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## Guidelines

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

### Objective

The purpose of this document is to provide information and guidance to sports organizations, athletes/players, coaches/trainers, support staff and spectators in view of planning and conducting sports activities and contests/events in the context of COVID-19. These guidelines not only outline prevention strategies to reduce the spread of COVID-19 during sports events/contests but also establish minimum set of standards to assist athletic and competition sports programs in continuing participation amid coronavirus pandemic.

### Rationale

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. In general holding contact sports activities in outdoor settings is relatively safer as compared to indoor venues with minimal number of sportsmen present at a given time in the venue.

### Instructions

These instructions are for both young and adult athletes considering their participation in sports activities and leagues/contests, for team events, and sports organizers/planners.

#### **A) Instructions for Organizers in terms of Game/Contest planning:**

The more persons a participant interacts with, the closer the physical interaction, the more sharing of equipment by multiple players, and the longer the interaction, the higher the risk of COVID-19 spread. The risk has been categorized as follows;

- **Lowest Risk:** Performing skill-building drills or conditioning at home, alone or with members of the same household
- **Increased Risk:** Team-based practice
- **More Risk:** Within-team competition



- **Higher Risk:** Full competition between teams from the same local geographic area (e.g., city or county)
- **Highest Risk:** Full competition between teams from different geographic areas (e.g., outside county or state)

To avoid the potential risk, the organisers should ensure that following precautions are taken;

- Stay at home if sick.
- Players should bring their own equipment (like gloves and bats).
- Reduce physical closeness and keep 6 feet of space between players, when possible.
- Wear a mask, if possible (when not involved in strenuous exercise and sport)
- Players should clean their hands before and after practices, games, and sharing equipment.
- Players should inform coach or staff members, if not feeling well

## **B) Preparatory Measures before Participating in Sports/Contest**

Following preparatory measures need to be followed;

- Ensure the availability of supplies including masks (keep extra stock), and hand sanitizer with at least 70% alcohol.
- Installation of dispensers for hand sanitizers at suitable places like entrances and exits.
- *Preference for outdoor venues for contact sports activities* over indoor activities should be given, by assessing the overall risk and circumstances within local area, as much as possible.
  - If using an indoor facility, allow previous groups to leave the facility before entering with new team. Allow for sufficient time to clean and disinfect, where possible.
- Monitor the Group's adoption of COVID-19 prevention practices and make sure they have all the required steps in place to prevent the spread of the virus.
  - For youth and adult organized sport practices or training (non-game activities), *pod sizes should be minimal*, it is proposed to not exceed 50 persons per pod for outdoor settings and not more than 10 for indoor activities (Pod count is composed of players and coaches).
  - Games (played indoors or outdoors) can have the total number of players, coaches, referees, umpires, etc. as needed to hold the game if the total number of people does not exceed the total number allowed by the venue or facility (check capacity limits).
- *Locker Rooms can be a major source of infection* spread in any type of athletic activity. Special precautions should be taken to increase ventilation, clean frequently touched surfaces, minimize crowding and limit the time spent there to a minimum period.
- If any player is at an increased risk for severe illness or have existing health conditions, take extra precautions and preventive actions and should be discouraged to participate
- Dedicated "Corona contact person" for each event/activity should be nominated who would be responsible for implementation of all the required precautions.

## **C) General Measures for Self-Protection**

- In case any player is sick, s/he should stay home and should not participate. If suspected or exposed to someone having coronavirus infection, the player should wait for COVID -19 test results before resuming sports activities
- Team size should be smaller as compared to regular/ typical team size to avoid the risk of infection
- Team should be limited to a core group of participants, by restricting non-team players from joining.
- Reduce physical closeness between players, when possible
  - Teammates should maintain at least 6 feet distance with themselves and with other competitors, and officials while actively participating in the sports.



