



MPA Soccer Committee

Soccer Recommendation for Return to Participation

Referencing Orders and Guidelines from the Following Resources

National Federation of State High School Associations
Governor's Office - State of Maine
Maine Department of Education
Maine Department of Economic & Community Development
Maine Department of Health and Human Services
Maine Principals' Association Sports Medicine Committee

The NFHS, along with the Maine Guidelines for Community Based Sports, has labeled the sport of soccer as a “Moderate Risk” (Level 4) activity. “Moderate Risk” activities are sports and activities that involve intermittent close proximity or limited, incidental contact, but with protective equipment or mitigating measures in place that may reduce the likelihood of respiratory particle transmission between participants (e.g., wearing masks, modifying play to maintain 6 feet of physical distance, cleaning and disinfecting). The following recommendations are being made in accordance with NFHS and the Maine Department of Economic & Community Development guidelines.

Coaches and School Administrator(s) should hold a team educational session prior to the first contest to educate student-athletes of all rules related to competitive competition with other school districts and the requirements outlined below. In addition, each coach, paid and volunteer, must complete the free Covid-19 course called Covid-19 for Coaches and Administrators currently available on the NFHS Learn platform at <https://nfhslearn.com/>.

- **DISTANCING**

- Space players at least 6 feet apart whenever possible (e.g., during warmup, skill building activities, simulation drills, when explaining drills or the rules of the game).
- Organizers should identify staff members or volunteers to help maintain physical distancing among players, coaches, umpires/referees, and spectators.
- Require individuals to maintain 6 feet of physical distance from individuals who are not part of their household group whenever possible.

- **SPECTATORS/CAPACITY**

The approval of spectators must follow the guidelines below.

- Organizers of community sports activities are responsible for limiting the number of individuals that can gather in a shared space, in accordance with the [Governor's Executive Order](#) on gathering size limits, currently set at 50 people indoors and 100 people outdoors, or fewer if distancing rules cannot be accommodated.
 - Players, coaches, cheerleaders, officials, volunteers, and spectators count toward the gathering limit.
 - If a space cannot accommodate the gathering limit without complying with the 6-foot distancing requirement, occupancy in that space must be limited to allow for such compliance.
 - Face coverings must always be worn by coaches, staff, and spectators.
 - Spectators, if allowed, must maintain 6 feet of physical distance between themselves and others.
- **FACE COVERINGS**
 - Face coverings are permitted by any athlete choosing to wear one during activity.
 - Require individuals to wear a face covering when physical distancing is difficult to maintain, per CDC recommendations and pertinent Executive Orders from the Office of the Governor.
 - Face coverings are not currently recommended for players during high intensity play.
 - Players must wear face coverings when not engaged in active play (e.g. during coaching strategy sessions, in bench area, or any indoor activity).
 - Unless the governing body for your sport has a specific recommendation regarding plastic face shields, do not wear them in place of a face covering given potential safety risks.
 - Face coverings must always be worn by coaches, staff, and spectators.
 - To facilitate the use of a face covering, coaches and officials should consider using an artificial noisemaker such as an air horn or electronic whistle in place of a whistle.
- **SCHEDULING**
 - As a Level 4 activity, competition between teams from the same geographic area (e.g. the same county and in some cases adjacent counties).
 - There shall be no minimum number of games required and the maximum number of games is 10.
- **FACILITY & PLAYING AREA**
 - When possible, schools should provide separate entrances and exits for teams and spectators to separate the teams from the public.
 - Home teams shall provide hand sanitizer/sanitizing stations at the scorer's table and each team bench.
- **VISITING TEAM**
 - Visiting teams should arrive in a self-sufficient manner.
 - Provide their own soccer balls for warmups.
 - Come ready to play the contest dressed in uniform.
 - Medical kit with necessary athletic training supplies.
 - All students-athletes must bring their own water vessel clearly labeled with their name.
 - Visiting teams should plan to bring their own water jug for their student-athletes to refill their water vessels.

