

MARYLAND STATE YOUTH
SOCCER ASSOCIATION

RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES

for a phased approach
to resuming organized
youth soccer in the
State of Maryland



Updated Aug 12, 2020 (Ver. 7)

This document is designed to be a starting point and framework for our affiliate members to use as guidelines as each one continues to discuss their own return to play.

This document is by no means a blanket permission to return to the fields. Each member is expected to strictly follow state and local guidelines for the resumption of play as individual counties and jurisdictions may have additional restrictions in place that effect your decisions. **CURRENTLY, YOUR LOCAL JURISDICTION TAKES PRECEDENCE UNLESS THERE IS A MORE STRINGENT STATE RESTRICTION IN PLACE.** In the interest of player, coach and parent safety, clubs may, at their discretion, implement social/physical distancing and face covering guidelines that go above and beyond the recommendations in this document.

PLEASE NOTE: MSYSA INSURANCE IS ONLY IN EFFECT IF YOUR ACTIVITIES ARE CONSISTENT WITH LOCAL HEALTH AND SAFETY REQUIREMENTS AND GUIDELINES.

****Please also note that any organized activities by our member leagues, clubs or teams require that players and staff are currently registered with MSYSA for the 2019-20 season in order to qualify for insurance coverage.**

Maryland State Youth Soccer Association is dedicated to protecting the health and safety of all people. The purpose of this document is to provide athletes, parents, coaches, and soccer organizations with information they can use to assist them with developing their return to training programs in the context of COVID-19. As a guideline meant to be used by athletes and organizations with vastly different resources, this document cannot be prescriptive; rather, it should spark thoughtful deliberation among athletes, coaches and staff, who will use this information to create their own unique return to training plan that is specific to their situation. Many of the recommendations rely upon rules and regulations set forth by public health authorities, which will/may be different across the Country, State and County. In addition, there will be other logistical challenges of returning to training following COVID-19.

The information contained in this document is not intended or implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. All content, including text, graphics, images, and information, are provided for general informational purposes only. The knowledge and circumstances around COVID-19 are changing constantly and, as such, Maryland State Youth Soccer Association makes no representation and assumes no responsibility for the completeness of this information. Further, you should seek advice from medical professionals and/or public health officials if you have specific questions about your return to training and competition.

Most, if not all, counties will have a phased approach to reopening businesses and the easing of social or physical distancing requirements. This may vary from county to county. Youth sports may not be a high priority for state or local officials, which may pose significant challenges for Youth Soccer. Soccer clubs and organizations across the state need to be aware and adhere to all Federal, State and Local guidelines and requirements.

Finally, although the young and healthy may be subject to less severe cases of COVID-19, every case of this disease is potentially life-altering or deadly, particularly in those with risk factors that may occur within our communities. Until COVID-19 is either eradicated, a vaccine is developed, or a cure is found, there is no way of eliminating the risk of infection. This should always be in the forefront when designing and considering your return to training program. State Associations and soccer organizations should be in contact with their respective insurance carriers to determine that all coverages are appropriate for the organization and its needs. The risks of participation must be clearly communicated with parents and participants in our respective programs.

Implementing the Return-to-Play Guidelines presented here will require a cooperative relationship between the Club, Coach, Parent, and Player. While the **Club** and **Coach** must create a safe environment, the **Parent** must make the decision for their child to return to play.

Whereas there are many that will be excited to return to play, there are others who may be apprehensive. If a player, parent, or family is not comfortable returning to play – **THEY SHOULDN'T**. We must demonstrate respect and courtesy for everyone's feelings during this time and ensure that we provide a safe environment as we return to play.

It is important for everyone to realize that this is not soccer as usual. Clubs and organizations will need to adjust their regular operations. Coaches will need to modify their training session plans. Parents need to understand and follow-through with safety precautions. Players need to respect and follow safety recommendations.

The following are recommendations for returning to play in phases designed to help keep all participants and our community safe.

