

RETURN TO SCHOOL SPORT PLAN

BC SCHOOL SPORTS

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to support the over 450 member schools around the province in safely reintegrating school sport activities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Importance of School Sport

School sport remains one of the most valued co-curricular activities for students and our member school communities. School sport continues to provide one of the lowest barrier entries to sport available, costs are generally much lower than club and community sport and schools often provide the necessary equipment or cover fees for families that are unable to pay. Additionally, BCSS through its partnership with KidSport BC allows schools to apply for funds for their student-athletes who may require some assistance with their participation fees. Further, many districts have no-cut policies in lower grades or will run multiple teams to ensure that students in the younger grades all have a chance to participate.

BCSS and its member schools believe participating in school sport is a privilege. With this comes the understanding that any participating student-athlete must ensure their behaviour, actions and academic standing meet the expectations as set by their school.

There is an abundance of research that supports that participation in school sport aids in the development of critical life skills, improves the mental well-being of a student, enhances their academic achievement and leads to healthier habits into adulthood.

Recent research conducted during the pandemic has indicated that 70% of student-athletes are showing signs of depression and anxiety at levels normally requiring medical intervention, a nearly 40% increase over normal benchmarks. Additionally, the study noted physical activity had decreased 50% during the pandemic in these student-athletes. School sport plays a critical role in the physical, emotional and psychological well-being of our student-athletes.

These are a few of the many reasons bringing school sport back, albeit in a modified way, is critical to the health of our student-athletes, and the sustainability of school sport as a pillar of the educational experience.

Dynamic Response to Pandemic

Predicting the future during this unprecedented time is nearly impossible. It is important to note that the stage for the Return to School Sport and even the guidelines within the stages will change in response to the guidance of the Public Health Officials. Any changes will be communicated to the membership and partner stakeholders. BCSS has identified 4 stages for operating through this pandemic.

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
No in-person school sport activities	Intra-School activities within educational cohorts	Inter-school activities with modifications and restrictions	Normalized school sport activities

Current BCSS Stage

On March 16, 2020, the BCSS Board of Directors, consistent with the Province's State of Emergency Declaration and mandatory school closures, issued a moratorium on all in-person school sport activities. This became Stage 1 in our Return to School Sport plan and was in effect from March 16, 2020, and will continue through September 9, 2020.

Effective September 10, 2020, as per the Ministry of Education Restart School Plan, the BCSS Board of Directors will lift the moratorium and place BCSS in **Stage 2: Intra-school activities within educational cohorts**. The Board will be closely monitoring the re-introduction of school sport during this stage. Working collaboratively with school districts, administrators, athletic directors, the Ministry of Education and public health officials, the Board will determine when it is safe to move to stage 3.

BC School Sports is currently in STAGE 2 of the Return to School Sport Plan.

GOVERNANCE & DECISION MAKING

Governance Permissions: School & School District Discretion

While member schools may not proceed with activities that have not been permitted by BC School Sports, the decision to offer approved activities will remain at the discretion of the School District and/or Member School. (ie. If BCSS is in Stage 2 of the Return to School Sport plan, which allows for intra-school, educational cohort-based activities, a school district or school may choose not to offer those activities at any given time).

It is recommended that each school district, in collaboration with their District Health and Safety Office review these guidelines before commencing any activities. A district or school may not authorize activities that go beyond the scope of those permitted by BCSS.

The application and delivery of school sport experiences must fit into the overall health and safety plan of each school. This can not be considered a stand-alone document or be implemented without consideration of the wider impact. Athletic directors must work with their administrators to ensure the safety protocols are being met and they are consistent with the school's safety plan.

