

NHADA Return to Play Task Force
COVID-19 Guidelines and Supporting Documentation

Version 2.2

July 15, 2020

Task Force Members

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Mission

The Task Force mission is to identify questions that exist around the topic of return to play and share recommended “best practices” and resources for a safe return to sports based on return to school, facility availability and Department of Health and Education clearance. Communication and sharing/advocacy of information/collaboration with Superintendents, Principals, and NHIAA as to the varied needs in the state is key to understanding the environment and vulnerabilities. Family health and safety is paramount in this process. Knowledge and data will drive what we do. Develop flexibility to keep students involved for physical, emotional and social wellbeing.

Preface

New Hampshire high school athletic programs face many issues involving the physical and mental wellbeing of their student-athletes and their eventual return to safe athletic participation during the COVID-19 pandemic. There is information that we know, missing information that we recognize that we don't know, and other information or factors that we may not even realize will factor into the safe return to sport participation in the future. Our hope is to use the information that is known at this time to outline the steps that may be taken to allow safe athletic participation and keep students involved for their physical, emotional, and social wellbeing. We also hope to identify the questions pertaining to the safe return to sports that have not yet been answered or even asked yet and develop a framework from which they may be answered in the future as we gain more clarity surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic.

What We Know

At this point in time there have been several guidelines released by institutions and agencies addressing the best practices for the return to athletics including the State of New Hampshire's released guidelines “Stay at Home 2.0 Amateur and Youth Sports,” the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) “Guidance for Opening Up High School Athletics and Activities,” and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) “Considerations for Schools” as well as various guidelines from other state high school athletic associations, amateur sport organizations such as the

United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC) and athletic training associations.

What We Know We **DON'T** Know

Information has been constantly evolving and updating. As we progress, guidelines will change. To date the State of New Hampshire's "Stay at Home 2.0 guidelines on Amateur and Youth Sports" have only outlined Phase 1 which does not include a return to competition. As of date, the New Hampshire Interscholastic Athletic Association (NHIAA) has not issued any guidelines or revisions to their policies and procedures, but that most assuredly will change. As more data, research, and information is gathered, guidelines will change. While recognizing there is a possibility of a second wave of COVID-19 related cases or recurrent outbreaks, we don't know how guidelines and practices may be impacted by this.

What We **Don't** Know We **Don't** Know

COVID-19 is a novel coronavirus. Because it has never been seen in humans before we cannot fully anticipate the how it will play out and the impact it will have on high school athletics and life in general. Any guidance or best practice we make can quickly be outdated and irrelevant. It is our belief that best practices include having a framework in place that it will help address these unknown future issues.

Guidelines and Supporting Documentation

What follows are collated guidelines based on the documents put out by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the State of New Hampshire, the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), and the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC). Other documents from other agencies exist and may also be helpful in developing your own plan of action, but as a New Hampshire athletic director you need to adhere to state and local policies at a minimum. Your district's insurance provider may offer additional guidance.

A Few Things to Keep in Mind

First, we would warn you to keep in mind that while multiple agencies' documents refer to "phases," not all phases are aligned. For example, while the State of New Hampshire issued its own guidelines for Phase 1 in the document "Stay at Home 2.0 Amateur and Youth Sports" released on May 18, 2020, it is not aligned with the different phases referred to in the National Federation of State High School Associations' "Guidance for Opening Up High School Athletics and Activities."

Furthermore, the State of New Hampshire has issued updated guidelines titled "Safer at Home Amateur and Youth Sports" on June 16, 2020 which, while an update to previous guidelines, does not refer to phases at all.

The current "Safer at Home Amateur and Youth Sports" from June 16, 2020 references low risk sports and indicates baseball and softball are considered low risk. However, under NFHS guidelines baseball and softball are considered moderate risk sports. To help better understand low, moderate, and high risk sports we have included the

infographic Potential COVID-19 Infection Risk for NHIAA Sanctioned Sports Based on NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee Guidance.

For the purposes of this document, the term “training event” is a catchall phrase that refers to any practice, conditioning activity, workout, or organized athletic activity.

Changes to guidance and implementation continue. Because of this, the following guidelines are labeled Version 2.0, but still cite references to previous outdated supporting documents so that changes and updates can be tracked. This is intended to be a fluid document and will be updated and chronologically retitled as more information and guidance is received.