1. The following should be applied **regardless of the Return to Play phase** in your geographic region:
 - a. Participation in any group activities is only allowed if you have had no signs or symptoms of Covid-19, no signs/symptoms that *may have been* Covid-19, have not been exposed to someone who has had signs or symptoms of Covid-19 for a *minimum period of 14 days* before participation
 - b. If you are sick or feel sick, **STAY HOME**
 - c. At risk individuals, youth or adult, **STAY HOME** (if you are unsure if you are considered at risk, please consult your medical provider directly)
 - d. *Anyone who self reports a temperature of 100 or more should be sent home and not allowed to participate for a minimum of 14 days*
 - e. Assign a “station” for each player to place their equipment, and that they should return to during breaks. Assigned space on the sideline for all players during Phase I – III should allow for adequate distance per these guidelines
 - f. Each player must utilize their own equipment to include a soccer ball. In phase I – III shared soccer balls are allowed (some with caveats or restrictions) but they must be disinfected after each session as well as during sessions when possible
 - g. In Phases I-III, no one is to share water, towels, or any personal equipment. This includes, but not limited to:
 - i. Shin guards, tape, hairbands
 - ii. Jersey/Uniform
 - iii. Pinnies or bibs of any kind
 1. Please note you can assign a pinnie/bib to a player to take home and care for OR ask that each player brings/wears their own alternative color shirt
 - h. No centralized hydration or refreshment stations
 - i. No spectators at practice/events during phase I – II. Spectators at events during phase III should be limited and must maintain maximum social or physical distancing (should not include at risk populations) and are encouraged to wear face masks when social distancing is not possible.
 - j. Recommend having sanitizing options available. This may include but is not limited to:
 - i. Hand sanitizer
 - ii. Disinfectant wipes to be used to wipe down all equipment
 - k. Respect for each individual’s choices must be the top priority. If a participant wishes to wear a face mask this should be allowed, and accommodations made if needed
 - i. Recommended to encourage staff to wear face masks whenever possible

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Each member is expected to strictly follow state and local guidelines for the resumption of play as individual counties and jurisdictions may have additional restrictions in place that effect your decisions. Some counties may allow games and tournaments to happen in Phase 2, while others may allow ONLY strict socially distanced, no contact drill based activities! CURRENTLY, YOUR LOCAL JURISDICTION TAKES PRECEDENCE UNLESS THERE IS A MORE STRINGENT STATE RESTRICTION IN PLACE. In the interest of player, coach and parent safety, clubs may, at their discretion, implement social/physical distancing and face covering guidelines that go above and beyond the recommendations in this document

It is important to note that these phases may not always proceed linearly but rather a step *backwards in phases may be required following continuous review of the ongoing situation and environment and further guidance from state or local authorities.* The following phase breakdowns are tied to directly or indirectly to the Stages and sub-stages of the ‘Maryland Road To Recovery’ (MSRR), additional directives from the Governor of Maryland AND other local/county/city authorities:

PPE: MASKS & FACE COVERINGS

As the state and various counties implement requirements for masks and face coverings we want to reinforce the use of face coverings as part of the mitigation strategy each club implements in their community. The latest data suggests that cloth face coverings are a critical tool in the fight against COVID-19 that could reduce the spread of the disease, particularly when used universally within communities.

- **Coaches** are encouraged to wear face coverings whenever possible, and especially when 6ft social distancing is not possible. Clubs may, at their discretion, require staff to wear face coverings at ALL TIMES practicing or at games.
- **Players** are encouraged to wear face coverings walking to/from their car to the field, while on breaks during practice and while on the sideline during games, especially when 6ft social distancing is not possible. Some counties may require the use of face coverings for players at ALL TIMES, even during physical activity. These county requirements MUST be followed, even if they differ from the guidelines in this document.
- **Parents** are encouraged to wear face coverings walking to/from their car to the field, whenever possible on the sidelines and especially when 6ft social distancing is not possible. Clubs may, at their discretion, limit spectator attendance at games or practices and/or require face coverings at ALL TIMES while on the sidelines.

PHASES I-IV

PHASE 0 (Virtual coaching, Virtual & Home Training, and 1 on 1 training)

- ii. Individual training sessions in your home/residence using your own equipment
- iii. Most coaching occurs virtually
- iv. 1 on 1 trainings should follow all guidelines in this document, they are not however sanctioned by MSYSA or US Youth Soccer

PHASE I (Individual and small group training of 10 or less)

- v. *Focused on return to activity with individual training (one player, one ball) and small group training*
 1. A maximum of two coaches/staff allowed per half field during practices (head, assistant and GK coaches included)
 - If your team does not have a second coach, a volunteer parent is recommended to assist with maintaining these guidelines (especially with younger teams)
 2. No more than 9 players to be present at a scheduled time (group size of 10 or less)
 - 8 players are recommended to allow for 2 adults
 - 1 adult may focus on implementing these guidelines while 1 adult is focused on the training session goals and coaching
 3. No physical contact should occur
 4. Groups on a half field should not exceed 10 people
 5. No sharing of water or equipment excluding soccer balls
 - Only the coach may handle cones, disks, etc

