



# MSI Return to Play Guidelines, version 3.1

(published effective December 18, 2020)

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# 1.0 Introduction and General Guidelines

Great news! Montgomery County has decided that it is safe and appropriate to allow youth soccer to move forward with league play! Inherent in that decision is the knowledge that there will be many rules and regulations that must be followed, ranging from health issues and logistics to rules modifications in support of both. ***We will need your help to ensure understanding, compliance, and support to make this work for the kids. Thank you in advance for being part of the solution!***

All individuals involved with MSI activities must accept that we are operating in extraordinary circumstances, and MANY concessions will need to be made to adhere to legal, health, and other requirements. For example, any allowed attendance by spectators will be governed by the Emergency Orders of Montgomery County, and may not be allowed at all (see *Section 2.0, Parent/Guardian Responsibilities*). It is important to accept that adherence to this protocol is a condition of participation for all!

MSI is following the advice and directives of local and state officials, as well as guidance from health and medical authorities to provide safe return to play for our staff, coaches, players, volunteers, and families. All staff, coaches, players, and families are required to adhere to the MSI Return to Play Guidelines and protocol so that we maximize the safety of all participants. These guidelines are based on the most recent Montgomery County Emergency Health Order, and Considerations for Youth Sports prepared by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/youth-sports.html>, as well as direct discussions with Montgomery County Health and Emergency Services officials.

In summary, MSI is adhering to the following guidelines, protocols, and safety measures to mitigate risk and safely return to play.

- Training/practices/games will adhere to social distancing, whenever possible (e.g., during warmup, rest breaks, etc.)
- Players must wear masks during arrival and departure, and at all times during practices and games when social distancing of greater than 6 feet is not able to be reliably maintained.
- Coaches and staff must wear masks during practices and games at all times.
- **Exceptions to the mask-wearing requirements may be made for any individual with a doctor's letter that certifies that the individual has an underlying health condition that makes wearing of the mask a danger to the individual. The letter must state what the underlying medical condition is, must state that wearing a mask during physical exercise creates a health danger to the individual, and must be present at the location of the game or practice and therefore able to be presented.**
- "Personal mask breaks" may be taken advantage of at such times that significant social distancing is able to be reliably maintained.
- The mask must be worn such that it consistently covers the nose, mouth, and chin, even during physical exercise.
- Coaches are responsible for limiting the number of people present for their practice or game in accordance with the most recent Montgomery County Emergency Health Order.
- **Per current Montgomery County law, no spectators are allowed at any team activity, including practices and games.** Coaches are responsible for ensuring compliance with the Emergency Order of Montgomery County. All parents/guardians/spectators must remain in their vehicle in the parking lot until the activity is over.
- Anyone who does not follow the safety protocols will be asked to leave

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- Player and Coach equipment must be cleaned/sanitized between sessions if the coach is conducting back-to-back activities.
- Protocol for reporting and quarantining will be followed
- MSI will continue to engage with local and state authorities and adhere to all guidelines recommended, making changes to protocol as needed

## **2.0 PARENT/GUARDIAN RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **2.1 Prior to leaving home for training/practice/game:**

- Parents/guardians MUST check your child's temperature and refrain from participation if their child has a fever (greater than or equal to 100.4 degrees F).
- If your child currently has any symptoms consistent with COVID-19 (including cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, fever of greater than or equal to 100.4 degrees, sudden loss of taste or smell, etc.) or is awaiting COVID-19 test results, please complete the COVID-19 Report and refrain from participation in soccer activities until cleared by a medical professional.
- Ensure your child's training/practice gear is washed and equipment (cleats, ball, shin guards, water bottle, etc.) is sanitized before and after every activity.
- Ensure your child has a personal supply of hand sanitizer to bring with them and keep in their personal bag, as well as a personal water bottle.
- Ensure your child brings their personal soccer ball, with name clearly labeled on it
- Carpooling is discouraged.

