

COVID-19: The Impact on Youth Sports

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Background Info:

Sports have always been and will always be an outlet for young kids. There aren't many activities or places that give kids the ability to make friends and feel a sense of belonging as much as sports do. Shooting hoops at the local park with friends or traveling around the state for AAU tournaments are typically routine activities for young boys and girls, but then everything changed. COVID-19 has taken away the opportunity to hold athletic practices, official games, and the ability to play pickup basketball with a couple of friends. Nearly 85% of parents believe that playing sports is one of the most beneficial ways for their children to make friends. Young kids will slowly become frustrated without sports or even begin to have feelings of isolation because for some kids, sports give them a chance to escape from the difficulties in their personal lives.

Proposed Solution:

- Highest risk is full competition between teams not in the same geographical area. At this point, it doesn't make logical sense to play full competition and put the youth and their families at such high risk.
- Start with in-team competition, it does have some risk, but doing fever checks and health screenings before each practice and game can reduce the chances of spreading COVID19.
- If all is going well, teams can start to have competitions with other teams in the same geographical area
- Practices:
 - ★ Encourage conditioning and skill drills (dribbling, shooting, and conditioning) to be completed at home
 - ★ Maximum 1 in person practice per week (*if necessary)
 - ★ Minimize full 5 on 5 scrimmages at practice
 - ★ Break into and remain in small groups
- Decrease the number of games played in a season and only go full contact in a game situation
- Every player and coach have their own water bottle
- Limit who can come to watch the games:

- ★ Parents, siblings, & guardians only (maximum two guests per player)
- ★ Strongly recommend those over 65 years of age to stay home
- Hand sanitizing stations available (mandatory for employees and guests)
- Everyone must wear a mask unless on the court
- Stands are social distanced by having sections and seats spread at least 6 feet apart in order to adhere to CDC guidelines
 - Conduct thorough cleaning of stands after every game
- Multiple exits creating a pathway for parents/players to leave as a team. Each team is meant to go out that exit together
- Families remain in car until 30 minutes before game time
- Reduce warm-up time before games
- Increasing the difference of time between games which reduces the risk of fans interacting with one another. If fans can exit the game before other fans enter, that helps reduce the exposure that is typically encountered with youth sports.
- Have parents sit in bleachers based on their team (home and away section)
- Depending on the age of the players, players ages 10 and under only require 1 official rather than the traditional 2 or 3
- No concession stands and block off water fountains in gym/hallway
- Encourage coaches to ask their players to limit high fives and use fist/elbow bumps instead
- Inform coaches prior to the start of the game that players need to come fully dressed and ready to play (no changing areas such as locker rooms)
- Clean and sanitize the game ball each timeout, end of quarter, and halftime
- Switch the ball at halftime to reduce the spread of germs
- Open doors/windows to allow flow of fresh air and install fans if possible
- Increase time between AAU games to ensure proper cleaning and sanitizing of chairs, court, and bleachers
- Two doors to enter gymnasium and touch-less thermometers
- Arrows on the ground, tape to close off areas where sitting is not available
- Step by step approach (will be posted in various locations throughout the building):

- Before entering building there must be a temperature check to determine if the guest has a fever (with mask on throughout this process)
- One member of the family must write down information in case someone does happen to be infected with COVID-19
- Multiple hand sanitizing stations with at least 60% alcohol (must use when entering the building) located at:
 - ★ Entrance of building
 - ★ Entrance of area to play
 - ★ Both ends of bleachers
 - ★ Bathrooms
 - ★ Exits
- Fans must enter stands immediately after entering the building following the arrows on the ground
- Sit in designated location for their team
- Ask families to bring in their own lawn chairs to sit in if possible
- Once game is complete, it is expected that fans follow the arrows to the exit
- Players must sanitize pre-game, timeouts, halftime, and post-game. No post-game handshakes. Reduce time for timeouts, half-time, and pre-game warm-ups.
- Encourage players who are on the bench during the game to wear masks if possible and then remove them when entering the game

How our solutions will improve safety:

- At home drills and practices will limit contact with other individuals, but Zoom workouts still give players the opportunity to interact with their teammates and coaches
- Having players sanitize pre-game, during timeouts, at halftime, and post-game means their hands will be as clean as possible
- Sanitizing the ball during game breaks and switching it at half time limits the spread of germs between players and coaches
- Marking off sections in the bleachers will comply with CDC guidelines by making sure individuals are at least 6 feet apart

- Temperature checks at the door prevents anyone with a fever (symptom of COVID-19) from entering and possibly making others sick
- Increasing the time between games ensures players and fans aren't interacting with other players from different teams
- Having one referee reduces the amount of people touching the ball constantly
- Playing games only against local towns reduces the amount of travel

Cost and benefit analysis:

- Getting kids outside and exercising compared to sitting inside playing video games
- 85% of parents believe playing sports is one of the most beneficial ways for their children to make friends
- Young children are far less likely to contract COVID-19 compared to adults, especially adults over the age of 65 with underlying medical conditions
- Players, coaches, fans, and referees can still contract the virus even with all the precautions in place
- Building chemistry between players and coaches will not be the same as normal practices and games
- Families or friends of players could potentially get upset due to limited number of fans allowed
- Lawn chairs are more comfortable than bleachers
- Impact on the economy:
 - Youth sports generated \$19.2 billion in 2019 which is approximately \$4 billion more than the National Football League (NFL)
 - Sporting goods stores will see a decrease in sales due to a lack of selling equipment and apparel
 - Thousands of individuals rely on youth sports as their main source of income
 - Coaches, trainers, facility workers, event coordinators (Zero Gravity), and referees
- Sports are FUN and can bring the community together in a time with so much negativity

Obstacles to implementation and enforcement:

- Having facility workers make sure fans are adhering to the rules
- Creating a pathway for fans/players to walk. From the moment they step into the building they must understand the rules and protocol they must follow.
- Having families bring their own lawn chairs. This idea was used by MAYB tournaments in Kansas. Bringing the lawn chairs would reduce the need of cleaning the bleachers and would be able to give better reasoning for social distancing.
- Gyms typically get very hot which means fans and players are going to want to remove their masks
- Parents spend a lot of money for their children to play AAU basketball so they might want to be reimbursed if the experience isn't going to be the same

When can the precautions be dropped?

- Youth sports in each state should actively listen to and follow the guidelines set forth by the CDC and their state governors
 - Some states will be able to open before others depending on their number of confirmed COVID-19 cases
- Even if youth sports can return to normal play in the future, highly infected states should continue to follow these precautions for weeks/months after in order to ensure the safest playing environment possible

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