- Soccer balls may be shared (passing included) but should not be touched with the hands
 - Once a ball is removed from a players/coaches bag, it MUST be sanitized before play. Once sanitized it should NOT be touched by hands again until the end of training
 - At the end of training each soccer ball should be sanitized again prior to touching with hands to place in the players bag
 - Throw-ins are not allowed
 - All soccer balls should be sanitized before next practice/scrimmage/game
 - If possible, soccer balls should be sanitized at halftime and whenever convenient during training
 - Only the coach may handle cones, disks, etc.
6. GK's are also not permitted to use their hands at training
 7. Each player and coach should sanitize all gear between each training
 8. Participants are to remain a minimum of 10 feet apart
 - This includes on and off the field
 - Designated areas for each attendee's gear should be clearly marked off the field
 - While CDC and other authorities recommended 6 feet for social or physical distancing purposes, due to the nature of physical activity and sports, our recommendation is to increase the distance for soccer to 10 feet
 9. Practice times should be set to maximize social or physical distancing to include 'turnover' time between different teams
 10. No spectators are allowed

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All items and information in this Phase and beyond are subject to change based on information and guidance from State, County and local municipalities and health authorities. Before implementing your protocols for each phase and regularly thereafter, please check with applicable health authorities for the most up to date information and guidance.

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PHASE II (Team training group size to be determined based on guidelines from local

- i. *Focused on team training with controlled scrimmages/small-sided games and physical contact allowed for a limited duration each training session*
 - ii. *Before proceeding to Phase II, it is recommended that you should have actively participated in Phase I for a minimum of 4 weeks. This applies on a team by team basis to allow for player, coach and organizational acclimatization to the challenges presented by the recommendations in this document.*
11. A maximum number of coaches/staff allowed per half field during practices (head coach, assistant coach, GK coach and manager included) is included in group sizes
 - If your team does not have a second coach, a volunteer parent is recommended to assist with maintaining these guidelines (especially with younger teams)
 12. Physical contact that is necessary for training may occur, whenever possible it should be limited in duration
 - This includes limiting close group discussions, no 'high fives', no embracing etc.

- Training sessions should have a balance between individual non-contact skill building activities and limited duration for small sided games including contact
13. No sharing of water or equipment; Soccer balls are excluded
 - All soccer balls should be sanitized before next practice/scrimmage/game
 - If possible, soccer balls should be sanitized at halftime and whenever convenient during training
 - Only the coach may handle cones, disks, etc.
 14. Fully Integrated GK training allowed
 - This includes technical training, field players shooting on goal, full sided play etc.
 - GK's should properly sanitize their gloves prior to beginning training and whenever possible and convenient throughout
 15. Participants are to remain 6 feet apart off of the field
 - Designated areas for each attendee's gear should be clearly marked off the field
 16. Spectators are allowed but with proper social or physical distancing and no contact with players or teams. At risk individuals should still take precautions

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PHASE III (based on local county or city executive orders and/or health guidelines; training and group size may or may not be restricted)

- Gradual return to full team competition*
 - Before proceeding to Phase III, it is recommended that you should have actively participated in Phase II for a minimum length of time 3-4 weeks. This applies on a team by team basis to allow for player, coach and organizational acclimatization to the challenges presented by the recommendations in this document.*
17. No training restrictions
 18. Full team competitions can occur
 19. Continue Covid-19 mitigation strategies
 20. Consider local and single day competitions
 21. Large events should be guided by local and/or state public health authorities
 - Teams are recommended to only participate in local games/events and resist the urge to participate in events in other areas or regions that may require travel or overnight stays
 22. Physical contact should be minimized whenever possible
 - No physical contact should occur outside of what is necessary for training / games
 - This includes limiting close group discussions, no 'high fives', no embracing etc.
 23. Participants are to remain 6 feet apart off of the field
 - Designated areas for each attendee's gear should be clearly marked off the field
 24. No sharing of water or equipment; Soccer balls are excluded
 - All soccer balls should be sanitized before next practice/scrimmage/game
 - If possible, soccer balls should be sanitized at halftime and whenever convenient during training
 - Only the coach may handle cones
 25. Spectators are allowed but with proper social or physical distancing and no contact with players or teams. At risk individuals should still take precautions

PHASE IV (No Restrictions)

- i. *No training, competition or travel restrictions*

This Phase will occur once Covid-19 is no longer a public health matter and there are no restrictions directed by federal, state and local authorities. Please refer to your governing bodies for up to date information.