Lastly, be aware that while these are the recommendations that are currently in place, schools have the flexibility to be more restrictive in their implementation. Some schools may approach this situation with the mindset that it is better to be safe than sorry. For example, current state guidelines have expanded to allow participation in groups of fifty or fewer people. Individual schools may still restrict groupings or cohorts to ten or fewer people if they choose.

For Your Benefit

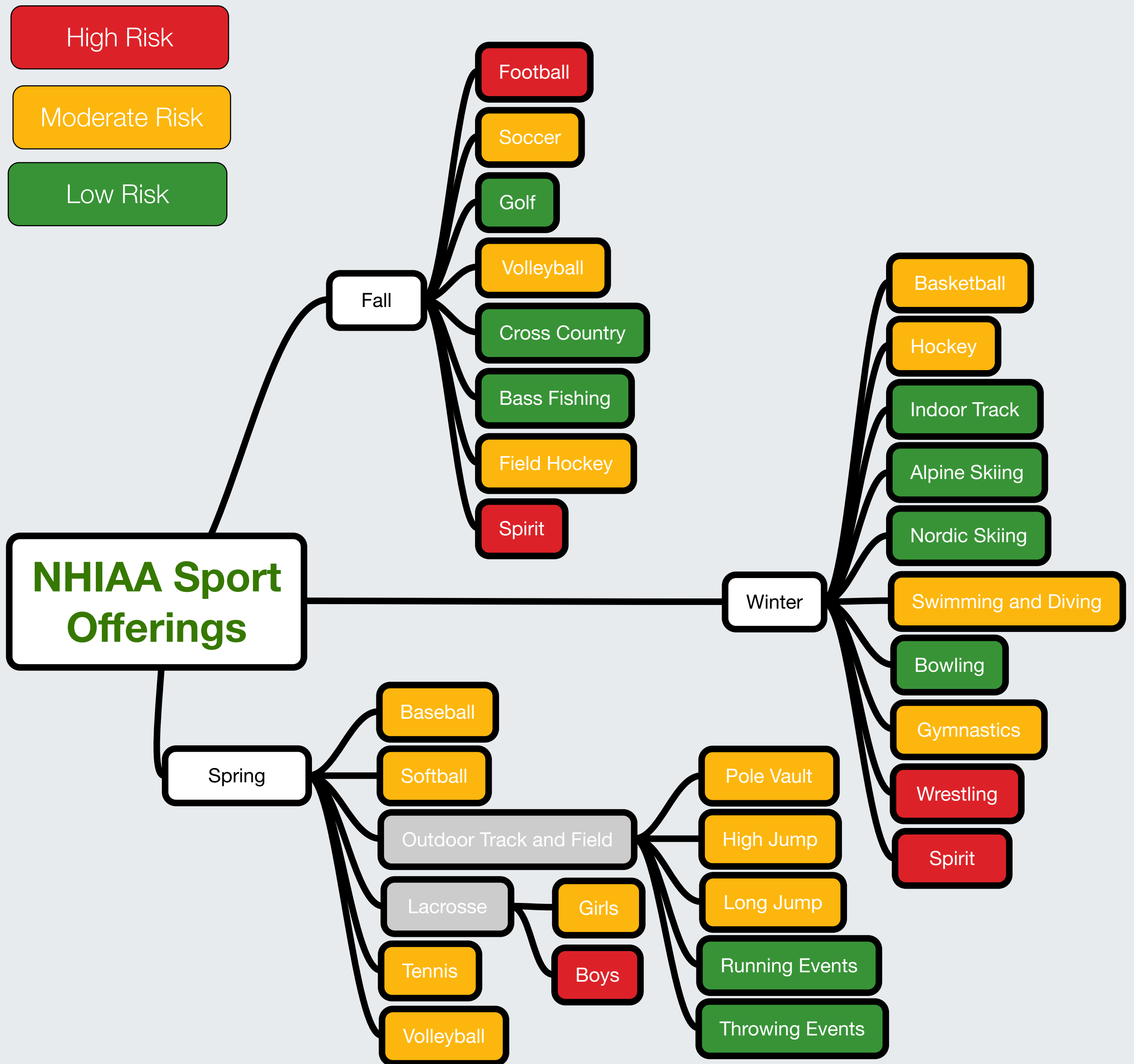
As of June 16, the Governor’s Task Force is requiring temperature checks for participation in sport activities. The Resource Center of Homeland Security and Emergency Management is offering PPE or sanitization supplies to be used for *summer activities* at your school.