### **2.2 Upon arrival and during training/game:**

- **At this time, attendance at training or game activities by any spectator is not allowed. Parents/guardians/siblings or others must stay in the parking lot, in or near your car,** and adhere to the social distance requirements, based on state and local health guidelines. In addition to minimizing all potential exposures, we must adhere to the State and Local requirements for gathering size limits at fields.
- Avoid physical contact with players, coaches, and other parents/guardians.
- If stepping outside of your car, all individuals must wear a mask.

### **2.3 At any time:**

- Notify the club immediately if your child becomes ill for any reason. Such email should be sent to [schuessler@msisoccer.org](mailto:schuessler@msisoccer.org).
- In case of illness or exposure to COVID-19, follow COVID-19 Exposure or Illness Protocol that is included in this document.

## **3.0 PLAYER RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **3.1 Prior to training/practice/game:**

- If you feel uncomfortable participating or are high risk, STAY HOME. Training is voluntary.
- Wash your hands thoroughly before leaving home.
- Take your temperature and refrain from participation if you have a fever (greater than or equal to 100.4 degrees F).
- Bring a bag to carry your personal items, and be sure that all personal items are clearly labeled with your name (ball, hand sanitizer, shin guards, outerwear such as jacket or sweatshirt).
- Bring your own water bottle (with your name on it)!
- Bring your own soccer ball (with your name on it)!

### **3.2 Upon arrival and during training/practice/game:**

- DO ... Wear a mask when you get out of the car and until you return to the car, and at all times in between, with exceptions during practice when social distancing is able to be reliably maintained.
- DO ... Report directly to your coach.
- DO ... Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer before training/practice begins.
- DO ... Maintain social distance (6 feet or more) and do NOT gather in groups.
- DO ... Wear Goalie Gloves and a long-sleeved shirt if practicing as a Goalkeeper.
- DO NOT ... touch anyone else's equipment!
- DO NOT ... touch any training equipment (for example, cones, goals, etc.). Only the coach should touch this equipment.
- DO NOT ... touch any soccer ball with your hands (this includes Goalies, who must wear GK gloves).
- DO NOT ... practice throw-in's.
- DO NOT ... head the ball.
- DO NOT ... slide tackle at any time.
- DO NOT ... have personal interaction that involves touching, including such things as high fives, handshakes, pats on the back, hugs, chest bumps, fist bumps, elbow bumps, etc.
- DO NOT ... chase your ball into the space occupied by another team (call for them to kick it back)

### **3.3 At the end of training/practice/game and after arriving home**

- Wear your mask from the end of training until you are in your car.
- Return directly to your parent/guardian's vehicle, immediately at the end of your activity. No "hanging around"!
- Clean/sanitize your clothing and personal gear (cleats, ball, water bottle, soccer bag, etc.) after every training/practice.
- In case of illness or exposure to COVID-19, follow COVID-19 Exposure or Illness Protocol, included in this document.

## 4.0 COACH RESPONSIBILITIES

### 4.1 Prior to training/practice/game:

- Coaches MUST check their own temperature and refrain from participation if they have a fever (greater than or equal to 100.0 degrees F).
- If you are displaying any symptoms consistent with COVID-19 (including cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, fever of > 100.0 degrees, or sudden loss of taste or smell) or are awaiting COVID-19 test results, please complete the COVID-19 Report and refrain from participation in soccer activities until cleared by a medical professional.
- Ensure you have a personal bag for your personal items (outerwear, personal water bottle, hand sanitizer, etc.), as well as a team bag for team training gear.
- Ensure that your clothing has been washed and training gear is sanitized before and after every training/practice session.
- Wash your hands thoroughly before leaving home.
- Ensure you have a personal supply of hand sanitizer to bring with you to training/practice and keep in your personal bag.

