



# **INITIAL PROTOCOL SUPPLEMENT: MSI RETURN TO PLAY**

*Updated: August 24, 2020*

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION and IMPORTANT GENERAL STATEMENT**

Great news! Montgomery County has decided that it is safe and appropriate to allow youth soccer to move forward with league play this fall! Inherent in that decision is the knowledge that there will be many rules and regulations that must be followed, ranging from health issues to 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 all of that!***

All individuals involved with MSI activities must understand that we are operating in extraordinary circumstances, and MANY concessions will need to be made to adhere to legal, health, and other logistical requirements. In some/many instances, this will mean that parents, siblings, grandparents, etc. will not be allowed to attend their child's practice or game, due to "gathering size" limits of 50 persons (that sounds like a big number, until you add up the roster sizes and coaches of the two teams, referees, and field supervisors/monitors).

Any time you have many thousands of people involved, there will be disagreements over interpretation of legal requirements and how you feel about decisions that we need to make. **It is important to understand that following the protocol that will be published is a condition of participation for all!** While we always want to hear different points of view, the rules will be the rules, especially in these times. If you disagree with something, please understand that others will disagree with you, as well. In the end, we must make decisions that we believe are in the best interests of all individuals, as well as facilitating the safe delivery of soccer programs.

**That said, what follows is an Initial Protocol. It will be a living document, and you will be expected to stay abreast of changes that may occur between now and the start of the season, as well as during the season.**

## **2.0 PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY GUIDELINES, REQUIREMENTS**

MSI has created a protocol titled “MSI (Covid-19) Return to Play”, which outlines the protocol to be followed when conducting MSI activities. This document addresses health and medical protocol to be followed, with reporting requirements outlined. That document is incorporated here by reference, and may be accessed from the MSI website.

## **3.0 GAME DAY/PRACTICE LOGISTICS and RULES MODIFICATIONS**

### **3.1 Facility Logistics**

#### **3.1.1 Generic Site Logistics**

All of the discussion items below are addressed in the MSI (Covid-19) Return to Play document, but are summarized below to highlight them.

#### **Gathering Size Limits: Attendance by parents/siblings/spectators**

Due to mandated “gathering size limits”, every MSI game or practice will have significant restrictions on attendance by parents and other spectators. In most instances, this restriction will dictate “NO PARENTS or SPECTATORS ALLOWED” at or near the field (individuals will be required to remain in/at their car in the parking lot, or leave and return to pick up their child upon the activity’s conclusion). In addition, all individuals that are allowed to be present will be required to strictly adhere to guidance on any signage at any MSI activity.

- **Effective 8/24/20:** Until updated, the MSI protocol will be that **no parents or spectators are allowed at any MSI activity (practices or games)**, beyond the coach and one designated additional non-related parent (e.g., “not husband and wife”, so that there always will be two non-related adults at each activity).

#### **Masks: Wearing of masks by players, coaches, referees, spectators**

At a minimum, all individuals are required to follow public safety regulations. The following information is summarized from the “MSI (Covid-19) Return to Play” Protocol document:

- **Coaches and Assistant Coaches** must wear masks at all times, from the time they leave their vehicle until the time they return to their vehicle.
- **Referees** must wear masks at all times other than while the game is active (i.e., while they are actively refereeing the game, as opposed to pre-game meetings, halftime, post-game when they will be required to wear a mask).
- **Spectators** must wear masks at all times, from the time they leave their vehicle until the time they return to their vehicle (this includes adults and children).
- **Players** must wear masks during all times other than when they are actively participating in game-play. This means that masks must be worn while a substitute on the sidelines, and during pre-game, half-time, and post-game times.
- **Players “MAY” wear masks during active game play.**

Exceptions apply only for individuals with health conditions for which wearing a mask creates a health risk for the individual.

#### **Social Distancing and Prohibition Against Sharing of Items**

- All individuals must maintain social distancing between individuals who are not members of the same household. Currently, the requirement is to maintain social distance of at least 6 feet, but any future changes by Health Officials’ guidance to potentially increase that distance are incorporated by reference. Social distancing requirements applies to all individuals (players,

coaches, referees, and spectators) at all times other than the players engaged in active game-play on the field of play (i.e., substitutes must remain socially distanced).