Reverting to Earlier Phases

- i. Regardless of which phase you are in, you should be prepared to step back and revert to an earlier phase if any of the following occur. Follow local public health official guidelines at all times.
 1. Cluster of infections occur
 2. Inability to maintain Covid-19 prevention and response protocols
 3. Inability to track and/or isolate players or staff
 4. External factor exposes a Covid-19 risk to your team or club
 5. Changes to local public health official guidelines regarding group gatherings and/or youth sports

Additional Responsibilities

(This information is provided for guidance only and should not be considered exhaustive)

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CLUB RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Create and distribute protocols to members.
- Contact insurers to ensure all coverages and communicate that information to participants prior to commencement of initial training.
- Have an effective communication plan in place.
- Identify strategies for working with public health officials to notify adult leaders, youth and their families if the organization becomes aware of a participant or adult leader has developed COVID-19 and may have been infectious to others while at a youth activity.
- Maintain participant confidentiality regarding health status.
- Be sensitive and accommodating to parents who may be uncomfortable with returning to play at this time.
- Have an action plan in place, in case of notification of a positive test result.
- Train and educate all staff on protocols and requirements, including state and local regulations, CDC recommendations and other necessary safety information.
- Be prepared to shut down and stop operations.
- Develop plans for temporary closure of indoor facilities and cancellation of outdoor activities or camps for proper disinfection.
- Provide adequate field space for social or physical distancing.
- Provide hand sanitizing stations and waste receptacles at fields for individual participant use.
- Develop a relationship and a dialogue with local health officials.

COACH RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Ensure the health and safety of the participants.
- Inquire how the athletes are feeling. Send home anyone you believe acts or looks ill.
- Follow all state and local health protocols and guidelines.
- Ensure all athletes have their own individual equipment (ball, water, bag etc.)
- Ensure coach is the only person to handle equipment (e.g. cones, disk etc.); do not enlist parental or attendee assistance.
- All training should be conducted outdoors and compliant with social or physical distancing per state or local health guidelines.
- Always wear a face mask, even when not actively coaching.
- Coaches should maintain social distance requirements from players based on state and local health requirements.
- Have fun, stay positive – players and parents are looking to you for leadership.
- The use of scrimmage vest, or pinnies, is not recommended at this time.
- Respect players, parents, and families by accommodating those that may not yet be comfortable with returning

PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES:

- If you are not comfortable with returning to play, **DON'T**. You are the only one who will make the decision when your child returns to play.
- Ensure your child is healthy, and check your child's temperature before activities with others.
- Consider not carpooling or very limited carpooling.
- Stay in car or adhere to social distance requirements, based on state and local health requirements
- When at training, wear a mask if outside your car.
- Ensure child's clothing is washed after every training.
- Ensure all equipment (cleats, ball, shin guards etc.) are sanitized before and after every training.
- Notify your club immediately if your child becomes ill for any reason.
- Do not assist your coach with equipment before or after training.
- Be sure your child has necessary sanitizing products with them at every training.

PLAYER RESPONSIBILITIES:

- If you are not comfortable with returning to play, **DON'T**
- Take your temperature daily and especially before activities with others.
- Wash hands thoroughly before and after training.
- Bring, and use, hand sanitizer with you at every training.
- Wear mask before and immediately after all training.
- Do not touch or share anyone else's equipment, water, food or bags.
- Practice social or physical distancing, place bags and equipment at least 6 feet apart.
- Wash and sanitize all equipment before and after every training.
- No group celebrations, high-5s, hugs, handshakes, fist-bumps, etc.
- Follow all CDC guidelines as well those of your local health authorities.

This document was created based on the following resources, guidelines, materials with input from various authorities and other sources. This document was created by the MSYSA staff and reviewed by the MSYSA Board to be used by our affiliates as a reference when creating their own plans and policies. Please note that any information contained herein is for informational purposes only and may not be construed as a directive, edict, or in place of medical or legal advice. This document may only be used in the spirit for which it was intended.

- CDC Guidelines:
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/youth-sports.html>
- Maryland State Guidelines:
 - <https://commerce.maryland.gov/Documents/BusinessResource/Youth-Sports-COVID-19-Best-Practices.pdf>
 - <https://governor.maryland.gov/recovery/>
 - <https://governor.maryland.gov/2020/04/24/governor-hogan-introduces-safe-gradual-and-effective-maryland-strong-roadmap-to-recovery/>
 - https://governor.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/MD_Strong.pdf
- Other Documents Referenced:
 - US Youth Soccer's 'Return to Play Guidelines'
 - Arizona Soccer Association's 'Return to Play'
 - Indiana Soccer 'Return to Activity Notice'
 - US Soccer's 'Play On' Grassroots Soccer Recommendations Guide