### 4.2 Upon arrival and during training/practice/game

- Coaches must arrive at least 15 minutes prior to the start of their training session, in order to manage the social distancing and safety protocols associated with adherence to all MSI Return to Play Guidelines.
- Wear a mask from the time you exit your car until the time you return to your car. Coaches must wear masks at all times throughout training or games.
- Wash hands or use hand sanitizer before training/practice begins.
- Gather all players together, and ask them to confirm that they do not have a fever or other symptoms of illness, have not had a Covid-19 test while still awaiting results, and have not been in contact with a known-Covid-19 exposure.
- **Keep a detailed record of attendance of participants at every session for potential use in Contact Tracing!**
- Avoid physical contact with fellow coaches, players, and parents.
- Do NOT allow your coaches or players to mix or participate in training with the coaches or players from any other team; all training must be completed within a “team unit”, on your designated training field, so as to minimize risk of transmission, and to facilitate effective Contact Tracing and follow up in the event of an exposure.
- Ensure all players have their individual equipment (ball, water, bag, etc.) and designate a specific sideline area for each player to place their equipment, at least 6 feet from each other.
- Ensure that players do NOT touch any training equipment (cones, goals, etc.). ONLY the coach may handle training equipment.
- Do NOT use shared pinneys or provide any other items for players during training/practice.
- **Enforce legal limits on attendance by players and coaches, and do NOT allow any spectators to attend (including parents/guardians). If any spectators insist on attending, the training or game must be halted until compliance may be achieved.**

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### **4.3 At the end of Training/Practice/Game and after arriving home**

- Dismiss players safely and swiftly, and ensure that players maintain social distancing while moving from the field to their car.
- If you are conducting “back-to-back” training sessions, disinfect training equipment (cones, etc.) between sessions.
- In case of illness or exposure to COVID-19, follow COVID-19 Exposure or Illness Protocol included in this document.

## 5.0 Return to Play “Phase”

Current Phase (as of December 18, 2020, until further notice or updating of this protocol)

### 5.1 General Training/Practice/Game Session Guidelines

- Maintain social/physical distancing during all passive times (water and rest breaks, before and after session times), and when possible during active times (training drills, activities, etc.)
- Maintain social/physical distancing whenever possible at all other times
- **Masks must be worn by players at all times**, though “personal mask breaks” are permitted when an individual is able to reliably maintain social distancing of greater than 6 feet.
- **Coaches are required to wear masks at all times**, during both passive and active portions of training/practice activities.
- **Spectators are NOT allowed to be present at training/game activities.**

### 5.2 Player-Specific Guidelines (in addition to above considerations)

- NOT ALLOWED ... Slide tackling of any type
- NOT ALLOWED ... Touching of the ball with hands
- NOT ALLOWED ... Heading of the ball
- NOT ALLOWED ... Throw-in's
- NOT ALLOWED Touching of training equipment (cones, goals, or other equipment) (except by the coach)
- NOT ALLOWED ... Sharing of any personal items (this includes water bottles, goalie gloves, etc.)
- NOT ALLOWED ... Players may not move outside of their designated training area

## 6.0 Game Day Logistics

### 6.1 General game day logistics upon arrival and during departure

- All individuals (coaches, players, referees) must wear masks
- Social distancing of at least 6 feet amongst non-immediate household members must be maintained
- **Coaches and players may not leave the parking lot any sooner than 20 minutes prior to the start of their game;** warm-up time may be limited, as a result.
- **No more than 10 players and 2 coaches may be present from each team playing in a game.**
- **All persons must vacate the field within 5 minutes of the game's end.** Please do not have team meetings to discuss the game or anything else; those are great things to do at the next practice!
- There are to be NO post-game handshake lines, team meetings, etc.
- Players should place their personal belongings along the sideline in a location that is at least 6 feet away from any other person's belongings (this could be further down the sideline, or further back from the sideline).
- No benches or tents are allowed at any location at any time! "Personal chairs" are allowed, though may not be shared outside of immediate family, and may not be placed on any synthetic turf surface at any time.

### 6.2 Pre-Game meeting (all games, all locations)

A pre-game meeting shall be held at midfield, attended by the Referee(s), Coaches, TSL's, and one captain per team (no multiple captains). During this meeting:

- the standard coin toss will occur
- Covid-19 rules modifications and protocol are to be reviewed
- social distancing is to be maintained
- no handshakes or other physical contact may occur.
- coaches and referee(s) shall confirm that the Game Ball, to be provided by the Home Team, has been sanitized prior to being used for the opening kickoff, and will be sanitized if at any point an individual touches the ball with their hands.