- All player/coach bags (personal belongings) must be placed at least 6 feet apart on the sidelines to maintain proper social distancing.
- No sharing of items is allowed, with the exception of soccer balls. Every player must bring their own personal water bottle (with name on it), hand sanitizer (with name on it), etc.
- Team equipment may only be “touched” by one coach; players may not assist with picking up cones, pop-up goals, etc.

### **Personal Health and Sanitization**

- Every attendee MUST confirm by thermometer reading prior to arrival that they do not have a fever (defined for adults as 100.0 degrees F or higher, for children as 100.4 degrees F or higher). Further, every attendee MUST comply with other health checks as described in the MSI (Covid-19) Return to Play protocol.
- Every player is required to bring a personal supply of hand sanitizer and use it to comply with the MSI (Covid-19) Return to Play protocol (including sanitizing hands upon arrival, departure, and any appropriate time in between).
- Soccer balls and other team equipment items (e.g., cones) must be sanitized prior to initial use on the field, including the game ball. Balls and other team equipment items should be sanitized upon
- At least at the beginning of the season, there will be no portapotties or access to bathrooms at any location, as it will not be possible to ensure proper sanitization per the Covid-safe requirements. Individuals will be at practice/game fields for limited periods of time, so please remember to take care of these needs before leaving home.

### **Signage**

All attendees are required to strictly adhere to guidance on any signage at any MSI activity, including but not limited to signage placed by Montgomery County Public Schools, Parks, HHS, and MSI.

### **Benches and Chairs**

- **Spectators (if allowed to be present)** may use personal chairs that they bring to the facility, so long as that chair is placed on a natural grass or paved surface. It is prohibited to place a chair on a synthetic turf surface.
- **Players and coaches may not use any type of bench or chair on a synthetic turf field space at any time, ever** (both during the Covid-era and after the Covid-era).
- **Players and coaches may not use any type of bench or chair on a natural grass field space at any time** (during the Covid-era), unless that bench or chair is limited to their personal use.
- **If a pop-up tent is used on a sideline by a coach, it may not use any anchoring spikes of any type on synthetic turf fields.** Additionally, only that one coach may participate in the setting up or taking down of the tent, and social distancing requirements make it unlikely that the tent may be utilized for much more than covering team equipment items in the event of inclement weather).

### **3.1.2 Specific Site Logistics**

The logistics guidelines indicated below are tailored to the characteristics of specific locations. They will be updated as we obtain information from Montgomery County Department of HHS, MCPS, and Parks.

#### **3.1.2.1 Julius West MS**

All protocol presented in the MSI (Covid-19) Return to Play protocol applies until further updates can be provided.

#### **3.1.2.2 Walt Whitman HS Stadium**

All protocol presented in the MSI (Covid-19) Return to Play protocol applies until further updates can be provided.

#### **3.1.2.3 Albert Einstein HS Stadium**

All protocol presented in the MSI (Covid-19) Return to Play protocol applies until further updates can be provided.

#### **3.1.2.4 Maryland Soccerplex**

All protocol presented in the MSI (Covid-19) Return to Play protocol applies until further updates can be provided.

#### **3.1.2.4 Other Park and School Field Locations**

All protocol presented in the MSI (Covid-19) Return to Play protocol applies until further updates can be provided.

## **3.2 Game/Practice Day Logistics: Timeline**

This section attempts to summarize various logistical requirements and issues “by timeline”. Some are only appropriate for games, as will be obvious.

### **Upon Arrival and During Departure**

- All individuals (coaches, players, spectators/if allowed must wear masks)
- Social distancing amongst non-immediate household members must be maintained

### **Teams During Warmup**

- Warmup shall be limited to areas where social distancing may be maintained by all coaches and players
- Personal belongings must be kept at least 6 feet apart during this time

### **Pre-Game Meeting**

- A pre-game meeting shall be held at midfield, including no more than 1 (one) captain from each team, no more than 1 (one) coach from each team, and no more than 1 (one) parent Team Sportsmanship Liaison (TSL) from each team. During this meeting, the standard coin toss will

occur, but it also should be an opportunity to remind each other of the rules modifications and the responsibility that every individual has for adhering to social distancing rules, behavioral rules, logistics, etc.