Responsibility for Adherence to the Rules

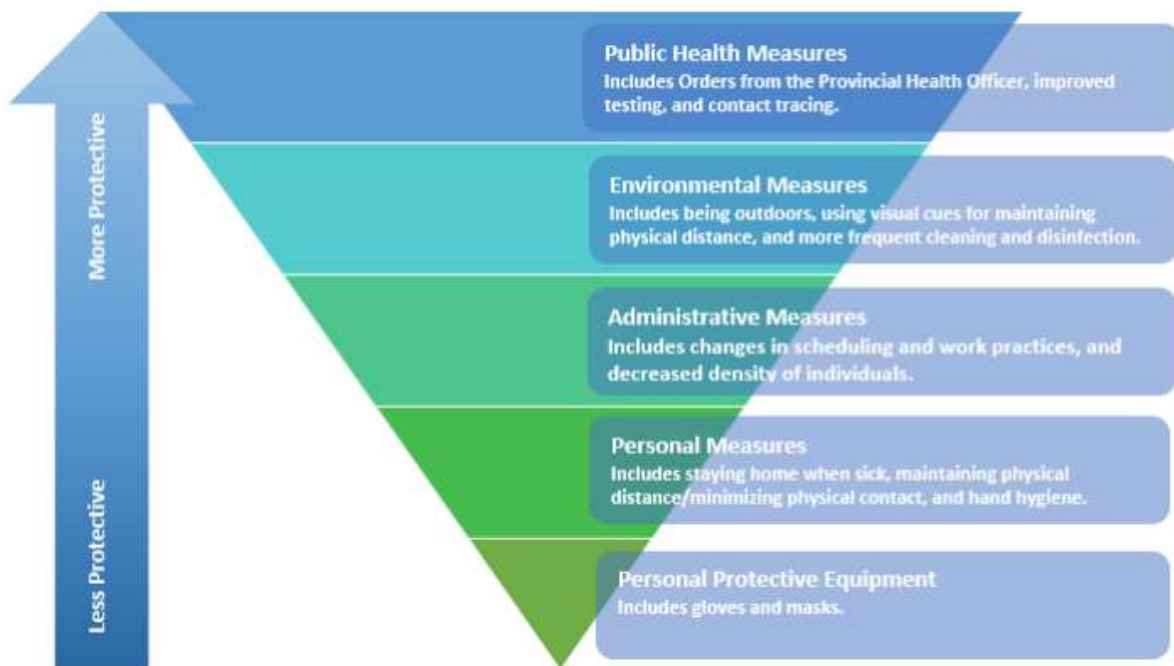
BC School Sports operates on the foundation of self-governance and self-regulation. There is a strong history of BCSS member schools ensuring the approved policies of BCSS are followed to ensure their own adherence to the rules.

COVID-19 policies and guidelines will be no different. It is the responsibility of districts, school administrators and athletic directors to ensure their school is adhering to the COVID-19 policies and guidelines approved by BC Public Health and BC School Sports.

The role of the athletic director has never been more important in a school than right now. The continual education and communication that will be required with coaches and student-athletes, while constantly updating and working with school administration to ensure safety protocols are being met will be critical. BCSS recognizes these are unusual times and there are fiscal challenges across the province, but we strongly encourage districts to maintain all support for athletic directors at this time. Additionally, we ask administrators to empower their AD's to take a hands-on leadership role navigating this return to school sport.

MITIGATION & OUTBREAK PROTOCOL

The Hierarchy for Infection Prevention and Exposure Control Measures for Communicable Disease



Risk Mitigation

- Student-athletes and coaches should, consistent with their school's safety plan complete a daily check for signs and symptoms of illness
- Member schools must complete a comprehensive assessment of their school sport facilities as part of their safety plan, and create mitigation strategies wherever required.
- By offering school sport activities, Member Schools are acknowledging the guidelines of the Government of BC and the Return to School Sport Plan from BC School Sports.
- Member schools and school districts are encouraged to consult their legal and occupational health experts and consider providing student-athletes (and their legal guardian), with an agreement acknowledging their acceptance of the risk of participating in school sport activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The decision to require an agreement is at the discretion of the school or school district.
- Non-teacher coaches should explicitly receive a copy of the school safety plan, the BCSS Return to School sport plan, and an environment to review and ask questions before leading students in any school sport activities.
- In Stage 2, it is recommended that schools keep records of who attended each training session on a day-by-day basis.
- Coaches should not use traditional whistles and can use electronic whistles or other means of communicating with their student-athletes.

