

RETURN TO PLAY



SPRING 2021

www.nnesoccerleague.org

NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND SOCCER LEAGUE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RETURNING TO PLAY

PURPOSE

The Recommendations for Returning to Play are provided to assist member clubs in safely and gradually resuming inter-club competition while reducing infection risk in the setting of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Please note: These recommendations do not supercede any local, state, regional, or federal health guidelines or requirements. The recommendations outlined in this document are intended to supplement those outlined by government agencies and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in detailing items for consideration in a youth sports gameday environment.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Please continue to follow the recommended general hygiene practices to mitigate transmission of communicable disease, including COVID-19.

- Avoid touching your face.
- Frequently wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (60% alcohol).
- Cover mouth and nose (with arm or elbow, not hands) when coughing or sneezing and wash hands afterward.
- Wear a face mask or covering any time you are in public and unable to maintain social distancing of 6 feet.
- Frequently clean commonly used surfaces (doorknobs, handles, etc) with a disinfectant cleaner.
- Avoid contact with other individuals such as shaking hands, hugs, etc.
- Maintain a distance of 6 feet between you and others. Avoid crowded places.
- Stay home if you feel sick and contact your health care provider.

Information provided by the NNESSL related to the COVID-19 pandemic is available on the league website at www.nnesoccerleague.org/covid-19.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEMBER CLUBS

As outlined in the [NNESSL Club Checklist](#), each club must develop and distribute a written plan outlining their practices to reduce the risk of virus transmission within the soccer environment. **The club's plan must be provided to NNESSL prior to the start of the season, as well as distributed to its teams and families.**

- Specific guidelines and steps to reduce the risk of infection among players and staff in accordance with local and national restrictions, as well as information within this document.
- Details to include:
 - Identification of lead/contact person(s) for matters related to COVID-19 in terms of prevention, event planning, case reporting, and dissemination of information.
 - Symptom monitoring and plans for medical evaluation of symptomatic staff and players.
 - Methods for dissemination of information regarding proper hygiene practices, social distancing requirements, and disinfection measures within all training environments.

- Case reporting to club membership, club staff and local health authorities.
- Emergency response planning and coordination with local emergency medical services for all medical emergencies, including COVID-19.
- Develop a facility plan for each field/facility used by the club, detailing the flow of foot traffic (entry & exit), designate isolation area, spectator area, as well as pickup and check-in areas if necessary. These facility plans will also be shared via the NNESSL website.
- Staggering of start/end time of events (practices, games) in advance to allow groups to safely exit before the next group enters the area.
- Commitment to abide by local and national recommendations and restrictions regarding hygiene, social distancing, limits on the size of group gatherings, and any other means of reducing the spread of COVID-19.
- While these procedures may vary slightly between organizations, all should reference the same common resources such as:
 - [CDC Considerations for Youth Sports](#)
 - New Hampshire guidance on [Amateur and Youth Sports](#)
 - Maine guidance on [Community Sports](#)
 - Massachusetts guidance on [Youth and Adult Amateur Sports](#)
- Other examples of information available by the CDC can be found here:
 - [How to protect yourself and others](#) (pdf)
 - [Stop the Spread of Germs](#) (pdf)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RETURNING TO COMPETITION

Returning to competitive play should only occur after a club has followed a progressive return to training process, with the priority of providing a safe competition environment for players. This is intended to account for the risk of both COVID-19 resurgence as well as the risks of overtraining and injury due to a rapid return to play.

The recommendations outlined below assume:

- Facilities where competitive events would take place are open;
- Any local restrictions allow for a gathering size that would accommodate all players, coaches, referees, facility staff, and spectators in attendance;
- There are otherwise no local guidelines or restrictions that would preclude travel to, or participation in, a youth soccer competition.

*Clubs may consider limiting spectator attendance as necessary if open attendance may result in numbers greater than the gathering size limits.

Any individual reporting or demonstrating symptoms of illness at any point should be removed from competition (or restricted from competition) and should seek guidance from his/her health care provider before returning to soccer activities.