### 6.3 Sideline location of team players and coaches (all locations)

- Please refer to *Section 6.5, Facility-Specific Logistics* for details that affect your game field. There will be important modifications to the guidance, depending on which field you are at.
- Both teams (including players and coaches) will occupy the same side of the field, separated by the midfield line. They will occupy the "outside" side of their game field, leaving the space in between the pair of game fields located on synthetic turf fields "open" as a "Covid buffer zone".
- One of the teams two coaches will move to the opposite side of the field (the "Covid buffer zone"), and serve as a preventive measure to keep balls and players from crossing over to the neighboring game field's space.
- **There is a hard limit of 10 players and 2 coaches allowed for each team.** In combination with the opposing team and one referee, this results in the maximum gathering size of 25 individuals that is mandated by the current Emergency Order of Montgomery County, while also maintaining the Risk Management requirement that two unrelated adults must be present at each team activity.

### 6.4 Referees

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All referees will be required to adhere to the same mask requirements as everybody else.

### **6.5 Bathrooms/Portapotties**

There will be no portapotties or access to bathrooms at any location, as it will not be possible to ensure proper sanitization between individual uses. Individuals will need to plan for this, and take care of business prior to leaving home.

### **6.6 Facility-specific logistics**

Obviously, every facility has unique characteristics. For games played at the following locations, please note this specific additional guidance.

#### **6.6.1 Einstein HS Stadium Field**

- **There is a hard limit of 10 players and 2 coaches/adults allowed for each team.** In combination with the opposing team and one referee, this results in the maximum gathering size of 25 individuals that is mandated by the current Emergency Order of Montgomery County.
- **At games at Einstein HS Stadium Field**, the teams/coaches will occupy the same sideline, specifically the sideline that is on the “outside” of the field (not in between the two fields), with each team on one side of the midfield point. Personal belongings should be placed a couple of yards back from the sideline, with social distancing of at least 6 feet maintained.
- **Each team shall designate one coach/adult to stand on the opposite sideline, in the “Covid Buffer Zone”, serving to prevent balls and players from crossing over to the neighboring field space.**

#### **6.6.2 Whitman HS Stadium Field**

- **There is a hard limit of 10 players and 2 coaches/adults allowed for each team.** In combination with the opposing team and one referee, this results in the maximum gathering size of 25 individuals that is mandated by the current Emergency Order of Montgomery County.
- **At games at Whitman HS Stadium Field**, the teams/coaches will occupy the same sideline, specifically the sideline that is on the “outside” of the field (not in between the two fields), with each team on one side of the midfield point. Personal belongings should be placed a couple of yards back from the sideline, with social distancing of at least 6 feet maintained.
- **Each team shall designate one coach/adult to stand on the opposite sideline, in the “Covid Buffer Zone”, serving to prevent balls and players from crossing over to the neighboring field space.**

#### **6.6.3 Julius West MS Fields**

- **There is a hard limit of 10 players and 2 coaches allowed for each team.** In combination with the opposing team and one referee, this results in the maximum gathering size of 25 individuals that is mandated by the current Emergency Order of Montgomery County.
- **Teams/coaches will occupy the same sideline**, and specifically the one that is on the “outside” of the synthetic turf space (on the natural grass area alongside the field), divided by the midfield line. Personal belongings should be placed a couple of yards back from the sideline, with social distancing of at least 6 feet maintained.

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- At the end of your game, teams/coaches/spectators must vacate the field areas and return to the parking lot within 5 minutes. There is to be no handshake line, team meeting, or anything else that will delay departure.
- Teams/coaches may not walk out to the field area any earlier than 20 minutes prior to their scheduled kickoff time.
- These rules are designed to avoid unnecessary interactions, and to maintain compliance with gathering size limits.

## 7.0 Game Rules Modifications

**No player may touch the ball at any time!** Coaches are directed to be aggressively responsible in reminding players at those times when they might otherwise be expected to pick the ball up, such as when the ball goes out of bounds. If a player does touch the ball, it must be replaced by another ball, and that ball may not be used again unless the coach is able to sanitize the ball with a proper sanitizing wipe or method.

