

Alvin He, Xinran Liu, Mingying Zhou

Pioneer Institute & Nichols College Youth Sports Management Policy Statement

Background Information

COVID-19, a novel Coronavirus was discovered spread worldwide in 2020, causing more than 600,000 deaths worldwide and 8,468 people's death in Massachusetts up to July 23, 2020. People who got COVID-19 can infect others 48 hours before the onset of the illness. The virus can be spread between face to face contact within 6 feet through respiratory droplets which can be caused by coughing, sneezing, or talking (Mass.gov, 2020). Staying safe during this pandemic time while maintaining people's normal lives is currently an urgent primary focus.

Due to quarantine, the economic impact of COVID-19 has greatly affected all industries, including youth sports. According to a recent study of Aspen Institute for Sports, 60% of youth sports organizations are expecting to lose at least 50% of revenue next year. Massachusetts entered Phase III of reopening businesses and organizations on July 6th, meaning socially distanced group activities, competitive practices, and competitions in sports can now be held as long as following Massachusetts laws and conducting safety procedures. Sports must follow the State of Massachusetts Youth Sport guidelines for COVID-19 such as "no more than 25 players are allowed per team in any space" and "the facility can't exceed more than 40% of the maximum occupancy", etc. (Mass.gov, 2020)

This policy includes procedures for making a safe environment for children during this COVID-19 pandemic while keeping children exercise and play sports, maximizing the recovery of the youth sports industry in the scope of the State of Massachusetts. The policy will be described under the circumstances of baseball as an example. Baseball is an outdoor moderate risk sport "that involves occasional contact, but where protective equipment like masks can reduce the risk of spreading the virus" (COVID Guidelines for Youth Sports in Massachusetts Released, 2020). Level 1, 2, and 3 types of play can be hosted for baseball, including no-contact workouts, aerobic conditioning, individual skill work, drills, Intra-team/group games, contact drills, scrimmages, Inter-team games, meets, matches, and races, etc. For baseball games, each team has nine players.

This policy applies to all the coaches, youth athletes, parents, and all of the employees who physically work on-site with the athletic departments. The remote working personnel and related faculty shall read through this policy as well to ensure the COVID-19 challenge can be responded collectively and uniformly.

Pre-Competition Procedures

❖ Waiver and Notice.

According to sports law, the sports organization may be sued for negligence if this organization violates all 4 of the following elements: duty, breach of duty, breach of duty causing sickness, and damages. The State of Massachusetts Youth Sport guidelines gives regulations related to COVID-19 and defines the responsibility of sports organizations on athletes. If the organization fails to follow the rules, any athlete that contracts COVID-19 can sue the organization for medical bills or other expenses.

Utilizing a waiver can be a legal defense that protects the organization from being sued by athletes. Signed before the athletes take the COVID-19 test, it should include recognition that the participants know the risks and that they take on personal responsibility for participation. Participants are expected to inform the organization if they are not feeling well, and agree to follow guidelines for COVID-19 and are willing to fully comply. Here is a link for sample waiver from SADLER: [Sample Waiver/Release For Communicable Diseases Including COVID-19](#)

Another important element for the organization is the assumption of risk. The organization should show athletes the organizations' plan and the potential risks, reiterate the guidelines issued by Massachusetts including social distancing and mask usage. After acknowledging all rules and expectations, the organization can let athletes sign the waiver, proving that they are aware of all the risks and are willing to participate.

❖ **COVID-19 Testing**

To avoid the risk of COVID-19, youth athletes, their parents, coaches, staff, and any relevant personnel who are involved in the competition or work on-site need to complete the COVID-19 test at the local testing center and send the testing result to the institution via email 3 days before any group activity or any type of on-site practice for the competition. Within these 3 days, youth athletes must complete a health log that records their temperature, activities, or any form of in-person contact. Not meeting standards will prevent athletes from being able to participate. In the state of MA, all COVID-19 testing costs are fully covered by health insurance, so individuals will not face added charges. This will provide an added layer of security and prevent potential transmission.

Daily Procedures

❖ **Field Cleaning Guidelines.**

➤ Staff

According to the State of Massachusetts Youth Sport guidelines, organizations need to provide training for employees regarding social distancing and hygiene protocols. Employees who are displaying COVID-19-like symptoms do not report to work.

Organizations need to educate their employees on the importance of social distancing, wearing masks and gloves, and that they should avoid touching their faces. Health logs should be created where employees post their daily temperature, schedule, and people they come into contact with. Through contact tracing, the athletes' risk of infection by the staff will be reduced, and health situations for others can be tracked if anyone tests positive.

It may be difficult to supervise the cleaning staff, as usually one person may be in charge of cleaning the entire establishment. People should all keep in mind risks and practice good hygiene.

Although training the team with health precautions may take some time, it is a greatly needed investment for safety, and it is important to educate staff on regulations and expectations.

➤ Cleaning Standard

Organizations standardize sanitation and disinfection requirements based on the guideline of CDC linked here: [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#). Restrooms and spaces with frequent contact need to be paid extra attention while cleaning.

❖ Equipment

➤ Face Covering

Based on the State of Massachusetts Youth Sport guidelines, face-covering is required when participants are not actively engaged in an activity. The youth athletes and coaches must wear face coverings or masks before and after the competition, other staff needs to wear masks all the time.