SCREENING PROCESS

Prior to participation, staff should obtain verbal confirmation from each individual:

- Each player, coach, and referee should check his/her temperature at home, and refrain from participation if he/she has a fever (100.4 degrees F or greater).
- Each player, coach, and referee should follow the screening protocols outlined by their state guidance (**see Appendix A**).
- All coaches, players, referees, and other attendees should be monitoring for symptoms at home to ensure:
 - He/She has not had any close contact with a sick individual or anyone with a confirmed case of COVID-19 (**see Appendix D**);
 - He/She has not had a documented case of COVID-19 in the last 10 days;
 - He /she is not currently demonstrating or suffering from any ill symptoms (**see Appendix B**).
 - Any individual who is unable to confirm these criteria should be restricted from participation and contact both their club and health care provider.
- These criteria should be confirmed verbally upon arrival as follows:
 - Each participating individual should confirm that they have met the above requirements of no known symptoms or exposures with the head coach of their team.
 - The head coach from each participating team should confirm with the head coach of the opposing team that all participating players and staff have met the above requirements of no known symptoms or exposures.
 - All referees should confirm individually with both head coaches that all referees have met the above requirements of no known symptoms or exposures.
 - Any individual who is unable to confirm these criteria should be restricted from participation and contact their health care provider.

DURING COMPETITION

- The game of soccer can be conducted as normal for the designated age group with the following exceptions:
 - a. Team pre-game and post-game handshakes, and on substitutions are not recommended.
 - b. Physical contact should be avoided during celebrations, halftime and post-game activities.
 - c. Social distancing should be ensured between players and coaches on the sideline during play and during any individual or group conversations throughout the competition (pre-game, halftime, post-game).
 - d. No player, coach, or spectator should violate social distancing guidelines with a referee or official at any time.
 - e. Player pass cards should be handled only by the coach of the team, and should be disinfected after the game. Referees should be shown the player pass cards at check-in, but not handle the cards.
 - f. Staff pass cards should only be handled by the staff member to whom it belongs. Referees should be shown the staff pass cards at check-in, but not handle the cards.
 - g. Referees should track player substitutions with their own notes, and should not collect player pass cards. Referees should note the staff pass card was checked on the game report, and add all sideline staff member names to the report.
 - h. Use of masks or cloth facial coverings by active players is not required; facial coverings are recommended on the sideline for staff, bench areas, and spectators when social distancing cannot be maintained. Please reference "**Face Coverings**" section.
 - i. Players on the sideline or bench area should remain physically distanced (6 feet apart), including pre-game, halftime and post-game discussions.
 - j. International walk-outs should not be held.
- All attendees should always maintain social distancing guidelines during arrival and departure from competition.

- Spectators should remain off of the field, practice proper social distancing and utilize masks or cloth facial coverings throughout the event.
- In the event of an injury, staff may assess and facilitate management of the injured individual in accordance with proper first aid management. Family members and any on-site healthcare providers may participate in injury management as necessary but others should maintain proper social distancing.
- It is recommended that participating clubs keep an attendance record of coaches and staff for all competitions to allow for optimized case reporting and contact tracing.

POST COMPETITION

- Teams should have contact information for both the head coach and club COVID contact of the opposing team/club they have competed against prior to departure from the facility.
- Teams should confirm the names of their assigned referees for their matches to ensure proper documentation with information provided by the referee assignor to the league.
- Any individual with a confirmed case of COVID-19 should notify their respective club immediately.
- Any referee with a confirmed case of COVID-19 should notify the referee assignor as well as any clubs involved in competitions worked by that individual within the last 10 days.
- Any club notified of a confirmed case of COVID-19 in a player, staff member, or referee should notify any other organization involved in competition (including the league) with that individual in the 10 days prior to the diagnosis of COVID-19.

FACE COVERINGS (updated 5/4/21)

- Face coverings are no longer required for players during active play.
- Face coverings for bench areas (including coaches) and spectators are recommended if social distancing cannot be maintained.
- **Local municipalities and/or individual facilities may have policies on face coverings with strict rules;** those policies must be followed per local ordinance.
- If players wish to wear face coverings during active play, they should allow for breakaway, and loop over the ear for the safety of the player. Neck gaiters are not allowed as they pose a choking hazard for players.
- This policy was modified per the recent outdoor recommendations released by the CDC and is subject to change. The NNESSL Board will reevaluate its mask policy every 2 weeks throughout the Spring 2021 season.

