



# NCYSA Return to Activity

Version 4

UPDATED: September 9, 2020

Changes from V3 highlighted in gray

## Purpose:

The purpose of this document is to provide athletes, parents, coaches, and soccer organizations with information they should use to assist them with developing their return-to-activity programming in the context of COVID-19. Given each organizations vastly different resources and local conditions, this document cannot be prescriptive; rather, it should spark thoughtful deliberation among those who intend to use this information to create their own unique return-to-activity programming plan specific to their situation. Much of the new content in Version 4 comes from USSF Grassroots recommendations.

Our first Return to Activity, published on June 2, provided guidelines for training and safe interaction, including guidance for field use, group size, sanitary conditions, equipment and water rules, limiting spectators, and coaching safety. NCYSA has since monitored the various expert recommendations from many sources, and documents are posted on our website:

- The US Soccer Federation Grassroots Recommendations Phase 1 thru Phase 3
- The USYS Guidance in May and June
- The National and NC Federation of High School Athletics in May and June
- The NC Department of Health and Human Services Interim Guidance in May and July
- The CDC Youth Sports Program FAQs in June

## Current Status:

Since June 2nd, more is known about soccer safety. Studies and observations, and the experiences from other states and organizations, has led NCYSA to offer our associations the choice to play competitive games, as long as guidelines are followed for all roles – players, coaches, clubs, spectators, and referees. The other aspects of healthy youth (exercise, competition, social contact) are important factors in decisions to return to play.

## Important to remember:

- All sports and activities have risks of injury, viruses, and illnesses. We can mitigate risk to players and their families and still get the benefits of soccer.
- Parents have the ultimate say in their kids' activities, and they should expect no repercussions for any decisions they make.
- Clubs, who know their local conditions, must determine to start, stop, or alter their practice and play.
- While we should carefully consider guidelines and recommendations, we MUST follow mandated state orders and protocols, which may change with the pandemic.

## Following Sections:

- A. General Guidelines
- B. TOPSoccer Guidelines
- C. Competition Considerations
- D. Other Considerations and Resources

## A. General Guidelines

NCYSA Return to Activity Guidelines are fashioned using U.S. Soccer Play ON Recommendations, US Youth Soccer Guidelines, and North Carolina State Guidelines focused on both COVID-19 considerations and overall health of our staff, players, and families.

### General Guidelines for practice (to include scrimmaging):

- Participants should have no signs or symptoms of COVID-19 in the past 14 days and have no known exposure to someone that has been ill in 14 days.
- Participants have not travelled out of state for 14 days prior to beginning training.
- Participants have no temperature readings above 100.4F; temperature checks should not be conducted by staff but by players and their families prior to attending training.
- Upon arrival to training, coaches or staff should ask each athlete if they are experiencing any signs or symptoms of COVID-19. If the athlete has any signs or symptoms of COVID-19, they should be sent home and instructed to contact their healthcare provider as soon as possible.
- Appropriate infection prevention supplies should be present in multiple targeted areas (e.g., hand sanitizer, facial tissues, facial coverings, hand wash stations, etc.).
- Training sessions should take place outside in an area where social distancing can be maintained. Current NC guidelines are groups of no more than 25, including players and coach(es).
- Two groups of 25 may train on a fullsize field, one at each half. Actual group size and younger age-appropriate fields may require adjustments.
- Participants should use their own equipment and properly sanitize the equipment after every training session.
- Participants should use their own water bottle, towel and any other personal hygiene products.
- Avoid any activities that may require direct or indirect contact (e.g. bumping) between athletes.
- Establish a cleaning schedule/protocol for equipment with the proper use of disinfectant before, during, and after training.
- While coaching can occur onsite, coaches must maintain social distancing from all participants.
- Clubs and coaches must remain sensitive to accommodating parents who may be uncomfortable with returning to activities. There should be no punitive repercussions for players whose parents are uncomfortable with returning to activities
- Players should hydrate while socially distanced. This will also provide the brief opportunity for cooling down, which may not happen throughout the scrimmage or play.
- Players should sanitize their hands before and after play
- The practice organizer should sanitize game balls for use during the scrimmage.
- Social distancing should be observed and masks on while on the sidelines.
- No unnecessary contact: no high-fives, chest bumps, elbow bumps, huddles, etc.