Outbreak Protocol

- Upon notification of a participating student-athlete receiving a positive diagnosis for COVID-19, the coach and/or athletic director will notify the appropriate person as per the Member School's outbreak plan. The school outbreak plan should be followed.
- Once the outbreak plan has been initiated, and separate from that process, the athletic director must contact BC School Sports and advise them of the student-athlete positive test. In Stage 2, we do not require any personal information about the student, simply the date of the positive test, the gender of the student-athlete and the sport(s) the student-athlete was participating in. This data will simply be used by BCSS to assist with tracking trends and statistics, to help identify potential areas for future progression or areas that may need further modification. The school and district remain responsible for following through with the outbreak protocol and liaising with public health officials as required.
- If a student-athlete is in an educational cohort that has an exposure, but no student-athletes receive positive tests, reporting to BCSS is not required.

It is at the discretion of the member school administration and/or school district administration when that team/cohort can resume their school sport activities.

GENERAL SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS FOR ALL BCSS RETURN TO SCHOOL SPORT STAGES

Hand Washing Stations or Hand Sanitizer: Schools should ensure that student-athletes have easy access to handwashing/sanitizing stations. Washing/sanitizing your hands is recommended whenever touching common surfaces or shared equipment. Student-athletes are required to wash (or sanitize with ABHR) their hands before, during, and after any school sport activities. Coaches should ensure that as important as hydration breaks are, that student-athletes are washing or disinfecting their hands at least with the same frequency.

Masks: The Government of BC encourages the use of non-medical face coverings whenever social distancing can't be adhered to. Student-athletes are encouraged to wear a non-medical face mask before and after school sport activities and wherever social distancing can not be maintained. Players who may be on the sidelines for a portion of a training session are encouraged to wear masks when waiting to return to the field of play. Coaches should wear masks.

Shared Equipment: While we encourage schools to reduce the amount of shared equipment when feasible, shared equipment is permitted within an educational cohort. For example, a multi-ball rotation is recommended to assist with the proper cleaning of shared equipment during school sport activities. There can be no sharing of equipment between students of different cohorts unless it is properly sanitized and disinfected.

Social Distancing: Social distancing of 2 metres (6 feet) is to be maintained wherever possible. To prevent the spread of COVID-19 student-athletes are strongly encouraged to social distance from fellow student-athletes, coaches, or team staff before, during, and after school sport activities.

Group Size: As per the Government of BC's regulations, gatherings of greater than 50 persons are not permitted, even if social distancing is enforced. The size of any group includes participants, coaches, event volunteers, officials and spectators. When evaluating how this has been applied around the province, the consensus application is that the maximum of 50 applies to one regulation field of play, and it's normal and appropriate spectator areas. For example, it would apply to one full-sized soccer field and the bleachers or spectator areas for that field. It is important however we remain logical and note that an outdoor soccer field is a much larger and less risk than say an indoor facility that contains 3 volleyball courts.

Facility Preparedness, Signage and Wayfinding: We encourage the use of school facilities whenever possible to ensure enhanced cleaning protocols and procedures are being met. School sport facilities should be in the school safety plan and subject to the required enhanced cleaning required by the school and school district. Using 3rd party facilities is permitted but should be approved by the school or district administrators and school groups must adhere to the facility-specific protocols in place. Indoor and Outdoor facilities should have appropriate wayfinding and signage to assist with the direction of traffic, to promote one-way traffic and eliminate congestion points where people congregate.