EQUIPMENT

- Team areas should be separated from spectators and each other so that individuals will not touch the same surfaces (benches for example).
- Shared surfaces such as soccer balls, disc cones, and any other equipment should be disinfected before and after each game.
- Sharing of training vests (pinnies) should be avoided or eliminated if possible. If vests are to be used, they should stay with a single player for the duration of the practice/game and washed before and after each day of use.
- Players and referees should bring their own equipment such as hand sanitizer, water bottle, towel, etc. These items are not to be shared between individuals.
- Equipment used by staff such as cones, etc should not be handled by players or other attendees and should be disinfected after use.
- Shared "hydration stations" should be eliminated and players/staff should bring their own water or other hydration.
- Referees should use electronic whistles instead of standard whistles.

FACILITIES

- Member clubs and host facilities should have procedures in place for the management of medical emergencies during any event, including but not limited to COVID-19.
- Hand sanitizer should be readily available at all facilities. Each coach, player, and referee should have their own hand sanitizer with their personal equipment. Players and coaches should disinfect their hands prior to and immediately after every competition and after any contact with a shared surface.
- All surfaces that individuals may contact when entering and leaving a facility should be disinfected prior to, regularly during, and at the end of the event. When possible, gates/doors should remain open to reduce contact with potentially contaminated surfaces.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The Northern New England Soccer League maintains a list of Frequently Asked Questions in an effort to help guide our member clubs and families through the league's COVID-19 protocols. This information can be located on the NNESSL website:

www.nnesoccerleague.org/covid-19/frequently-asked-questions

APPENDIX A SCREENING PROTOCOLS BY STATE

New Hampshire Screening Questions

Staff, athletes, and volunteers must be screened on arrival to each competitive sporting event, training session, or practice by having their temperature taken (temperature checks for athletes participating in competitive events is at the discretion of the organizing entity but is not required) and all shall be asked:

- a. Do you have any of the following symptoms of COVID-19: (see Universal Guidelines for list of potential symptoms)
 - Fever (a documented temperature of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or higher) or are feeling feverish;
 - Respiratory symptoms such as a runny nose, nasal congestion, sore throat, cough, or shortness of breath;
 - General body symptoms such as muscle aches, chills, and severe fatigue;
 - Gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea; or
 - Changes in your sense of taste or smell?
- b. Have you been in close contact with someone who is suspected or confirmed to have had COVID-19 in the past 10 days? (NOTE: Healthcare workers caring for COVID-19 patients while wearing appropriate personal protective equipment should answer “no” to this question).
- c. Have you traveled on non-essential travel in the past 10 days either internationally or by cruise ship?

If an individual is on-site at the event and answers “yes” to any of the above screening questions, please instruct the player to proceed to the isolation area and immediately contact the parent/guardian to be taken home. When screening at home with these questions, if an individual answers “yes” they should not go to the facility and should not participate in the event.

Please Note:

Per NH Youth Sports guidance, the following people do NOT need to quarantine after international or cruise ship travel:

- Persons who are 14 days or more beyond completion of COVID-19 vaccination - this means a person must be at least 14 days beyond receipt of the 2nd dose of either Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, or at least 14 days beyond receipt of the single-dose Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) COVID-19 vaccine.
- Persons who are within 90 days of a prior SARS-CoV-2 infection that was diagnosed by PCR or antigen testing (if a person had a previous infection that was more than 90 days prior, then they are still subject to quarantine).

Maine Screening Questions

Coaches, volunteers, and athletes must stay home if they are feeling ill or have any symptoms of COVID-19. Organizers/coaches should ask all staff and players (or guardians of players, if appropriate) to self-screen for COVID-19 symptoms prior to practice or competition using either of the following approaches:

1. Use an electronic or app-based self-screening form, such as the Coronavirus Self-Checker available on the CDC's [website](#).
2. Self-screen using the following questions:
 - a. Do you feel ill or have you been caring for someone who is ill?
 - b. In the past two weeks, have you been exposed to anyone who tested positive for COVID-19?

Maine Screening Questions (cont.)

Please also be aware of the [Maine travel and visitor policies](#) on the state website.

If an individual is on-site at the event and answers "yes" to any of the above screening questions, please instruct the player to proceed to the isolation area and immediately contact the parent/guardian to be taken home. When screening at home with these questions, if an individual answers "yes" they should not go to the facility and should not participate in the event.

Massachusetts Screening Questions

Coaches, volunteers, and athletes must stay home if they are feeling ill or have any symptoms of COVID-19. Organizers/coaches should ask all staff and players (or guardians of players, if appropriate) to self-screen for COVID-19 symptoms prior to practice or competition using either of the following approaches:

1. Use an electronic or app-based self-screening form, such as the Coronavirus Self-Checker available on the CDC's [website](#).
2. Self-screen using the following questions:
 - a. Do you feel ill or have you been caring for someone who is ill?
 - b. In the past two weeks, have you been exposed to anyone who tested positive for COVID-19?

