



The Safe Return to High School Athletics

This document was developed by the Alberta Schools' Athletic Association (ASAA) as a useful summary of Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic related guidelines as set out by the Government of Alberta and the impact of those guidelines on school sport, and ASAA's recommendations for a safe return to athletics in the school setting.

A summary of the key takeaways is on page 3

Updated on August 13, 2020

Please check the [ASAA website](#) regularly for updates to this document

Guidelines for the Safe Return of High School Athletics in Alberta

While it may be some time before interschool athletic competition resumes, current Government of Alberta documents allow for sport to occur under clear guidelines and restrictions. Regardless of whether or not your school jurisdiction will permit athletics to occur at this time, it is prudent for each school to prepare a plan of action to ensure a safe return to athletics when permitted by your school jurisdiction and principal.

Please review these guidelines to assist you with this preparation for a return to sport in the school setting, but please let teachers and students settle into their "new normal" educational environment before actively pursuing athletic opportunities in your school. A slow and steady start is recommended.

Currently the Government of Alberta is in Stage 2 of their relaunch plan. The ASAA does not approve any interschool athletic interaction (including scrimmage and competition) during Stage 2 at this time. Should GoA restrictions regarding cohorts or inter-region play change during Stage 2, the ASAA Executive will reevaluate its position on this.

There is currently no timeline for when the Government of Alberta will move into Stage 3 of their relaunch plan or what Stage 3 would mean for high school athletics as there has been no direction at this time on how sports will look in Stage 3. Be assured however, that the ASAA Executive and staff will stay abreast of any GoA and/or AHS changes in any directives that are issued, and will remain in a continual evaluation/re-evaluation mode throughout the 2020/21 school year.

This document was developed with the expectation that we will be in Stage 2 when Alberta schools open in the fall of 2020. In the event that Alberta does move into Stage 3, there will be changes to the Guidelines which will be communicated to the membership in a timely manner. Please check www.asaa.ca regularly for updates.

[Click here for the Alberta Government Relaunch Strategy](#)

Guidelines for the Safe Return of High School Athletics in Alberta

Summary of these guidelines from the ASAA

- **Authority** for approval of school athletic activities: In order, authority rests with Government of Alberta (GoA), Alberta Health Services (AHS), school superintendent and principal.
- The **purpose** of the guidelines is to assist athletic directors and coaches prepare for school athletic activities during the COVID-19 pandemic
- **Monitoring and Enforcement/Spectator Guidelines**
- **Screening/Forms**
- **Any changes** to ASAA Seasons of Play dates and/or provincial championship dates will be addressed in a timely manner by the ASAA Executive based on direction from the GoA and AHS.
- **Coaches** should adjust their expectations around **fitness levels** of student athletes as research shows it will be lower than it would be if there were no pandemic
- **Cohorts** of up to 50 people (inclusive of student athletes and all team personnel) are permitted to participate in sports, but one cohort cannot interact with another.
- **In school** athletic practices only are permitted at this time
- A person can only participate in a **second/different cohort** if they complete activity with one cohort and then not participate with another cohort for 14 days.
- **General safety protocols** being employed in schools and the general community should be observed at all times e.g. hand sanitizer, masks, physical distancing, etc.
- **Participant Tracking:** A "**Responsible Person**" (definition provided) should be appointed for each team to maintain attendance records for all gatherings of each sport cohort, including meetings, practices and, when permitted, competition.
- **Rapid response plan:** each school jurisdiction will likely have a rapid response plan
- **In school guidelines/protocols** around: equipment, scheduling, locker rooms, transportation, entry/exit points, spectators, etc.
- **Alberta Government:** gathering restrictions and health regions
- **Insurance** related considerations

[Click here for more information on the Alberta Government Guidance for Sport and Recreation](#)

Guidelines for the Safe Return of High School Athletics in Alberta

MONITORING & ENFORCEMENT:

No one involved in high school sports wants to be the cause of an outbreak of the disease that results in the implementation of COVID-19 related restrictions that “shut-down” high school athletics.

