

# **INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND ATHLETES REGARDING RETURNING TO SPORTS AND COVID-19**

## **INTRODUCTION**

As vaccinations are slowing the spread of COVID-19 and restrictions are allowing the reopening of schools in a more normal fashion, sports are resuming as well. Some modifications may still be in place or may change over the course of the season. However, the district believes along with the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) that “re-engaging in sports and physical activity with friends has both physical and psychological health benefits for children and adolescents. Participating in sports and physical activity allows youth to improve their cardiovascular health, strength, body composition, and overall fitness. Mentally, youth may experience benefits from the increased socialization with friends and coaches as well as from the return to a more structured routine. These psychological and physical benefits can help support their developmental growth. Exercise also has immune system benefits.” So, resuming sports and physical fitness activities are appropriately encouraged as long as everyone continues to practice safe strategies that may be needed to mitigate and keep the transmission of infection low.

## **GETTING IN SHAPE: CONDITIONING AND CLIMATE**

Children and adolescents who have not participated in physical activity for more than a month should be encouraged to begin a gradual return to physical activity. They should start at about 25% of their usual activity, every other day, and increase their activity gradually, about 10% per week, until they are at their desired intensity. This is especially important over the weather extremes of summer. It can take 8 to 12 weeks, for example, for an athlete who is “out of shape” to get back in shape for the intense demands of football practice in August. Now is the time to begin. There are phone apps like “Couch to 5K” or “None to Run” that can help students achieve these goals safely. Hydration, drinking plenty of water before, during,

and after exercising, and dressing for the hot weather is very important. Exercising before or after the peak heat of the day before being used to working out in very hot weather is also helpful. Stopping and resting and cooling off, listening to your body are key to getting in good shape in a healthy way.

### **ANNUAL SPORT PHYSICAL EXAM**

All children and adolescents should have an annual physical examination before participation in intense physical activity. An exam is valid for 12 continuous months, through the last day of the month in which the exam was conducted and is good for the entire season, even if the exam runs out during the season. If a season starts in August, an exam must be valid on or after August 1 of the year before to play fall sports. Summer physicals can be hard to schedule. Now is the time to call and make your appointment with your private healthcare provider. Do not forget to check to ensure all your routine preventable childhood vaccines are up to date. The NYS Department of Health has made it clear any student who is not up to date has just 14 calendar days in September after school begins to complete required vaccines. After that, they will be excluded regardless of how they are being educated, remotely or on-site.

### **WHAT ABOUT COVID-19?**

This is still a novel virus, and while the vaccine has decreased the outbreak, we all must remain cautious. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the AAP encourage all people who are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as it is available. Once fully vaccinated, athletes should follow transmission mitigation guidance regarding physical activity that the CDC updates periodically.

If your child had a moderate to severe case of COVID-19 and/or required hospitalization, intubation, or any cardiac issues, you must discuss this matter with your physician and submit written cardiac clearance to the school nurse before your student athlete can safely return to sports. A graduated return to play protocol is recommended

by the district for you to use with your child or adolescent before you get a clearance from your physician for your student athlete to participate in sports.

If your child or adolescent tested positive for and had a mild or asymptomatic case of COVID-19 and has already advanced safely back to physical activity or sports on their own without any abnormal symptoms, please notify your healthcare provider about this so it is documented in the medical record, indicate this on your athletic interval health history for the school nurse, and make sure your student does a gradual conditioning program as described above.

At the present time, the CDC does not recommend COVID-19 testing for an athlete unless that person is symptomatic or has been recently exposed to someone known to be confirmed for infection with COVID-19. Testing is not required to participate in sports.

### **FALL MITIGATION MEASURES**

At this time, we cannot tell you details about what the NYS Department of Health or the CDC will require in the fall for schools. We do not yet know the extent and details of which sports will be allowed, the use of masks, physical distancing, the use of locker rooms, the allowance of indoor vs outdoor activities, the allowance and number of spectators at sporting events, or any other modifications or strategies that might be put into place to reduce the risk of transmission during sports. We can assure you, however, that the district follows guidance strictly to the letter of the recommendations. We can also tell you that as soon as we know, we will advise you.