Click on this link to order your free materials:

https://prd.blogs.nh.gov/dos/hsem/?page_id=8737

Keep in mind that these supplies are for summer activities. PPE/sanitization needs for the upcoming academic year will be assessed at a later date.

Potential COVID-19 Infection Risk for NHIAA Sanctioned Sports Based on NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee Guidance



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Area of Concern	NHADA Task Force Endorsement	Supporting Institution	Centers for Disease Control (CDC)	National Federation of High School Sports (NFHS)	State of New Hampshire Stay at Home 2.0 -Phase 1 (NH 1)	State of New Hampshire Safer at Home (NH 2)	United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC)	School Action
Liability	NHADA	Supporting Institution	CDC	NFHS	NH	NH 2	USOPC	School Action
Review and follow the Universal Guidelines for All New Hampshire Employers and Employees.	✓	Supporting Institution			*	*		
Athletes and staff (including administrative, coaches, trainers or officials) must be provided education and training around safe practices as it relates to hygiene, sanitation (cleaning and disinfection policies), and illness policies outlined in the Universal Guidelines and in State of New Hampshire Stay at Home 2.0 document	✓	Supporting Institution			*	*		
Organizations shall require players' parents/guardians to sign usual participation waivers outlining the additional risks due to COVID-19 associated with the activity	✓	Supporting Institution			*	*		

Safety	NHADA		CDC	NFHS	NH	NH 2	USOPC	School Action
All staff, volunteers, and athletes should bring to sporting events and wear, reusable/washable cloth face coverings over their nose and mouth when around others and not actively engaged in athletics and when social distancing is not possible	✓		*	*	*	*		
Parents/guardians of minors attending a sporting event should be asked to wear cloth face coverings while around other attendees, staff and athletes when social distancing is not possible.	✓		*		*	*		
Alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol must be readily made available to staff and athletes and kept with staff and equipment at all times.	✓		*		*	*		
Commonly touched surfaces and areas should be frequently cleaned and disinfected according to CDC guidance at the end of each event. Shared equipment must be cleaned and disinfected between use.	✓		*		*	*		
Staff, athletes, volunteers, and other attendees should be reminded to maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from others (Physical activity may involve distances greater than 6 feet.)	✓				*	*		
Equipment bags/backpacks of athletes should be placed 6-feet apart. Athletes should not touch other players' bags, equipment or water bottles	✓				*	*		
Participants should not use bench or dugout areas for storage of personal equipment. Centralized areas for congregating, such as benches and dugouts, should be avoided. (In the event of inclement weather and sheltering is necessary, all social distancing protocols should be followed.)	✓				*	*		

Limits on Gathering Size	NHADA	CDC	NFHS	NH	NH 2	USOPC	School Action
Practices and training sessions may begin and are allowed for groups of up to 50 participants (e.g., 45 athletes per training area with 5 staff/coaches/volunteers). *Under NH Safer at Home 6/16/20) -NOTE RECOMMENDATION ABOUT PODS/COHORTS	✓			*	*		
Practices, training sessions, games, and/or competitions should be planned and implemented to maintain a minimum of 6 feet of distance between all athletes, volunteers, and staff. In circumstances where closer contact for brief periods of time is necessary, staff, volunteers, and athletes must wear cloth face coverings/masks when possible (Updated NH Safer at Home 6/22/20)	Not endorsed				*		
Practices, training sessions, competitions, games, and tournaments/jamborees are permitted. When possible or practical, they should be planned and implemented to maintain a minimum of 6 feet of distance between all athletes, volunteers, and staff. In circumstances where closer contact for sustained periods is necessary, staff, volunteers, and athletes must wear cloth face coverings/masks when possible. NOTE: These adaptations are applicable but are not limited to the following athletic activities: Badminton, Baseball, Basketball, Cheerleading/Competitive Spirit Squad, Dance, Field Hockey, Football/Flag Football, Gymnastics, Ice Hockey, Indoor Track, Lacrosse, Rugby, Skiing, Snowboarding, Soccer, Softball, Spirit, Swimming, Diving, Tennis, Track and Field, Cross Country, Volleyball, Water Polo, and Wrestling as of updated NH Safer at Home on 7/7/20.	NHADA does not endorse competitions, games, tournaments, or jamborees at this time (7/15/20)		Depends on current phase and sport		*		
Workouts should be conducted in “pods” or cohorts of students with the same 10< people always working out together. (as of 6/10/20, subject to change)	✓	*	*	*		*	