Try to be compliant with the guidelines below regardless of your personal level of concern about the risk of transmission of infection. While those involved in organizing high school sporting events will make all reasonable efforts to minimize the risk of transmission, it is up to **all** participants (including parents and guardians of student athletes) to take precautions to protect themselves and others from the risk of transmission of the COVID-19 virus and other infectious diseases.

The ASAA recommends that each school appoint a “Responsible Person” (adult authorized by school principal or athletic director) for each school athletic team, to oversee safety factors, ensure compliance and contact tracing for members of that team.

If you notice a lack of compliance by others that you think presents a real risk, be positive in any steps you take to try to ensure compliance.

In addition to any measure taken by the zone or school jurisdiction administration, the ASAA may, upon confirming that there has been a lack of compliance with the guidelines, take appropriate measures and impose penalties and sanctions which may include, but not be limited to suspension or disqualification of the right to play future games, including at the provincial playoff or championship level.

SPECTATORS

The ASAA suggests the following Alberta Government guidelines:

- Spectators (excluding parents and guardians where necessary for player support) should be kept out of participant spaces (e.g., fields of play, courts, ice surfaces).
- Physical distancing of minimum 2 metres should be maintained by spectators at all times, unless from the same household or cohort.
- In Stage 2, with 2 metres of distance maintained between members of different households (with the exception of cohort families), the following capacity restrictions apply:
 - A maximum of 200 spectators are permitted for outdoor seated/audience events/settings.
 - A maximum of 100 spectators are permitted for indoor events/settings.
- Cheering and yelling is strongly discouraged as it presents a high risk of spreading droplets.
- It is strongly recommended that spectators wear masks.

Guidelines for the Safe Return of High School Athletics in Alberta

SCREENING/FORMS

- Active screening of attendees at a meeting, practice or game should be considered to monitor for symptoms of fever, sore throat, cough, runny nose or difficulty breathing. As noted in the Alberta Government's [Guidance for Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation – Stage 2 document](#), “any participant that is exhibiting any symptoms (of COVID-19) cannot enter the (athletic) facility or participate”.
- Schools may choose to use the [Alberta Health Daily Checklist](#).
- Schools may also recommend that all involved in school athletic activities complete the AHS [COVID-19 Self-Assessment tool](#) daily.
- Schools and those appointed to be the Responsible Persons for teams should consider making use of testing facilities in their communities in accordance with AHS guidelines (i.e. regular testing of random team members may offer reassurance that the cohort is virus free).

FORMS

- Because each of the 60+ school jurisdictions in Alberta may have different guidelines, waivers, forms and participant tracking procedures, the ASAA does not plan to provide an example for anything other than a participant tracking form which is located later in this document. The ASAA does, however, suggest each school jurisdiction give consideration to the creation of forms that address:
 - Athletic Informed Consent
 - Daily Athletic Screening Checklist or “Attestation of no COVID-19” symptoms
 - Cohort List, which would ensure compliance for the requirement for no more than 50 individuals; this could be in the format of a participant tracking form.
- **NB:** Various PSO's have examples of a variety of forms in their return to play documents located at: <https://www.asaa.ca/covid-19>

Guidelines for the Safe Return of High School Athletics

From the ASAA during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Who to look for in terms of decision making around high school athletics

As much as any other group or individual, the ASAA wishes to see athletics return to the school setting. First and foremost however, the safety of all involved with school athletics is the priority of the ASAA, and directives from the Government of Alberta and Alberta Health Services take precedence over any decision made by the ASAA, school jurisdiction or school level. Therefore, no athletics related decision by a principal, athletic director or coach should occur without consideration of GoA and AHS and the documents located at [Alberta Biz Connect relaunch website](#) which are regularly added to and/or updated.

Purpose of these Guidelines

The purpose of these is to give general recommendations on things that need to be considered when coordinating an athletics program in a scholastic setting during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. It is a starting point for principals and athletic directors to review as they develop their own local plans. These Guidelines will be updated as GOA restrictions change.

Sport Specific Guidelines for each of the ASAA's 12 sports will be available at a newly created COVID-19 section on the ASAA website. These links provide access to general guidelines within each ASAA sport as well as the return to play protocols recommended by the respective provincial sport organization (PSO).