Locker Rooms/Change Rooms: Each Member School will determine if the locker rooms can be used for any specific purposes. We encourage programs to ask their student-athletes to arrive for any school sport as prepared as possible. Where the use of locker rooms may be required, ensure the timing of student entry and exits are scheduled and regulated and enhanced cleaning protocols are in place. It is strongly recommended schools consult their Health and Safety representative to evaluate the needs for these facilities and use them only when required.

RETURN TO SCHOOL SPORT STAGES

Stage 1: No in-person school sport activities

In this stage, there are to be no in-person school sport activities. Facilities are closed, all in-person team activities are not permitted to meet in person. This includes “off-site” unofficial practices, workouts, or meetups between the team and coaches. Virtual team meetings and workouts are permitted to stay engaged with your team if the team has already been selected.

Stage 1: Questions & Answers

Q: Can I get my athletes to meet me in a public park/court to practice?

A: No, you are not permitted to interact with your student-athletes at any time in person during this stage, you may provide online workouts/individual drills, but they are to be performed individually. For the safety of all athletes and coaches, at no time should coaches or parents be encouraging athletes to interact in person.

Q: My administrator said they are okay with us practicing does that mean we can practice?

A: While in Stage 1 there are no school sport activities, even if the administrator is comfortable with offering school sport activities. Participating in school sport while in stage 1 could result in penalties ranging from monetary fines to disqualification from postseason play to a suspension of the school from BCSS activities.

Q: My sport is a non-contact, low-risk sport. Can we operate if we maintain social distance?

A: No, although BCSS has considered the risk of each of the 19 sports offered, all school sport activities no matter the risk assessment are not permitted in stage 1.

Stage 2: Intra-School Activities Within Educational Cohorts

In stage 2, as per the Ministry of Education Restart Education Plan, co-curricular activities such as school sport may take place, but under the conditions as specified by the Ministry in the plan.

This means that reduced physical contact training and friendly competition can take place within the educational cohorts students are placed in by their school for the delivery of the curriculum. This means that social distancing should still be maintained and masks used for all aspects of preparing for the sporting activity. It is only during the actual activity, within the natural parameters of the sport would there be a reduction in physical distancing, however it is noted that contact should be reduced. This eliminates any drills or contests where there is intense and/or prolonged physical contact. (ie. Line play in football, scrums in rugby etc). Coaches are required to adapt to the training environment to reduce physical contact in this stage

Students from different cohorts in the same school may participate together as long as there are strict physical distancing measures implemented. This means maintaining a minimum of 2m of space at all times and no sharing of equipment between students in different cohorts, etc. Unfortunately, in most schools and for most of our activities, this will rule out traditional training environments or practices. Scrimmages or contests between cohorts, even in the same school are also prohibited in this stage.

We want to encourage our schools, athletic directors and coaches to be creative in finding new solutions and ways to engage the student body in your school. While this situation is far from ideal, it does present an opportunity for perhaps wider engagement from those who may not traditionally participate. We must keep in mind that any physical activity and engagement with their school at this time will bring a sense of normalcy and will be beneficial to the physical and mental health of the student. We will continue to work to progress the options available to our member schools, but our member schools should do the same and attempt to expand the reach of school sport even wider within their schools at this time.

Stage 2 Specifics

Group Size in Stage 2: A maximum of 50 participants in any one training area. Approved coaches and staff are permitted in the training zone, but unless they are a teacher in the same educational cohort, are required to maintain a 2m distance. More than 1 cohort may practice on the same training area as long as the total number of participants doesn't exceed 50, there is no sharing of equipment (without cleaning) between the educational cohorts, and social distancing is maintained between students in different cohorts. We recommend that if a school is going to use one field of play for multiple cohorts, that a "buffer zone" of at least 2m (6ft) be set up that is clearly marked by cones or dividers so that it is easily distinguishable and that students and equipment cannot pass through this area.

Facility Logistics: Facilities used for school sport should ensure that in addition to the proper signage to control the flow of traffic, the storage of personal belongings is provided for in a socially distant manner.