Please also be aware of the [State of Massachusetts Travel Advisory](#) which was modified on March 22, 2021.

If an individual is on-site at the event and answers "yes" to any of the above screening questions, please instruct the player to proceed to the isolation area and immediately contact the parent/guardian to be taken home. When screening at home with these questions, if an individual answers "yes" they should not go to the facility and should not participate in the event.

Quarantine Exemptions

Please reference the state websites for quarantine exemptions due to vaccination or for those who have previously tested positive for COVID-19:

- [Maine Center for Disease Control](#)
- New Hampshire: [Travel Guidance](#) and [Youth/Amateur Sports Guidance](#)
- Massachusetts: [Travel Advisory](#); and [Guidance for Fully Vaccinated Individuals](#)

APPENDIX B

SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19 INFECTION

Individuals with COVID-19 can exhibit symptoms ranging from mild to life-threatening. The most common symptoms associated with the infection include:

- Fever (≥ 100.4 degrees F)
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

Less common symptoms that may still be evidence of COVID-19 infection include:

- Sore throat
- Congestion
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Headache
- Muscle/joint pain
- Sudden loss of taste or smell
- Chills

APPENDIX C

RETURN TO PLAY FOLLOWING CONFIRMED OR SUSPECTED COVID-19 INFECTION

These recommendations are intended to guide decision-making regarding players, staff, or referees with a suspected or documented COVID-19 infection in order to reduce the risk of disease transmission.

Symptomatic player/staff/referee with suspected or laboratory confirmed COVID-19 infection:

- Cannot attend club events until:
 - a. At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since resolution of fever (defined as ≥ 100.4 degrees F) without the use of fever-reducing medications and respiratory symptoms (e.g. cough, shortness of breath), AND
 - b. At least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared
- OR:
- c. Resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications, AND
- d. Improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g. cough, shortness of breath), AND
- e. Negative results of an FDA authorized molecular assay for detection of SARS-CoV-2 RNA from at least two consecutive respiratory specimens collected ≥ 24 hours apart (two negative specimens).

Players/staff/referees with laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 who have not had any symptoms (Asymptomatic):

- Cannot attend club events until:
 - a. 10 days after date of their first positive COVID-19 diagnostic test assuming no symptoms since that time. If symptoms develop, then management should be guided as above for symptomatic individuals.
- OR:
- b. Negative results of an FDA authorized molecular assay for detection of SARS-CoV-2 RNA from at least two consecutive respiratory specimens collected ≥ 24 hours apart (two negative specimens).

APPENDIX D

RETURN TO PLAY FOLLOWING EXPOSURE TO A SUSPECTED OR DIAGNOSED CASE OF COVID-19

These recommendations are intended to guide decision-making regarding players, staff, or referees with a suspected or documented COVID-19 infection in order to reduce the risk of disease transmission.

Any asymptomatic player, staff, or referee who has been exposed to an individual with a suspected or diagnosed case of COVID-19 should be restricted from participation for at least 10 days (even if the player/staff/referee produces a negative test) and monitor for any symptoms consistent with infection.

Additional information on “when to quarantine” can be found on the CDC website [here](#).

If asymptomatic after 10 days since last exposure, they can return to participation. In general, you need to be in close contact with an individual to contract the disease. In this case, exposure means any one of the following:

- Caring for a sick person with a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection.
- Living in the same household as an individual with a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection.
- Being within 6 feet of an individual with a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection for around 10 minutes or more.

OR:

- Coming in direct contact with secretions from an individual with a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection (for example, being coughed or sneezed on, sharing water bottles/utensils).

Please Note:

Per NH Youth Sports guidance, the following people do NOT need to quarantine after close contact to a person with COVID-19

- Persons who are 14 days or more beyond completion of COVID-19 vaccination - this means a person must be at least 14 days beyond receipt of the 2nd dose of either Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, or at least 14 days beyond receipt of the single-dose Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) COVID-19 vaccine.
- Persons who are within 90 days of a prior SARS-CoV-2 infection that was diagnosed by PCR or antigen testing (if a person had a previous infection that was more than 90 days prior, then they are still subject to quarantine).



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