Prior to engaging students/coaches/others in any school athletics program:

It is vital that before any *Return to Play* in the sport setting occurs, that you consult your school jurisdiction's superintendent. Your superintendent is responsible for determining what *Return to Play* will look like in your school jurisdiction. Further, each school principal will then determine how *Return to Play* will be implemented in their school.

ASAA Seasons of Play: The ASAA will be determining what happens with its seasons of play and its championships for each ASAA sport as circumstances allow, and it will remain flexible in its actions based on the directions from the GoA and AHS.

Prior to any *Return to Play*, it is strongly recommended that you are familiar with all of the AHS and GoA guidelines, the *Return to Play* guidelines from your sport's PSO and have a very detailed rapid response plan in the event a participant tests positive for COVID-19.

General Guidelines: Cohorts

A Cohort is a group of up to 50 individuals who gather for the purpose of participating in a sporting activity. All individuals in a cohort must be on and stay on the same school team; joint school teams may still exist within these Guidelines. **Individuals (athlete, coach, manager, etc.) are only allowed to participate in one sport cohort (school, club, other) at one time;**

At Stage 2 of the Government of Alberta relaunch strategy, competition between cohorts is strictly prohibited, both within a region and between regions. It is strongly recommended that social distancing still be used within a cohort whenever it is possible.

ASAA Restriction: Where approved by a school jurisdiction, in-school sport practices only which involve students from your school are permitted at this time. No interschool or inter-zone activity can occur at this time.

Cohort groups are a way for individuals to participate in a sport or physical activity in close proximity to others.

- Cohorts help to mitigate risk of widespread transmission by limiting the number of individuals in close contact. In Stage 2, The Government of Alberta permits sports or physical activity that involve participant interaction at a distance of less than 2 metres.
- The 50-person sport cohort maximum includes all involved: coaches/staff, instructors, student athletes, officials and volunteers.
- In school athletic interactions must be limited to being between the same cohort of 50
- Teams in different cohorts cannot play each other (same school or otherwise)
- There can be no substitutions in or out of a cohort without having new participants not participate for 14 days prior to being involved if they have come from another cohort. Students and any school athletic team personnel who have been involved in summer/fall club or community sports must sit out 14 days before joining a school team for practice or any other activity.
- It is recommended that cohorts be supervised by a responsible person whose role is to oversee logistical maintenance of the group and to ensure AHS and school jurisdiction guidelines are followed. It is strongly recommended that this individual is a teacher or administrator and has a very in-depth understanding of the AHS guidelines, PSO recommendations and their school jurisdiction's policies.

[Click here for the Alberta Government Cohort Guidelines](#)

General Guidelines: Cohorts Cont.

When participating in Cohort groups, you should:

- interact outdoors if possible – it's safer than indoors.
- avoid closed spaces with poor ventilation, crowded places and close contact settings.
- keep the cohort in your local community or neighborhood to reduce geographic spread.
- be healthy and not show any COVID-19 symptoms (see the full symptom list below) have not traveled outside Canada in the last 14 days.
- have not been in close contact with a person who has COVID-19 in the last 14 days.
- keep track of where you go, when you are there, and who you meet:
 - this will be helpful if someone is exposed to COVID-19.
 - download the contact tracing app recommended by the provincial government. This may help to let you know if you have been exposed to COVID-19 or if you have exposed someone else to COVID-19.

While 50 is the maximum number of individuals you are allowed to have within a cohort as per AHS guidelines, the ASAA strongly recommends that the size of cohorts be kept to a minimum to lower the risk associated. The ASAA Executive Committee will address any GoA changes to cohort limits in a timely manner.

If an individual wants to change cohorts to participate in another sport or with another group within the same sport, they must not participate in any cohort for 14 days. Changing cohorts does not require individuals to quarantine or self isolate.

The ASAA strongly recommends that individuals that are at high risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19 or live in the same household as someone who is, refrain from participating in a cohort.