- Focus on building individual skills, like batting, dribbling, kicking, and strength training.
- High fives, handshakes, fist bumps or hugs should be discouraged.
- Players should keep space in the practice areas, including the side-line, dugout, and benches.
- Players should wait in car or away from the playing area until just before the warm-up period or the beginning of the game.
- Massing in the parking lot or near the field before or after games should be avoided. If it is not possible to avoid massing, social distancing must be ensured between participants.
- If social distancing is not possible, wearing a mask should be mandatory to reduce risk of virus transmission.

#### **D) Protective Measures for Spectators**

- **Outdoor Sports:** Spectators should be allowed for sports/ games having outdoor pavilions while ensuring distancing 6-feet apart (Spectators will not exceed of 50% of total seating capacity).
- **Indoor Sports**
  - Spectators should be allowed for indoor sports/ games while ensuring social distance of 6-feet; however, number of spectators would not exceed one-third of the normal seating capacity at any time.
  - Seating capacity be displayed at prominent places i.e at main entrance etc
- **Common Aspects for Indoor/ Outdoor Sports**
  - Entry of spectators should be regulated properly and numbers be counted deliberately.
  - Wearing face mask should be mandatory for the Spectators
  - Public/ spectators restrooms should be disinfected/ cleaned frequently. Adequate arrangements for handwashing/ hand hygiene be made available by the management.
  - PPEs after use be properly disposed of.

#### **E) Wear a mask**

- Wear a mask if feasible, especially when it is difficult to stay less than 6 feet apart from other people or indoors, for example in close contact sports such as basketball court
- **Lower intensity sports:** Emphasize wearing masks and practicing social distancing for lower intensity sports.
- **Higher intensity sports:** People who are engaged in high intensity activities, like running, may not be able to wear a mask if it causes difficulty breathing.
  - If unable to wear a mask, consider conducting the activity in a location with greater ventilation and air exchange (for instance, outdoors versus indoors) and where it is possible to maintain physical distance from others.
- In situations where individuals might raise their voices, such as shouting or chanting, we strongly encourage wearing masks.
- **For very young athletes,** parents, coaches, and sports administrators should decide if the kids need to wear a mask.

#### **F) Minimize sharing of equipment or gear**

- Encourage players to bring their own equipment if possible, like gloves, balls, and helmets.
- Limit the use of frequently touched surfaces on the field, court, or play surface.
- Players should bring their own water to minimize use and touching of drinking fountains.
- Clean and disinfect shared items between use.
- Do not share towels, clothing, or any items used to wipe face or hands.
- Avoid sharing food, drink containers (e.g., coolers), and utensils

#### **G) Wash hands**



- Hands should be washed with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer with 70% alcohol
  - Before and after playing
  - Before adjusting mask

#### **H) Limited travel**

- Consider competing against teams in local areas (neighbourhood, town, or community).

#### **Checklist for coaches**

- Send a welcome email or call parents (for youth players) and/or players. Inform them about actions that the sports program will take to protect players. Remind them to stay home if sick or if they have been around someone, who is sick
- Be a role model. Wear a mask and encourage family members, fans, officials, and sports staff to wear one during practices and games.
- Provide hand sanitizer with at least 70% alcohol to players before and after practice/game and encourage them to wash their hands with soap and water
- Educate players about covering their mouth during coughs and sneezes with a tissue or with their elbow.
- Discourage spitting
- Remind players about social distancing and use markers (such as signage or tape on floor).
- Encourage players to focus on building their individual skills and cardiovascular conditioning, so they can limit close contact with other players.
- Check with sports administrator to make sure they are following cleaning and disinfection recommendations.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces on field, court, or play surface (such as drinking fountains) at least daily or between use.
- Clean and disinfect shared equipment.

*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.*

*The Ministry acknowledges the contribution of Ms Amina Ehsan Qazi and HSA/ HPSIU/ NIH team to compile these guidelines.*

#### **References**

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/playing-sports.html>
2. COVID-19 Sports Guidance for Youth and Adults, Minnesota Department of Health, July 22, 2020

**For more information, please contact:**

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

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

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