Social Distancing: Social distancing and reduced contact are encouraged wherever possible. Between students of different educational cohorts, it is mandatory. Coaches should be staying socially distant from athletes if they are involved in coaching multiple cohorts.

Equipment: Schools should attempt to reduce shared equipment where possible. Equipment sharing is permitted between students in the same educational cohort. Students in different educational cohorts are not permitted to share equipment unless it has been appropriately sanitized.

Health and Safety Protocols: Students required by the Ministry of Education to wear a mask in certain educational settings should continue to do so whenever preparing for, or immediately after a school sport activity. Sports that allow for masks to be worn

during training are encouraged to do so. Coaches and athletic directors must be cognizant of high touch-point surfaces such as pylons or cones. This must be addressed in the school safety plan and approved by the school before the commencement of activities. Any coaches who do not teach within the same educational cohort as the students or coach multiple cohorts of students must wear a mask while coaching.

STARS & Eligibility: Member schools are encouraged to upload all their students into STARS at this time. However, schools are NOT required to add them to specific teams in stage 2. For the purpose of BCSS student-athlete transfers, a student participating while BCSS is in stage 2 will not be considered to have participated in an interschool sport.

Minimizing Contact: While students in the same cohort can participate in a sport naturally without having to maintain strict social distancing, the ministry has stated that school sport must still maintain reduced contact. This means that in sports where there continuous or sustained close contact (as defined in the glossary) are required to adapt sessions to reduce the sustained contact.

Spectators: While this stage provides very little opportunity for any competition, we recommend spectators not be permitted at training or competitive events. If a school chooses to allow them, spectators should be a member of a student-athlete's immediate family bubble, be required to wear a mask, social distance from student-athletes and other spectators and remain in a designated area for spectators. It should be also noted that any spectators contribute to the 50 person maximum at any one training area.

School Teams Playing as Club Teams: We have already heard that as a result of the discrepancy between what is currently permitted in a club/community sport setting as opposed to what is currently permitted in school sport that some school teams are looking at playing in club leagues. Here are a few reminders of BCSS policy for administrators, athletic directors and coaches.

- club teams should be an aggregate of players from the community
- teams of BCSS Member Schools may only play teams from other member schools
- a club team must be entirely independent of the school, meaning no provision of equipment, uniforms, facilities or other support, and the club is an entirely outside entity, generally with its own business number and insurance
- a rental agreement for any school space should be in place for outside groups. Note that most school districts at present have stated they will not be renting their gymnasium space to outside groups

We understand the frustration and the desire to look for workarounds, but using your school team as a club team may jeopardize the eligibility of that school team for play in the future. Administrators and AD's should be explicitly clear about the expectations of their coaches, and should ensure any group wanting to explore playing club is meeting all of the standards as listed above. Additionally, what is permitted currently may change as we move forward in the coming months.

Stage 2 Questions & Answers

Q: The student-athletes on my team are split across multiple cohorts, can we practice together?

A: If you can train in your sport and maintain strict social distancing, then yes. However, in reality, we recognize that the majority of sports will not allow for that. Best practice would dictate that student-athletes from different cohorts have different fields of play. Where that isn't possible, student-athletes from different educational cohorts should be separated by a buffer zone, and maintain physical distancing at all times.

Q: We have limited equipment, can different cohorts use the same equipment?

A: Provided that the equipment is sanitized before being used by another cohort, yes, the same equipment can be used. If you are training two (or more) educational cohorts simultaneously, there should be no sharing of equipment, unless again, it's being sanitized before being used by another cohort.

Q: Can the same coach be present in multiple cohorts? What about an outside coach?

A: Yes, if the coach comes from within that educational cohort, the coach can be present and interact with the student-athletes as normal. Similar to a TTOC (substitute teacher) a teacher-coach from a different educational cohort, or an outside coach can be present in multiple cohorts provided they maintain social distance from the student-athletes while taking all measures to ensure the safety of all student-athletes, such as wearing a mask at all times. Ultimately, this is at the discretion of the school administration.