<p>No teams/groups/athletes other than from New Hampshire, Maine and Vermont are allowed at the competitive sporting events, training sessions, or practices in New Hampshire. Effective June 29, 2020, Massachusetts players and teams are eligible to return to play in New Hampshire. (Updated NH Safer at Home 6/22/20)</p>	<p>✓</p>				<p>*</p>		
<p>No teams/groups/athletes other than from New England are allowed at competitive sporting events, training sessions, or practices in New Hampshire. (Updated NH Safer at Home 7/7/20)</p>	<p>NHADA does not endorse competitive sporting events at this time (7/15/20)</p>				<p>*</p>		

Screening	NHADA	CDC	NFHS	NH	NH2	USOPC	School Action
Staff and athletes should be screened on arrival to each sporting event including temperature check			*	*		*	
Staff, athletes, and volunteers must be screened on arrival to each competitive sporting event, training session, or practice all by having their temperature taken	✓				*		
Staff, athletes, and volunteers must be screened on arrival to each competitive sporting event, training session, or practice by having their temperature taken (temperature checks for athletes participating in competitive events is at the discretion of the organizing entity but is not required) (As of updated NH Safer at Home on 7/7/20)	NHADA doesn't endorse competitive events at this time (7/15/20)				*		
Staff and athletes should be screened on arrival to each sporting event to see if they have had any close contact with someone who is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 in the past 14 days.	✓			*	*		
Staff and athletes should be screened on arrival to each sporting event to see if they have traveled in the past 14 days internationally, by cruise ship, or domestically outside of NH, VT, or ME.	✓			*	*		
Responses to screening questions for each person should be recorded and stored so that there is a record of everyone present in case a student develops COVID-19	✓		*				
Person(s) with any COVID-19 symptoms, those who report close contact with someone suspected or confirmed with COVID-19, or those reporting travel risk factors should not be allowed into the sporting event	✓		*	*	*	*	
Person(s) with suspect or confirmed COVID-19 must stay home until symptombased criteria are met for discontinuation of isolation	✓		*	*	*	*	

Cleaning	NHADA	CDC	NFHS	NH	NH 2	USOPC	School Action
Coaches shall bring trash bags to sessions and remove all garbage following each session	✓			*	*		
All athletic equipment, such as catchers equipment or field hockey equipment, should be cleaned after each use and prior to the ne*t workout	✓		*	*	*	*	
Balls may be passed or shared, but any shared balls should be cleaned intermittently.	✓						
Adequate cleaning schedules should be created and implemented for all athletic facilities to mitigate any communicable diseases	✓	*	*		*	*	
Transportation	NHADA	CDC	NFHS	NH	NH 2	USOPC	School Action
Staff and other volunteers should not transport any athletes that are not immediate family members. In the event, that this becomes necessary, all parties must wear cloth face coverings and space out seating to maintain ma*imal distance from each other	✓			*	*		
Athletes traveling to training events should travel/drive by themselves or with immediate family members or members of their household	✓						
Training	NHADA	CDC	NFHS	NH	NH 2	USOPC	School Action
Sporting events will be limited to small group or team-based training activities. No competition sporting events or contact sports are allowed	✓			*		*	
Group training activities are encouraged to be limited to small group or team based training activities. Competition sporting events are permitted but shall be limited to two teams per field or designated area of play. Training sessions are encouraged to be non-contact with focus on skills and drills that can be developed while maintaining physical distancing.	Not endorsed				*		