Citing from the State of Massachusetts Youth Sport guidelines, “Activity organizationally must require facial coverings to be worn while engaged in a moderate risk sport/activity intermittent contact might occur and it is safe to do so.”

Wearing masks during exercising can be very dangerous. In May, two high school students in China died because of running with their masks on. A doctor in Beijing suggests that wearing masks running can cause hypoxia, even death. Therefore, it is important to find a way of wearing masks safely while doing moderate risk sport.

The organization can regulate athletes and coaches using face shields instead of masks while doing sports. A face shield is made by a curved plastic with an adjustable strap, fixed on the head which can cover the whole face. Shields are better than masks in several ways. Face shields are more comfortable, easy to clean and reuse, easier to breathe and communicate between athletes and coaches. According to research from the University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine, face shields can reduce viral exposure for a cough within 18 inches by 96%, reducing inhaled virus by 92% at social distance. Some health experts said that shields show more effective prevention of infection in a daily setting.

The obstacle is that it can be hard for athletes wearing helmets to fix the face shield. The possible risk for using a face shield is if someone falls to the ground to catch a ball, the face shield might hit him in the face. However, this is still a safer, more effective, more breathable way than face masks to do sports and communicate with teammates while covering the face.

To emphasize, there is still limited research showing the effectiveness of face shields preventing spreading viruses. To better protect the athletes after sports, stopping the spread of viruses, face shields cannot fully substitute face masks. Youth athletes and coaches need to wear masks before and after playing. For other staff, they need to wear masks all the time.

➤ Hand Sanitizer

Citing the State of Massachusetts Youth Sport guidelines, the organizations should provide regular sanitization of high touch areas, such as workstations, equipment, screens, doorknobs, restrooms throughout work sites. It is important to have hand sanitizers available before and after the athletes play, place the hand sanitizers in a prominent place.

➤ **Social Distance**

According to the State of Massachusetts Youth Sport guidelines, locker rooms should be 50% full. Youth athletes need to keep social distance inside the locker room and wear masks if it's possible. The spectators need to maintain social distance with the youth athletes and other spectators. The organizations should set barriers every 6 feet between the audience to make sure they keep enough social distance.

❖ **Practice and Competition**

During the practice or competition, all the athletes and coaches need to keep social distance and wear masks, following the guideline of face-covering, face shield, and social distancing mentioned before.

❖ **Audience Restrictions for Competition**

➤ **Spectator**

According to the State of Massachusetts Youth Sport guidelines, every youth athlete, who is under 18 years old, can bring up to one parent.

➤ **Online audience**

To suit the audiences' needs, the organization can stream games at online platforms like TikTok and YouTube and set a donation channel to raise money. There can also be related products selling online to make profits. In this way, the organization can maintain its reputation while providing a safer way for people to watch the competition.

❖ **After-Competition**

No close contact like hugging or shaking hands after the competition.

Enforcement

- If any person provides false information on the health log, that person has to pay a \$200 fine and leave the activity.
- If a youth athlete comes to the game without fulfilling the document, that person will be asked to leave and pay a fine of \$200.
- If a youth athlete or parent does not meet the standard of wearing a face mask or code mentioned above, depending on the seriousness, that person could be forced to leave the baseball game.
- If staff or coach fails to meet the standard, depending on how serious the issue is, that person could be fired.
- If staff or coaches breach their duty, they could be sued for negligence by the athletes.
- The guidelines will no longer be necessary when the Massachusetts government comes to phase 4.

Related Information

- State of Massachusetts Youth Sport guidelines
<https://www.mass.gov/doc/safety-standards-for-youth-and-adult-amateur-sports-activities-phase-iii-step-1/download>
- Sample Waiver/Release For Communicable Diseases Including COVID-19
<https://www.sadlersports.com/sample-waiver-release-communicable-diseases-including-covid-19/>
- Amateur Sports and Coronavirus (COVID-19): How To Return to Play
<https://www.sadlersports.com/coronavirus-risk-management-in-sports/>
- CDC: Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility (Everyday Steps, Steps When Someone is Sick, and Considerations for Employers)
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>
- Matt Vautour, Jul 07, 2020, UMass football player tests positive for coronavirus: Ryan Bamford confirms one Minuteman has COVID-19
<https://www.masslive.com/umassfootball/2020/07/umass-football-player-tests-positive-for-coronavirus-ryan-bamford-confirms-one-minuteman-has-covid-19.html>
- Renée Bacher and Christina Ianzito, July 23, 2020, Are Face Shields Better Than Masks for Coronavirus Protection?
<https://www.aarp.org/health/healthy-living/info-2020/shields-compared-to-masks.html>
- E.J. Mundell, April 30, 2020, Are Face Shields Better Than Face Masks for Coronavirus?
<https://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=230978>
- EPOCH VIDEO, May 8, 2020, 3 Students Die at School While Running After Schools Reopen in China
https://www.theepochtimes.com/epoch-news-schools-resume-in-china-and-3-students-died-on-school-grounds-while-running_3343831.html
- Sharp, Moorman, Claussen, Sport Law: A Managerial Approach, Jul 5, 2017
https://books.google.com/books/about/Sport_Law.html?id=UzErDwAAQBAJ