Q: When will my student-athletes' eligibility be impacted?

A: The number of years of eligibility available to any student-athlete is five consecutive years, beginning with the entry to Grade 8, this remains unchanged. As it pertains to transfers, rostering of players in STARS is NOT required for Stage 2, and a student who participates in this stage is not considered to have participated in that sport for this year.

Q: If one of our student-athletes tests positive for COVID-19 what do we do?

A: Follow your school outbreak protocol by notifying the appropriate persons. Once the outbreak protocol has been initiated, the athletic director should contact BC School Sports to report the positive case. We require only the date of the positive test, student-athlete gender and sport.

Q: Can cohorts compete against each other as long as they are from the same school?

A: Cohorts are not permitted to compete against one another unless in a sport that allows for social distancing to be maintained. However, creative activities to support participation and healthy competition are encouraged within an educational cohort.

Q: Can ‘contact’ sports practice?

A: It is important to note for the sake of coronavirus transmission, contact isn't viewed in the sense of a rough physical sporting play such as in football or rugby. Instead, contact is the amount of time spent close to another person. For example, Ultimate is considered a Group C sport (frequent or sustained contact) despite there being minimal physical contact during gameplay.

BCSS is encouraging schools to get creative with how they provide opportunities for their students. Sports with frequent or sustained contact may practice but are required to modify their practices to ensure a meaningful reduction in contact time. This will look different for each sport. For example, in Ultimate, if during practicing a team is performing game-like simulations, a rule adaptation may be required where the defender must remain two paces from the student-athlete with the disc. In football, this will mean no line play where the D-line and O-line are face to face. In rugby, this would eliminate scrums. For some sports, they may be able to proceed with minimal adaptation, wherein others a training environment will be limited by the restrictions in place due to the nature of that specific sport.

BCSS will work to standardize any rule adaptations required by the government should we be permitted to move to stage 3. However, for stage 2, coaches must adapt their practice plans to reduce sustained or frequent contact between student-athletes.

Q: A coach from another school in our health district would like to have a friendly exhibition game while maintaining social distance, can my team participate?

A: During stage 2 there is no inter-school competition permitted; this includes scrimmages, exhibition games, or friendly competition. Even with social distancing, no competition is allowed between cohorts.

Q: Can our school practice out-of-season sports (ie. Winter or Spring Sports)?

A: While BCSS is one of the few school sport jurisdictions in North America that does not limit out-of-season practices, at this time it is recommended that schools focus on the seasons currently in season. This is ultimately at the discretion of the school administration and the athletic director.

Stage 3: Inter-school activities with modifications and restrictions

BCSS is working hard to obtain permission from the Ministry of Education to move to this stage. We understand the frustration felt by many that club/community sport is progressing to competition and we in school sport are lagging so far behind. We have continually made this argument to those involved in decision making.

We have many concepts available for Ministry review, however one includes proposing that BC School Sports adopt the already approved framework for club/community sport by classifying our activities into four groups based on risk profiles. We are hopeful

we will be able to introduce some inter-school competition, with varying levels of restrictions. They are as follows

Group A Activities - Individual sports that can maintain physical distancing:

Aquatics, Badminton, Golf, Gymnastics, Mtn. Biking, Skiing, Snowboard, Track & Field, Tennis

Group B Activities - Sports that have minimal contact:

Curling, Volleyball

Group C Activities - Sports with frequent or sustained contact:

Basketball, Field Hockey, Football, Soccer, Ultimate, Rugby

Group D Activities - Combat Sports:

Wrestling

It is important to note that these sports are categorized for play in their natural form, or with some minimal adaptations. Once we receive some clarity from the Ministry, we will work with our commissioners and members to determine if altering rules would allow for a better experience for the student-athletes to lower the risk profile of a sport.