### Club Responsibilities:

- Create and distribute protocols to members. Document what was done, who did it & how, and who from the club verified ongoing communication and actions.
- Have an effective multi-platform 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. Also, call NCYSA (Kathy Robinson) and report the incident immediately.
- Maintain participant confidentiality regarding health status.

- Be sensitive and accommodating to parents who may be uncomfortable with kids returning to activities.
- 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. Visit [ncsoccer.org/covid](https://ncsoccer.org/covid) for more information
- Be prepared to shut down and stop operations.
- Develop plans for temporary closure of facilities and cancellation of outdoor activities or camps for proper disinfection.
- Provide adequate field space for social distancing.
- Provide hand sanitizing stations and waste receptacles at fields for individual participant use.
- Develop a relationship and a dialogue with local health officials.
- If an NCYSA team requests a Notification to Travel, that team's club, after determining the safety of travel out of state, must notify NCYSA via email approving the team's travel before it will be issued.

### **Coach Responsibilities:**

- Ensure the health and safety of the participants. Be aware of any higher risk conditions noted in NCYSA waivers (formerly called medical waivers).
- Inquire how the athletes are feeling. Send home anyone you believe acts or looks ill.
- Keep a log of all players attending. Ask if players took their temperature before coming and it was below 100.4F.
- 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 practice equipment (e.g. cones, disk etc.); do not enlist parental or attendee assistance.
- All training should be conducted outdoors and compliant with social distancing per state or local health guidelines.
- Coaches are strongly encouraged to incorporate hydration / cool-down / or “sanitation breaks” during practice.
- Coaches should focus on space, not close 1v1 defense, in practice and scrimmage to mitigate risks of contact between players.
- Monitor to ensure no group celebrations, high-5s, hugs, handshakes, fist-bumps, etc.
- Always wear a face mask to and from the fields. Maintain social distancing yourself (not within six feet of any player) or wear a mask during training.
- Coaches should maintain social distance requirements from players and parents based on state and local health requirements. Avoid huddles, parent conferences, etc. if social distancing is difficult.
- The use and sharing of scrimmage vests, or pennies, is not recommended at this time.
- Have fun, stay positive – players and parents are looking to you for leadership.

### **Parent Responsibilities:**

- Parents have the final decision on their child’s play.
- Ensure your child is healthy and symptom-free and check your child’s temperature before activities with others.
- Ensure your child’s NCYSA waiver includes any high risks (ex. asthma, diabetes, heart, immunocompromised conditions).
- Consider not carpooling or very limited carpooling.
- Stay in car or adhere to social distance requirements, based on state/local health guidelines.
- 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:**

- With parent direction, take your temperature daily and before activities with others.
- Wash hands thoroughly before and after training. Avoid touching your face and avoid spitting.
- Bring, and use, hand sanitizer with you at every training. Bring a labeled baggie for your mask and a plastic bag for practice clothing items you remove after practice.
- Wear mask before and immediately after all training and when on sidelines at games and scrimmages.
- Do not touch or share anyone else's equipment (ex. gloves, shoes, uniforms, water, food)
- Practice social distancing, including placing 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.
- Stay in shape and work on your skills at home.

## B. TOPSoccer General Guidelines

**Registration tables** (if utilized) should be cleaned prior to event.

- Registration desk assistants/staff should wear a mask and disposable gloves.
- Every person should be required to clean his or her hands with readily accessible hand sanitizer.
- Hand sanitizer needs to be present on registration table(s).
- Emphasis should be placed on electronic forms. Try to move away from paper registration forms.
- Sign in sheets and name tags should only be written by the registration desk assistants/staff vs individual registrants. Pre-printed name tags via electronic registration are encouraged.

