health publishes county-level Rt estimates](#) based on publicly available NYSDOH data.
 - Local ability to monitor and enforce compliance with requirements.
- Effective February 1, 2021, and until otherwise indicated, student-athletes are permitted to participate in K-12 sponsored higher-risk school sports in Chenango County, provided that specific requirements are met.

BACKGROUND

The World Health Organization defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” Regarding SARS-CoV-2 and participation in sports, the American Academy of Pediatrics has indicated that re-engaging in sports activities has physical and psychological health benefits. Participating in sports allows youth to improve their cardiovascular health, strength, body composition, and overall fitness. Mentally, youth may experience benefits from increased socialization and from a more structured routine. Both the psychological and physical benefits support developmental growth and can have immune system benefits.

The State’s decision to permit higher-risk sports and recreation activities does not mean that their risk has changed. Any time people are gathered, there is a risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2, which can lead to serious medical conditions and even death. Symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals can spread the virus. Masking, distancing, and other mitigation measures reduce, but do not eliminate risk. Further, there is a significant risk of transmission to those in the home of an infected student-athlete.

At present, it cannot be predicted who will become severely ill, although older people and those with underlying health conditions are at higher risk. The long-term effects of SARS-CoV-2 are not known; even people with mild cases may experience long-term complications.

Schools, players, parents, and coaches should understand that social interactions outside of an actual practice or competition (e.g. locker rooms, buses) are also potential places of transmission among student-athletes. Regarding clusters of SARS-CoV-2 cases among athletes, at this time, there is insufficient data to determine whether transmission is more likely to have occurred because of the nature of a given sport or because of the social factors and environment surrounding the athletes and teams.

Ultimately, the decision falls on a parents/guardian to decide whether they will allow their children to participate in a given sport or activity.

REQUIREMENTS FOR HIGHER RISK K-12 SCHOOL SPORTS IN CHENANGO COUNTY

Effective February 1, 2021, and until otherwise indicated, student-athletes are permitted to participate in K-12 sponsored higher-risk school sports in Chenango County, provided that the following requirements are met. Understanding the time constraints on the winter sports season districts may begin tryouts practice on February 1st. These activities should follow the applicable updated guidance linked above. These enhanced practices may continue until all the conditions of this approval are met or this office mandates their cessation.

- Each school district’s Board of Education or non-public school’s Board of Directors (or other appropriate person/entity) must approve the district/school’s participation in each specific higher-risk sport.
- Each school superintendent/school leader must oversee the creation of a sport-specific preparedness plan that delineates:
 - A plan administrator, who is responsible for communicating the plan to student-athletes, coaches, parents, trainers, referees/officials, etc.
 - A plan coordinator, who will serve as a point of contact, should any cases be identified. The coordinator must facilitate and assist with case investigation and contact elicitation and

notification.

- A daily system to ensure that no one associated with the practice or competition is ill, including referees/officials and spectators.
 - 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 and email addresses.
 - How practice and game times can be staggered to avoid crowding and congestion when participants, referees/officials and spectators are arriving, playing, and leaving.
 - If feasible, how pods can be created to limit the potential for transmission in the event of an exposure. A pod is a group of student-athletes who only practice or play with members of their own pod.
 - Pods should either practice in physically separate rooms, facilities or areas or steps taken to ensure that pods are appropriately distanced.
 - Teams should avoid reassigning athletes to different pods to the maximum extent possible.
 - The smaller the pod size, the more the team can minimize potential transmission.
 - How sharing of objects (e.g. water bottles, towels, snacks) will be avoided and the use of dedicated personal equipment encouraged.
 - If feasible, how practices or competitions can be held outdoors. If not feasible, how time spent indoors can be minimized.
 - How locker rooms and facility shower use can be avoided.
 - How carpooling can be discouraged to the extent possible.
- Each sport-specific preparedness plan must be approved by the district/school's medical director.
 - Each parent/guardian must sign a district/school developed SARS-CoV-2 informed consent that, at a minimum, acknowledges that:
 - Participation in the higher-risk sport places the student-athlete at risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2.
 - Symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals can spread the virus.
 - Masking, distancing, and other mitigation measures reduce, but do not eliminate risk.
 - At present, it cannot be predicted who will become severely ill if infected.
 - SARS-CoV-2 can lead to serious medical conditions and death for people of all ages.
 - The long-term effects of SARS-CoV-2 are, at present, unknown; even people with mild cases may experience long-term complications.
 - There is a significant risk of transmission to those in the home of infected student-athletes.
 - Older people and people with underlying health conditions are at higher risk of serious disease.
 - Each district/school obtains a medical clearance from the student-athletes healthcare provider.
 - Each district/school establishes and disseminates their own dedicated phone number and email address to allow athletes, parents or others to report alleged failures to adhere to the obligations reflected in these requirements and/or those in NYS' [Interim Guidance For Sports And Recreation During The Covid-19 Public Health Emergency](#).
 - Masks that conform to recommendations from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) must be worn at all times, by all student-athletes, coaches, managers, referees/officials, spectators, individuals dropping off or picking up student-athletes, etc.
 - Any mask that becomes saturated with sweat must be changed immediately.
 - Reusable masks (cloth face coverings) must be washed daily in hot water and not reused until cleaned.
 - Coaches, managers, and other school employees should monitor proper use and correct

improper use by student-athletes, when indicated.

- Each student-athlete, coach, manager, referee/official, or other individual associated with the higher-risk sport must undergo weekly testing, unless the individual has documentation of a positive SARS-CoV-2 test within the previous 90 days.
 - Testing must continue at least weekly until the county's 7 day rolling average positivity rate is below 4%
 - Testing must be arranged or conducted by the district/school.
 - The district/school must report patient-specific results (positive or negative) to Chenango County.
 - The 'home' team is responsible for arranging for and reporting of results from officials/referees.
- Travel for practice or play to, or from anywhere other than the following counties is not permitted.
 - Broome, Cortland, Delaware, Otsego, Madison, Tioga, Tompkins
 - Travel to, or from, any area that has been designated as a red or orange zone is not permitted.
 - Travel to, or from, any area that has been designated as a yellow zone is permitted so long as it adheres to all applicable NYS guidance.
 - Superintendents/school leaders from districts/schools from outside Chenango County must stipulate to the host district/school that no one associated with the team is known to be ill or currently infected with SARS-CoV-2 prior to their team traveling to Chenango County to participate in a practice or competition.
- Districts/schools must limit spectators to minimize the risk of transmission and comply with venue guidance and capacity limits. No more than two spectators per student-athlete may be permitted for indoor sports.
- Multi-team events or tournaments involving higher-risk sports are not permitted in Chenango County.
- Each district/school will maintain at their own expense a valid policy of insurance covering the liability arising from their sponsorship of higher-risk sports teams.
- Each district/school agrees to indemnify and hold harmless the County, its directors, officers, employees and agents from and against any and all claims, actions or liabilities of any nature that may be asserted against them by third parties in connection with participation in higher-risk school sports.