- During this meeting, social distancing must be maintained, and no handshakes or other physical contact may occur.
- The coaches and referee 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 prior to the 2<sup>nd</sup> half kickoff ???
- Masks must be worn by all participants during this meeting.

### **Team Players and Coaches**

- each team's coach and players will occupy half of one sideline, with one team on either side of the midfield stripe on the same side of the field
- each individual must set their personal belongings such that a minimum of 6 feet separation may be maintained at all times
- Coaches must wear masks at all times
- Players must wear masks upon arrival at the field location, during all warm-up activities, and during all passive times (when on the sidelines as a substitute, during halftime, etc.), and upon completion of the game until they have returned to their vehicle
- Players and coaches must maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet at all times, with no physical contact allowed, except for players on the field during active play
- Players must work to avoid unnecessary physical contact during game play, including but not limited to high-fives, hugs, handshakes, fist bumps, chest bumps, etc.
- Coaches and players must remain socially distant during any break in the game; during halftime, it is suggested that teams occupy space inside the field of play, with players either in a large circle with at least 6 feet separation, or staggered in a zig zag pattern with at least 6 feet separation

### **Spectators**

As of 8/24/20, no Spectators are allowed. All parents, siblings, grandparents, and others must remain at or by their vehicle in the parking lot.

If Health Officials' guidance changes, we may be allowed to have limited numbers of spectators). In that event, site-specific guidance will be published that includes information that may look something like this:

- Each team's spectators will occupy half of one sideline (both on the same side of the field)
- Spectators must wear masks at all times
- Spectators must maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet from any individual who is not an immediate household member

### **Referee(s)**

- **Referees must wear a mask upon arrival** at the field location and until the game actually begins, including during the pre-game meeting with team representatives.

- **Referees may wear a mask during the game**, and will be required to do the best possible job at maintaining social distance from all others at all times.
- **Referees must wear a mask during departure** from the field until such time as they enter their vehicle.
- **Under no circumstances whatsoever shall a whistle be shared by two individuals** (e.g., in the unlikely event that a referee becomes injured and a parent volunteer must step in; in such a case, the parent volunteer would need to simply use their voice to call “foul”, and point in the proper direction).

### 3.3 Game Play Rules Modifications

#### 3.3.1 Grades KG, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>

Due to the nature of games/activities for KG, 1<sup>st</sup>, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Grades, there may be additional modifications to the format/structure of their game day program. Those updates need to be evaluated with the updated guidance from HHS, and this document will be updated with that information as it becomes available.

#### 3.3.2 Grades 3 through 12, all Classic League age groups

- **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.
- **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).
- **Goalkeepers MUST wear gloves and long sleeves!** If a GK does not have gloves or long sleeves, they may 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. On hot days, coaches need to consider whether the long sleeves may cause an individual player to overheat, and consider a rotation of goalies that resolves that potential issue.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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” 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.
- **The rule regarding “Drop balls” was modified by FIFA in the past year,** and as a result, it no longer is contested between a player from each team; rather, the referee “drops” the ball to one player from one team. In this case, the referee shall not touch the ball with his/her hands, and shall simply nudge the ball to the designated player with his/her foot.

### **3.2.3 Uniforms**

The lack of availability of new uniforms presents a challenge for all of us. Teams returning from the last season played should wear the same jersey as worn that most recent season. To the extent that our remaining in-house inventory can support this, we will distribute additional jerseys of the same color. However, we know that we will not have 100% success, and some players without a formal jersey will be asked to wear a t-shirt with the closest color match possible. All families and teams are asked to be very understanding of this, at a time where new uniforms are not available. This information will be updated as we determine the composition and makeup of all teams.

If a coach provides a pinney to a player, that pinney must remain in the possession of that player for the entire season (i.e., it is “assigned and dedicated” to that player). **Under no circumstances may pinneys be shared or worn by different players!**