**Players and Volunteers** (including TOPSoccer Buddies):

- Encourage parent/guardian/family member to act as the buddy for their player
- Greet players/parents at the beginning and administer screening questions about player illnesses and those within their household members.
- Check temperatures.
- Make masks and gloves available to those who want to wear them.
- Utilize hand sanitizer prior to, during, and after participation.
- Participants and attendees should use their own water bottle, towel, and personal hygiene products.

**Equipment:**

- Prior to each session:
- All equipment that is touched during play should be disinfected with spray/wipes.
- Only staff should touch equipment, if possible.
- All pennies (vests) should be washed prior to each session.
- If using another facility's equipment (e.g. goals, benches), they should be sanitized/cleaned before and after sessions.

**Exercises:**

- Focus on a skill/activity-based program vs a structure that encourages scrimmaging
- Emphasis should be placed on exercises that allow players and buddies to practice skills with 6 feet of distance from each other, if possible.
- Exercises should avoid transitions that involve "physically tagging a teammate" such as relay races or tag. Use alternative visual cues.
- If you do want to scrimmage, consider small-sided games.
- Reduce the amount of time (and total number of players).

**Closing rituals:**

- No handshakes, high-5s or group celebrations; consider alternatives that avoid contact like New Zealand Haka-style dance, hand waves, gestures, etc.

**After the session:**

- Have a wastebasket available for masks and gloves.
- Require everyone to use hand sanitizer before leaving sessions.
- Use disinfectant spray/wipes on high traffic areas, especially gates, door handles and water fountains.

## C. Competitive Guidelines

For organized games across the state, the following recommendations are adapted from *U.S. Soccer PLAY ON Phase III Grassroots Recommendations Guide*, updated July 8, 2020, and should be followed as appropriate for local and field conditions and player age groups.

### Participating in Competitions & Tournaments:

1. Teams should consider participating in local or regional single-day, outdoor events to avoid travel and especially avoid overnight stays.
2. If travel is required to an out-of-state tournament, NCYSA permission to travel rules will apply. If clubs want travel authorization, a letter to NCYSA from the club president is required, stating they have reviewed safety plans and approve travel. Returning from an out-of-state tournament, teams and spectators should consider a quarantine of 14 days based on conditions.

### Field Considerations:

1. Field markings should consider wider sidelines for spectator and participant spacing for the next field, even if slightly narrower fields result.
2. Field markings should include social distancing spacing reminders for both sides of the field and allow additional spacing between opposing team spectators at midfield and between opposing teams on the player side. Fields without adequate spacing may require shifting start timing to prevent crowded bench or spectator areas. Benches should be removed or not used.
3. Signage may be used to remind spectators and participants of key protocols, entry and exit paths, and limitations on spectator numbers.

### Warm-Ups:

1. Warm-ups should not begin until previous teams have left the field and equipment has been cleaned and sanitized. Spectators and players should remain in their vehicle until the teams from the prior game have left the field area. Allow for extra time between games to accommodate as necessary.
2. Competition warm-up recommendations should follow training recommendations, such as:
  - a) Coaches should not be within six feet of any player
  - b) Progressions between warm-up drills should be set up prior to players arriving to field. The players should not touch any equipment.
  - c) In general, maintain as much social distance as possible during warm-up activities.
3. Participants should avoid intentionally touching each other before or after competitions. This includes celebrations such as hugs, high-fives, or huddles.
4. If game balls are used during warm-up, they should be re-sanitized before the game.

### Referee Considerations:

1. Fields should still be walked pre-game.
2. Physical items (nets, goals, corner flags etc.) should be inspected visually.
3. If issues are identified – for example a goal net needs to be repaired or an object needs to be removed from the field of play – the referees should sanitize his or her hands after managing. Referees should maintain at least six feet distance when communicating with their referee crew, players and coaches. If a fourth official is present, they should maintain six feet distance when communicating with coaches, players or their fellow referees. If a fourth official's table is provided, the referee should check that it is six feet away from either bench or coaching area. The fourth official should wear a mask for the duration of the game.