[Click here for the AHS COVID-19 symptom list](#)

General Guidelines: Participant Tracking

Participant Tracking

- To support public health contact tracing efforts in the event that an attendee tests positive, it is strongly recommended that the names and contact information of attendees is collected each time there is a practice or competition.
- Providing information is voluntary. A school must obtain an individual's consent and notify them about the purpose and legal authority for the collection.
- It is strongly recommended that all participants (signed by a parent/guardian as required) sign a Event Participation Waiver plus sign a Daily Attestation prior to participating in any sanctioned athletic activity.
- A Daily Attestation is the participant (signed by a parent/guardian) acknowledging that they understand the guidelines that are in place and agree to follow them.
- Any personal information that is collected for COVID-19 participant tracking can only be used for this purpose. Information about attendees will only be requested by Alberta Health Services if a potential exposure occurs onsite.
- It is recommended that records be kept for as long as the cohort is regularly coming together. A school must make reasonable security arrangements to protect personal information.

Pre-Screening of Participants

- It is strongly recommended that all participants go through screening before participating in activities. Please see a example of pre-screening checklists in the resource section.
- Any participant that is exhibiting any symptoms cannot enter the facility or participate as per AHS guidelines.

[Click here for the AHS Self Assessment Tool](#)

General Guidelines: Rapid Response Plan

Rapid Response Plan

- A rapid response plan is a fast-action plan for operators when an attendee shows symptoms or tests positive for COVID-19.
- It is **strongly recommended that all activities come to a stop in the event a participant tests positive** until all individuals have been tested and receive a negative result.
- School Personnel should develop a plan that includes appropriate policies and procedures based on the type of participants specific to their services and settings.
- Staff should be familiar with and follow the rapid response plan if a participant starts feeling symptoms during sporting activity.
- AHS guidelines state that this plan should include:
 - Immediately isolating the attendee from others.
 - Cleaning and disinfecting all surfaces that may have come into contact with the symptomatic participant.
 - Requiring hand hygiene and masking of the attendee.
 - The attendee must self-isolate away from school as soon as possible.
 - Informing school administrators of the situation.

[Click here for the GoA guidance document for Sport, Physical Activity, and Recreation \(rapid response plan information on page 12\)](#)

[Click here to get tested for COVID-19](#)

General Guidelines: Masks

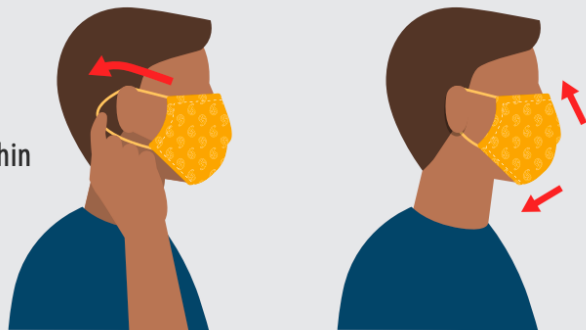
Masks

- It is recommended that cohort participants wear masks when they are not engaging in physical activity. A mask, when worn properly, can help reduce the spread of COVID-19.
- Masks do not need to be worn during intense physical activity based on the following CDC guidelines:
 - Masks and face shields cannot be assured to stay in place.
 - There is some evidence to suggest that wearing a mask during high-intensity activity could have negative health effects.
 - Please see the [CDC guidelines for mask wearing during physical activity](#) for more information.
- It is strongly recommended that individuals not participating in physical activity such as coaches and trainers wear masks at all times (Even if the activity occurs outside).

[Click here for the CDC guidelines on how to wear and remove a mask](#)

WEAR YOUR FACE COVERING CORRECTLY

- Wash your hands before putting on your face covering
- Put it over your nose and mouth and secure it under your chin
- Try to fit it snugly against the sides of your face
- Make sure you can breathe easily
- Do not place a mask on a child younger than 2



General Guidelines: Equipment

Group Equipment

- If any equipment is being used, it is strongly recommended at a minimum that equipment be sanitized before and after each session.
- It is recommended that equipment not be shared with other cohorts without proper sanitizing.
- It is recommended that the number of people setting up and putting away the equipment be kept to a minimum and respect social distancing guidelines
- It is strongly recommended that hand sanitizer and/or sanitizing wipes be made available to participants and those responsible for setting up and putting away of equipment.