An updated version of this document containing details on Stage 3 will be released when we receive approval from the government. **Effective September 10, 2020, all BCSS activities will be in Stage 2 until further notice.**

Stage 4: Normalized School Sport

Training and Competition can resume with limited to no modifications. Zone and Provincial Championships will look and feel similar to what they have in the past, although may require adaptation based on the guidance of public health officials.

COVID-19¹

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses found mostly in animals. In humans, they can cause diseases ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). The disease caused by the new coronavirus has been named COVID-19.

COVID-19 was first identified in late 2019. It was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization in March 2020.

Transmission

Covid-19 is transmitted via liquid droplets when a person coughs, sneezes or sometimes talks or sings. If you are in close contact with an infected person, the virus can enter the body if droplets get into the eyes, nose, or throat. These droplets usually land one to two metres away, but they can land on another person if they are close by.

COVID-19 can also spread by touch. If droplets are left on objects and surfaces after an infected person sneezes, coughs on, or touches them, other people may become infected by touching these objects or surfaces, and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. That's why it is recommended you cough or sneeze into your arm and wash your hands regularly.

Symptoms

Symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to other respiratory illnesses including the flu and common cold. The most common symptoms include:

- Fever
- Chills
- Cough or worsening of chronic cough
- Shortness of Breath
- Runny Nose
- Loss of sense of smell or taste
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Diarrhea
- Nausea and vomiting
- Muscle Aches

¹ BC Centre for Disease Control. www.bccdc.ca (multiple pages). Accessed August 24, 2020

Prevention

Prevention efforts to reduce exposure or spreading of droplets is focused in 3 key areas:

1) Hand Washing

Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Where soap isn't available, using an alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) is a suitable alternative

2) Physical Distancing

Knowing that the majority of droplets fall to the ground in 1-2 metres, maintaining a physical distance of 2m is an effective way to lower the risk of transmission.

3) Wearing a Mask

Non-surgical masks can act as a barrier of droplets and help stop the spread of droplets from a person's mouth, and nose when talking, laughing, yelling, singing, coughing or sneezing. Wearing masks should be used in combination with other preventative measures, but are important to wear when physical distancing can't be maintained, or if you or someone you care for is sick.

The BC Centre for Disease Control has an entire section of its website with specific information on COVID-19. For more information, please visit: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19>

RESOURCES

[ViaSport Return to Sport Resources](#)

[Provincial Sport Specific Return to Sport Guidelines](#)

[BC Government Restart Plan](#)

[BC K-12 Education Restart Plan](#)

GLOSSARY

Buffer Zone: The area required on a training area where more than one cohort is present and is clearly marked by cones, dividers or the like, to prevent the movement of student-athletes and equipment between cohorts. The Buffer Zone must be at least 2m (6ft) wide.

Community Sport Cohort: A community sport cohort is a group of participants who primarily interact with each other within the club or community sport environment following the ViaSport Return to Sport Phase 3 Guidelines. Community sport cohorts may change after 2 weeks of no contact between athletes.

Contact: Contact is defined for the purposes of this document as close proximity (within 2 metres) or physical contact.

Contact Sport: A contact sport is a sport that continuous or sustained physical proximity between competing athletes.

Educational Cohort: An educational cohort is a group of students and staff who remain together throughout the school quarter, semester or year, and who primarily interact with each other in the educational (and school sport setting) Educational cohorts are generally set for the duration of the quarter, semester or year, depending on the delivery model of each school.

Inter-School Competition: An inter-school competition is a competition between student-athletes from two different schools that can include but is not limited to: exhibition, scrimmages, league games, tournaments, and championships

Intra-School Competition: An intra-school competition is a competition between student-athletes from the same school/educational cohort, commonly known as intramurals.

Training Area

The training or competition environment is normally used for school sport purposes. (ie. A single full-sized court or field) including the bleachers and immediate viewing areas for that field of play.