Group training activities are encouraged to be limited to small group or team based training activities. Competitive sporting events, including intramurals, are discouraged during the summer training period. Training sessions are encouraged to be non-contact with focus on skills and drills that can be developed while maintaining physical distancing.	✓						
Multiple groups are allowed to practice in one large area/field as long as the separate groups do not mix or interact in any way (e.g., no floating of coaching or support staff, and no interaction between athletes of different training groups)	✓			*	*		
All training sessions and classes must take place outdoors				*			
All training sessions and classes are encouraged to take place outdoors. Any inside training sessions should be limited to 10 or fewer people while maintaining maximum social distancing protocols.	✓						
Players shall bring their own equipment and not share their personal equipment with other players. Shared training equipment provided by the coaches must be cleaned and disinfected according to CDC guidance after every use between athletes	✓	*	*	*	*	*	
Adequate breaks for water and sanitization should be provided and are encouraged to occur between changes in training activities.	✓			*	*		
Athletes should bring their own water bottles. No sharing or common use water bottles or drinking stations	✓	*	*	*	*		

Returning to Training and Heat Acclimatization Guidelines

The COVID-19 pandemic has sparked dramatic changes across all aspects of our daily lives. The combination of lifestyle modifications and potential comorbidities associated with COVID-19 also presents important, athlete specific health and safety risks as return to sport plans emerge. While it is clear that transition periods have a higher risk for catastrophic sport injury, some of the factors that place athletes at higher risk during these periods may be amplified as a result of social distancing measures. These risk factors may also be amplified at various levels – so even athletes within the same team may have a spectrum of risk profiles. As plans for a return to organized sport begin, over 10 million high school and college athletes emerge from this unprecedented period, calling for healthcare providers and administrators to give greater consideration for how to reduce risk while re-introducing sport.

Current pre-season conditioning and acclimatization stage assume that athletes decondition over the summer months. The current pandemic may result in students being **deconditioned** for four to five months. As well, over the last couple of months with a “stay at home order” in place, most athletes, coaches, and staff had significantly **less exposure to the heat**. The current transition period should follow a similar approach as to returning to sport following an extended time away due to injury. **Reconditioning** will take time and needs to be done slowly to **avoid injury**. In general, workouts should have lower work to rest ratios (i.e. **more breaks**) and progress on a weekly basis.

Injury Prevention

1. Each team should be required to develop a preventative training program. The purpose of these training programs is to reduce the likelihood of musculoskeletal injury.
2. Each team should dedicate a minimum of minutes (e.g., 10, 15, 20) at the beginning of practice to implement the preventative training program. The preventative training program may, and likely will, take the place of the traditional warm-up for the team.
3. Preventative training programs:
 - a) Should include exercises in at least 3 of the following categories: strength, balance, agility, and flexibility.
 - b) Should determine how frequently the program will be performed (e.g. every practice, 2-3 times per week).

With the return of youth sports aligning with rising temperatures across most of New Hampshire it is important to allow athletes, coaches, and staff a period to adjust or **acclimatize** to the heat especially as indoor athletes may have more outdoor practices to follow current guidelines. As coaches and teams begin training outside, we strongly encourage all groups to follow the current NHIAA heat acclimatization policy

Heat Acclimatization

1. Once exercise adaptations have been achieved (see previous section), it is important to ensure heat acclimatization is also achieved, though these may occur simultaneously.
2. No athlete will be allowed to participate in competition until they have completed a minimum number of practices as determined by the school.
3. In the event that training is paused for more than seven consecutive days due to “stay at home orders” or any other reason, athletes must restart or extend the heat acclimatization process prior to the resumption of activity. A school designated qualified health care professional may decide on the restart or extension of the heat acclimatization period on a case by case basis.

Athletes should be well **hydrated** before commencing all activities. Sufficient, sanitary and appropriate fluid should be readily accessible and consumed at regular intervals **before, during** and **after** all sports participation and other physical activities to offset sweat loss and maintain adequate hydration while avoiding overdrinking.

Hydration

1. At no time will any athlete be denied access to fluids.
2. Public hydration will not be available. This includes shared water bottles and water sources. Each athlete will be required to bring his/her own individualized and labeled bottles.
3. If an athlete arrives to practice or competition without an individualized bottle, they will not be allowed to partake in the practice/competition.