Individual equipment

- It is strongly recommended that participants not share their personal equipment with anyone. (e.g. cleats, pads, helmets, clubs, etc.)
- All participants should have their own labeled water bottles and water bottles should not be shared or stored in close proximity to one another.
- All equipment of individuals should be labeled with the participant's name.
- All equipment of individuals should be kept at least 2 metres from another participant's equipment whenever practical.

General Guidelines: Insurance

Insurance

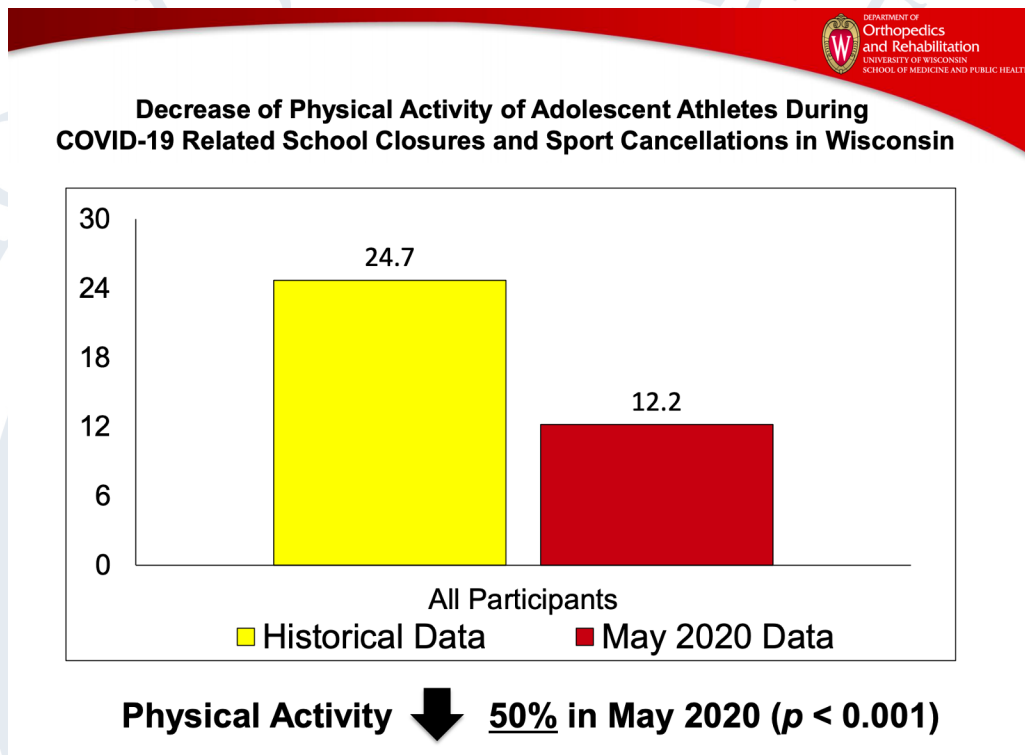
- This is a school jurisdiction issue, and there are only a few insurers of school jurisdictions in Alberta, as many of them belong to insurance “consortiums” with other school jurisdictions. However, you should be aware, through your superintendent or principal if there are any insurance related issues that may impact your school athletics program, with AHS restrictions always taking precedence over local decisions or policies.
- Examples of considerations include but are not limited to:
 - transportation restrictions (travel distance, physical distancing in vehicles, overnight trip requirements if such trips are allowed, etc.),
 - number of spectators allowed at school events,
 - participant tracking protocols like attendance lists for each practice or competition,
 - use of masks, hand sanitizer, etc.
- It may be appropriate to have participants and their parents or guardians sign a separate acknowledgment of risk and a waiver confirming that they will not make a claim against your school, jurisdiction, zone or the ASAA in the event that they contract Coronavirus COVID-19 as a result of their involvement in high school athletics. However the decision to proceed with waiver forms rests with the authority of the respective superintendent of schools or their counterpart in private, charter or independent schools.