### Pre-Game Activities:

1. The coin toss should be socially distanced.
  - a. Only one referee and one representative per team should take part in the coin toss. Only the owner of the coin should touch the coin. Referees can choose to skip the meeting and use other methods.

- b. All participants involved in the coin toss should wear a mask, following recommendations that masks should be worn at all times excepting moments of physical exertion.
- 2. No pre-game handshakes shall take place.
- 3. Uniform/jewelry checks should be visible checks only, maintaining 6-ft between the referee and player.
- 4. Electronic pass procedures should be followed.
- 5. Team pre-game meetings should be kept brief.
  - a) All participants should wear proper PPE (personal protective equipment) and endeavor to maintain space between themselves and others. Prolonged proximity, even with masks should be avoided.
  - b) Huddles should be avoided. Benches should not be present, and if they are, not used.

**Game Time:**

- 1. Players and coaches at the bench, as well as referees at the fourth official's table, are reminded to wear PPE for the duration of the game.
- 2. No handshakes, high fives, fist bumps, chest bumps, huddles, group celebrations, etc., should take place, including when goals are scored, or when substitutions are leaving or entering the field.
- 3. The following modifications to substitutions protocols are suggested:
  - a) When subbing into the game, players should maintain distance from the referees and other players who are also subbing into the game.
  - b) If a player is subbed out of the game, the player should stand at least six feet away from other individuals while recovering before putting on facemask.
- 4. For throw-ins, active players should collect the ball.
- 5. Masks may be worn during play, but medical advice should be considered by parents and players, as many cautions have been discussed. Masks should pose no danger to the wearer or other players.
- 6. Clean and sanitized balls may be readily available for use, in the case of the ball not being easily retrievable. It is the responsibility of the home team or competition organizer to supply sanitized balls.
- 7. When possible during breaks in play, consider making sanitized balls available to replace used game balls.
- 8. Avoid delays in start of play, so that players do not have pro-longed periods of standing in close proximity. For example, encourage all participants to conduct free kicks and set plays with efficiency so players do not have prolonged periods in shoulder-to-shoulder defense walls.

**Spectator Responsibilities:**

- 1. Practice: No spectators on the fields or sidelines for practices. Remain in parking lots or areas away from the fields of play. Local facility rules will apply.
- 2. Game: The state mandate of a maximum of 50 spectators per field must be followed. Phasing in of spectators (ex. no spectators or 1 per player) is at the discretion of the host club.
- 3. The spectator areas should be marked at social distancing intervals. Additional spacing from the sideline is recommended.
- 4. Masks should be worn to, from, and before games. Stationary spectators may remove masks only if alone or in the presence of their family unit. Masks should be worn if spectators leave the area.

**Hydration / Cool-Down / Sanitation Breaks:**

- 1. Competition organizers are strongly encouraged to consider and follow the necessary steps for approval to incorporate hydration / cool-down / or "sanitation" breaks during games.
- 2. Consideration should be taken to incorporating these at the mid-way point of any half lasting thirty minutes or longer.
- 3. During this break:
  - a) Players should hydrate while socially distanced. This will also provide the brief opportunity for cooling down, which may not happen throughout the game while efficiency is enforced in game activities.
  - b) Players should sanitize their hands.
  - c) The hosting competition can sanitize game balls for use during the game.

**Halftime:**

- 1. During halftime, referees, players and coaches should maintain at least six feet distance.

2. All players and coaches should be wearing proper PPE. If a player needs to recover before participating in halftime activities, player should stand 12 ft away from other individuals while recovering before putting on their face covering or mask.
3. Players should sanitize their hands.
4. Coaches should limit the amount of time the entire team is near the bench area at one time.
5. Referees should sanitize their own equipment (whistle, flags, etc.).