- **All games will play 30-minute halves, with a halftime break of not more than 5 minutes.** It is vital that games begin and end on-time (both for the convenience of all involved, in order to ensure games end before sunset or the scheduled shutdown of lights, etc.).
- **Throw-in's will be replaced with kick-in's** from the spot where the ball went out of bounds; these will be Indirect Kicks, requiring all opposing team players to respect the normal required distance from the ball (either 8 yards or 10 yards, depending on age group). While on normal throw-in's, the offside rule would be suspended, that will NOT be the case on an indirect kick-in.
- **Goalkeepers MUST wear gloves and long sleeves!** If a GK does not have gloves or long sleeves, they may NOT be designated as a GK, with privileges to catch or touch a ball with their hands or arms. In this instance, the team will simply be playing with an extra "field player", even though that field player may be tasked by their coach with protecting the goal as best possible while NOT using their hands or arms.
- **No heading of the ball will be allowed at any time!** If this occurs, an indirect free kick shall be awarded the opposing team from the spot of the foul (at the nearest spot outside of the penalty area, if it occurs by a defender inside the penalty area)
- **No slide tackling will be allowed at any time!** If this occurs, an indirect free kick shall be awarded the opposing team from the spot of the foul (at the nearest spot outside of the penalty area, if it occurs by a defender inside the penalty area).
- **Unnecessary physical contact is not allowed at any time!** No handshakes. No huddles. No high-fives, hugs, chest bumps, etc. At the conclusion of the game, when you would normally be expected to conduct a handshake line, coaches instead shall organize their players to do a "group clap and thank you cheer" in the direction of the other team's location on the sidelines. Remember to maintain social distancing at the conclusion of the first half and end of the game, especially!
- **No defensive "wall" (defined as 2 or more players) may be formed to defend against free kicks.** If an indirect kick is awarded inside the penalty area, it shall be moved to the nearest point outside the penalty area, to avoid point-blank shots without walls to defend against them. If a direct kick is awarded inside the penalty area, it shall proceed as a Penalty Kick, per normal rules.
- **For a corner kick**, we will work to avoid the extended clustering of players by enacting the following rule:
  - attacking players must remain outside of the Goal Area (this is often referred to as the 6-yard box, the smaller box immediately in front of the goal), until the ball is kicked into play.
  - Defending players must remain either inside the Goal Area or outside the Penalty Area, until the ball is kicked into play.
- **No "drop balls" will be conducted by the referee**, since it would necessitate touching the ball with his/her hands; instead, the referee shall put the ball into play by nudging it with his/her foot. Note that FIFA modified this Law of the Game about a 1.5 years ago, eliminating "competitive drop balls" between players from both teams, and replaced it with guidance that awards the drop ball to one player from one team, only.
- **Coaches are responsible for enforcing mask-wearing on the sidelines, and for enforcing the "no spectators" rule.**

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- **Referees are responsible for enforcing mask-wearing inside the field of play, keeping in mind that a player may take a “personal mask break” when able to reliably maintain social distancing.**
  - **For the first instance of violation by a team, there shall be a verbal warning, and an indirect free kick awarded to the other team (if it occurs by a defender inside the penalty area, the restart shall occur at the nearest point outside the penalty area).**
  - For the second instance of violation by a team, there shall be a yellow card given, and a similar restart.
  - For the third instance of violation by a team, there shall be a red card given, and a similar restart. Referees are encouraged to “manage” this situation so as to avoid red cards, if at all possible. Asking the coach for assistance is always a good option!
  
- **Uniform Colors: the home team is responsible for changing colors in the event of conflict**, and coaches should tell all players to bring an alternate-colored jersey for this possibility (for Recreational teams, the home team players should always bring a white t-shirt to wear in the event of a color conflict).
  
- **Pinneys may not be passed out to players, unless** each player is provided a pinney that has been washed prior to its use, and that is dedicated to them for the entire activity (i.e., no “sharing”).

## 8.0 COVID-19 Exposure or Illness Protocol

This guidance is based on available information to date about COVID-19 and subject to change as additional information becomes available. Protocol may be amended at any time if there are changes in circumstances or public guidance. This protocol will also be applied to MSI coaches and staff.