General Guidelines:

Physical Fitness Of Athletes

The University of Wisconsin recently released the findings of a study regarding the impact of school closures and sport cancellations on the health of adolescent athletes.

The study found that their physical activity levels during COVID-19 have dropped by at least 50%.



This likely means that students will not be showing up to their first practice with the same level of physical readiness you would have seen in previous years. Make sure that coaches are modifying activities to take into account the lower level of physical readiness. Working too hard too soon and without a sufficient base opens athletes up to a higher risk of injury.

[Click here to read the full Summary of study and its findings](#)

Other General Guidelines

Scheduling

- It is recommended that athletics activities be scheduled with sufficient time between activities to avoid any overlap of players on the court or field or other sports facility.
- Congestion during pick up and drop off should be avoided.

Entry and Exit Points

- Entry and exit points such as doors are recommended to be propped open if possible. It is strongly recommended that entry and exit points be sanitized before and after each session.
- It is strongly recommended that hand sanitizer be supplied near entry and exit points.
- It is strongly recommended that if athletic facilities allow, different entry and exit points should be used.

Celebrations

- It is recommended celebrations such as handshakes, fist to fist contact, high fives, chest bumps or any other physical contact do not occur during any school sport related physical activity at this time.

Locker Rooms, Change Rooms, and Sidelines

- It is strongly recommended that locker rooms or change rooms not be used at this time.
- All participants should come to activities fully dressed and ready to participate.
- AHS guidelines suggest physical distancing (2m) be followed on the sideline and when not in competition.

Transportation

- If transportation is permitted for the purposes of athletics, it is strongly recommended transportation to and from activities be only with members of the same household if possible.

Other General Guidelines

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Spectators

- It is strongly recommended that activities occur without spectators at this time. However, if spectators are approved by the school jurisdiction and principal to be present, they must comply with the maximum of gathering limits and must maintain physical distancing of at least two metres from other individuals or household groups.

[Click here for the Alberta Government restrictions on gatherings](#)

Travel

- Activities should be restricted to local opportunities and in respect of the 50 maximum for cohorts at this time.
 - This means within a neighborhood, town or municipality.
- Participants must not seek sport, physical activity and recreation opportunities in other AHS regions, ASAA zones, with other schools or out of province.
- Cross-jurisdictional, or inter-regional, play must not occur at this stage; it is not permitted as per AHS requirements.

Competition

- No competition between schools is permitted at this time. If and when there are changes to cohort restrictions and inter-regional play by the GoA, the ASAA Executive will revisit this restriction.
- Be aware that there may be different restrictions for some sports versus others e.g. some sports that can physically distance may have less restrictive guidelines, but these are not published at this time. Any impact of different restrictions will be addressed by the ASAA Executive when published by GoA.

[Click here for Alberta Government regional information](#)

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Sport Specific PSO Resources and Government Links

Sport Specific PSO Resources

Use the links below to access the COVID-19 safety guidelines and/or return to sport protocol for each sport.

- [Athletics Alberta](#)
- [Badminton Alberta](#)
- [Alberta Basketball](#)
- [Alberta Cheerleading](#)
- [Cross Country Alberta](#)
- [Curling Alberta](#)
- [Football Alberta](#)
- [Alberta Golf](#)
- [Rugby Alberta](#)
- [Volleyball Alberta](#)
- [Alberta Amateur Wrestling](#)

Government of Alberta and Alberta Health Services Links

- [Alberta Government Guidance for Sport and Recreation](#)
- [Cohort Guidelines](#)
- [COVID-19 Self Assessment Tool](#)
- [Alberta Government Gathering Restrictions](#)
- [Alberta Government Region Information](#)

For More Information

For more information on the ASAA's Safe Return to Sport guidelines, please contact us at:

Phone: 780-427-8182

Email: info@asaa.ca

Website: www.asaa.ca

All updates to the COVID-19 Return to Sport guidance, including any information about provincial championships, will be sent out to principals and athletic directors listed in our registration system as well as posted on our website and social media. We encourage all schools to check that their contact information is up to date to ensure that they receive information in timely manner.



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