- These jugs/refill stations should be clearly marked with the team name and purpose of only for use by such school when possible.
 - Designated space for visiting teams may be available at schools that have protocols in place for sanitizing those areas.
 - Visiting teams will be briefed by the home team medical staff on protocols and isolation space if an athlete becomes sick during play.
- **SCREENING**
 - It should be the understanding of both teams involved in the contest that student-athletes have completed a self-screening for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 prior to participation or entrance into an opposing school's facilities.
 - All game day staff/officials will be asked to complete self-screening questions prior to arriving at the event.
- **TEAM BENCHES**
 - Team areas may be expanded for players only toward the end line to promote social distancing.
 - Limit bench personnel to observe social distancing of 6 feet.
 - Schools should maximize the number of bench seats for each team (seats may be arranged in such a way that one is behind the other.)
 - All participants and coaches shall always wear face covering while on or in the bench area.
 - Mask may be removed while hydrating so long as the person hydrating is 6 feet from anyone else in/on the bench area.
- **PRE-MATCH CONFERENCE**
 - Limit attendees to one official, the head coach from each team, and a single captain from each team.
 - Move the location of the pregame conference away from the team benches and into the center of the field. All individuals must be masked and maintain a social distance of 6 feet during the conference.
 - Suspend handshakes prior to and following the pregame conference. Coaches and captains can use a good sportsmanship wave.
 - No pregame introductions. Send players to their field positions for the start of play.
- **TOOTH AND MOUTH PROTECTORS**
 - Student-athletes should keep their mouth guards in their mouth throughout the competition. If the mouth guard is taken out a player's hands should also be washed or disinfected before continuing to play.
- **OFFICIALS' TABLE**
 - Limit to essential personnel which includes home team scorer and timer with a recommended distance 6 feet between individuals. Visiting team personnel may need to find an alternative location.
 - All scorers table personnel must wear masks.
 - Scorer's table shall have its own hand sanitizer/sanitizing station.

- **BALL RUNNERS**

- Ball runners must always wear masks. Encourage social distancing of 6 feet. Additional game balls may be placed around the outside of the field to limit contact with the ball. Ball runners are encouraged to use their feet to return balls to designated areas. Teams are responsible for retrieving balls on the bench side of the field.

- **SUBSTITUTIONS**

- Substitutes should remain socially distant from the team benches, head table, and opposing team substitutes.
- The number of substitutes in the substitution area is limited to one athlete per team. The use of a visual field marking such as an “X” (or other markings) in the substitution box is encouraged so that substitutes from the opposing team will remain 6 feet away from each other.

- **IN-GAME PROCEDURE**

- Coaches and all bench personnel must always wear masks during the contest.
- Athletes involved in vigorous activity on the field during play will be the only ones exempt from wearing masks.
- Athletes, coaches, and game personnel should sanitize hands and game balls after the first natural stoppage following the 20:00 mark of both halves and when entering or exiting the playing area.
- If a game ball is touched by an outside person, that ball should be removed and sanitized prior to reusing.
- Prohibit unnecessary physical contact, such as high fives, handshakes, fist bumps, or hugs.

- **SOCCER SPECIFIC RULE/GAME MODIFICATIONS**

- Stop the clock at the first natural stoppage after the 20:00 mark of each half to allow for sanitization of hands, game balls and water break.
- **Slide tackling** is suspended if players are within 6 feet of another player, which is to avoid tripping over or falling on top of one another. Any slide tackle within 6 feet of an opponent will result in an indirect free kick for a dangerous play. It is allowed outside of 6 feet because it is a legal method of tackling a ball where you can slide to save it from going out of bounds.
- **Throw-ins and corner kicks** will have restrictions to help prevent physical contact to play the ball. At the time of a throw in or corner kick into the penalty box (including the arc at top of the penalty box) there may only be 5 offensive players and 5 defensive players plus the goalie in the penalty box at the time of the throw or kick. Other players may enter the box once the throw or kick has been played.
- On all **indirect and direct free kicks**, players must reasonably remain at least 3 feet from each other (an arm’s length). This eliminates the traditional wall and jostling for positioning in front of a goalkeeper. By rule they will need to provide 10 yards from the ball prior to the kick.

- The **drop-ball restart** has been suspended, and the referee will instead award an indirect free kick to whichever team is deemed to be in possession (must follow 2020 NFHS rule change).