### 8.1 Protocol

This protocol describes and provides guidelines for multiple scenarios:

- Players or coaches who are exhibiting fever or feeling ill in any way
- Players or coaches who have received a positive diagnosis for COVID-19, but are not exhibiting any symptoms of illness (“Asymptomatic”)
- Players or coaches who have received a positive diagnosis for COVID-19, and are exhibiting symptoms of illness (“Symptomatic”)
- Players or coaches who have a known exposure to a person testing positive for COVID-19 (these individuals may be either “Symptomatic” or “Asymptomatic”)
- Players or coaches who have been tested for COVID-19 for some other reason (e.g., travel), and are awaiting results

### 8.2 Cases with fever/illness (i.e., “Symptomatic”)

Players or coaches who have a fever greater than 100.4 (players) or 100.0 (coaches) degrees Fahrenheit, or are showing symptoms of illness in any way, should not attend any in-person session. In the case of fever or illness, please email your coach and copy [schuessler@msisoccer.org](mailto:schuessler@msisoccer.org) to let us know about your child’s condition. These individuals shall not attend any in-person MSI activity until:

- at least 72 hours have passed since the fever has resolved without the use of fever-reducing medications, and
- respiratory symptoms (cough, shortness of breath, etc.) have resolved, and
- at least 10 days have passed since those symptoms first appeared.

OR

- at least 72 hours have passed since the fever has resolved without the use of fever-reducing medications,
- respiratory symptoms are resolved, and
- the player receives negative results from at least two consecutive COVID-19 tests (using two different specimens collected at least 24 hours apart)

### 8.3 Cases with positive diagnosis for COVID-19, but without symptoms of illness (Asymptomatic)

Players or coaches who have received a positive test result for COVID-19, but are not showing any symptoms of illness (i.e., they are Asymptomatic), should not attend any in-person session. Please email your coach and copy [schuessler@msisoccer.org](mailto:schuessler@msisoccer.org) to let us know about your child’s condition and to provide all details. These individuals may not attend any in-person MSI activity until:

- At least 10 days have passed since their COVID-19 positive test result, and
- They have not experienced any symptoms at any time prior to or after the positive test result

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### **8.4 Cases with positive diagnosis for COVID-19, with symptoms of illness (Symptomatic)**

Players or coaches who have received a positive result from a COVID-19 test, and exhibit or develop a fever or other symptoms of illness (symptomatic):

- these individuals' return to participation will be governed by the guidance above in *Section 8.2, Cases with Fever/Illness (i.e., "Symptomatic")*  
OR
- the player or coach receives negative results from at least two consecutive COVID-19 tests conducted at least 24 hours apart
  - Club Communication: the club will notify the entire team of the exposure
  - Team Activity: : team training may be canceled until players and coach meet the return to participation guidance above

### **8.5 Cases with exposure to an individual with suspected or diagnosed case of COVID-19**

If an otherwise "asymptomatic" player or coach who has attended an in-person MSI activity has a known exposure\* to a person who has been tested positive for COVID-19:

- Parents/guardians are required to email [schuessler@msisoccer.org](mailto:schuessler@msisoccer.org) and provide full details.
- The exposed player or coach should self-isolate for at least 14 days and monitor for any symptom consistent with infection by COVID-19, and may not participate in any in-person MSI activity unless they complete that isolation period and continue to be asymptomatic
  - Club Communication: the club will notify the entire team of the exposure
  - Team Activity: : team training may be canceled until players and coach meet the return to participation guidance above

### **8.6 Cases where an individual has been tested for COVID-19 for "other reasons"**

If an otherwise "asymptomatic" player or coach has been tested for COVID-19 for "other reasons", such as travel, work requirements, etc., that individual may not attend any in-person MSI activity until they receive negative test results

*\*Per the CDC, "exposure" currently is defined as close contact (less than 6 feet) for 15 minutes or more.*

*\*\*Talk with your health provider before resuming play if you have other underlying health conditions or severe symptoms, since you may be advised to isolate for longer.*