#### **Considerations In The Case Of Injuries:**

1. As able, the Referee should keep a six-foot distance from the injured player while determining if medical attention is necessary
2. If needed, allow a coach or medical professional from the injured player's team to enter the field and attend to the player. The coach/medical professional should wear PPE and gloves. The Referee should remind other players to keep their distance from each other, and the injured player, during the break in play. Players should not congregate.

#### **Post-Game:**

1. No post-game handshakes should take place. Consider other forms of sportsmanship or instituting new acknowledgement traditions, such as clapping, etc.
2. If a referee needs the coach's signature for a roster, place the paper down on the end of the bench and step away to have them sign it.
3. Teams should pack-up and immediately leave the field following the game, exiting at the designated exit point. Post-game meetings should be kept brief, if any meeting is held at all. All participants should wear proper PPE and endeavor to maintain space between themselves and others. Prolonged proximity, even with masks, should be avoided. Huddles should be avoided.
4. Do not have a team snack that is shared among the team members.
5. Players should not take off any equipment until they have left the facility.
6. Teams should clean up bench area so that it is clean of ALL trash.
7. Competition hosts should ensure all equipment, including benches, balls, flags, etc. are sanitized.
8. Spectators are encouraged to maintain social distancing following the game while waiting for their child. Dependent on field layout, spectators may need to wait further away from the field.
9. Referees should leave field immediately following the game and referee duties have been completed assuming they have no other games to officiate. Referee debrief sessions should be conducted in a space where the referees can social distance but still in view of the game field. If referees are working later in the day, the referee should stay away from other individuals, may consider departing the facility or using their personal vehicle as a place to take a break in between games.

#### **Inclement Weather:**

1. Facilities should have a plan in place in the event of inclement weather. As this plan may be different from pre-COVID-19 protocols, it should be adjusted and then communicated with all teams in advance of competitions. If inclement weather is forecasted, consider posting protocols at all entrances and arrival/check-in locations. Social distancing must be observed during any shelter-in-place or evacuation protocols. PPE should be worn and participants should not take off their equipment during the delay.
2. Encourage all participants and spectators to return to their vehicles in the event of inclement weather. When possible, individuals in the car should be limited to members of the immediate family. If non-family members must be present in the vehicle, everyone in the vehicle should wear PPE. If possible, have a back-up option for those who were dropped off or do not have a vehicle on-site. This location should only be used as a last resort. The number of people in these locations should be pre-determined and posted on the wall. In accordance with the Safe Soccer Framework and the U.S. Center for SafeSport policies and guidance, a minor and an adult who is not the minor player's parent/legal guardian may not be alone in a room together.
3. If inclement weather is forecasted, depending on the size of the field complex, the competition hosts may consider taking a conservative approach by communicating game delays or cancellations well in advance of game time.

## D. Other Considerations and Resources

Many of the recommendations rely upon rules and regulations set forth by public health authorities, which will be different across the country. In addition, we all must recognize that there will be other logistical and implementation challenges for activity organizers, participants and their families given COVID-19.

The information 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, US Youth Soccer and NCYSA 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 in your area if you have specific questions. These guidelines address only early phases of return-to-play, and additional guidelines may, or may not, follow as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve. Our state will have a phased approach to masks, reopening of fields, and easing of social distancing requirements. This may vary town to town, county to county. Soccer organizations need to be aware of 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. Health consequences may be long-standing and only apparent weeks after initial infection and recovery. Until COVID-19 is eradicated, a vaccine is developed, or a cure is found, there is no way of eliminating the risk of infection. This view should always be at the forefront when designing and considering return-to-activity programming. NC 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 should be clearly communicated to parents and participants in your respective programs.

### Resources:

NCYSA: <http://ncyouthsoccer.org/>

US Soccer docs: <https://www.ncsoccer.org/file.aspx?DocumentId=2323>

NC Government: <https://www.nc.gov/covid19>

CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Special Olympics: <https://resources.specialolympics.org/resources-to-help-during-the-crisis>

Federation for Children with Special Needs: <https://fcsn.org/>

Johns Hopkins Covid-19 Data: [coronavirus.jhu.edu](https://coronavirus.jhu.edu)