

Waterford Soccer Club COVID Plan

Introduction:

My name is Kevin Girard, and I am the designated COVID Officer for Waterford Soccer Club. COVID-19 has had a profound and lasting effect on youth sports in our area. Many seasons were cancelled in Spring 2020, when disease transmission rate and methods were less understood. Connecticut has taken a phased re-opening approach that allows youth sports to continue with added restrictions. Experts have classified **soccer as a moderate risk of transmission**. As such, Waterford Soccer Club (WSC) is hopeful we can return to play during fall of 2020, with the following considerations:

- Modifications to how the program has been traditionally been run, including social distancing.
- A phased return to play (described in detail below) approach which increasingly allows more contact between players.
- Potential reversion to an earlier phase(s), including full stoppage of play, if conditions are warranted or advised by parent organization or government.
- Mask wearing by everyone when not participating. **Mask wearing by players during play is optional.**

WSC must adhere to all requirements set forth by our local and state government, as well as our parent organizations [CJSA](#), [USYS](#), and [US Soccer](#). A [Return To Play Guidance \(click to read\)](#), organized into phases, has been released by US Soccer, and we encourage you to read it. **This document is being sent to you to provide WSC players, parents, and coaches a summary of the most important of these guidelines, as well as to outline the specific ways WSC will implement them for each phase.**

The club has been conducting trials with an older team in adherence to the stages provided by US Soccer. We are currently in Phase III of the Return-To-Play Plan. Experience gained has indicated that it is essential to create and reinforce new behaviors with all participants. As such, when our youth teams return to play, starting with assessments and continuing with our Fall 2020 Season, we will progressively work through the phases again, and will start with Phase I. Assessments may have a brief small-sided game to assist with assessments (which is allowed under phase II).

From a COVID-19 transmission perspective, experts consider soccer a **medium risk sport**. By following guidelines from US Soccer and the government, WSC will endeavor to lower the risk of COVID-19 transmission as best as possible. However, participation carries risk due to the close-contact nature of the sport and we cannot guarantee to be COVID-19 free – there are many factors beyond our control. Players are always allowed to wear masks if desired, but it is not recommended by US Soccer. Ultimately, **YOU are our front line in this fight**. We need your assistance to:

- Monitor your player's health, especially for symptoms of COVID-19.
- **EXCLUDE your player** from play whenever any symptom appears, whether you think it is COVID-19 related or not.
- NOTIFY your coach or the WSC COVID officer immediately if you suspect your player, anyone your player has close contact with, or anyone in your household has symptoms of COVID-19.

Missing one practice will not adversely impact future opportunities but spreading an infectious disease throughout the club will have a major impact on the safety and soccer experience for everyone. As a community **we need to all work together** to demonstrate responsible behavior that will keep us all safe and healthy.

Finally, the club needs adult volunteers to help run the program, now more than ever. Our youngest players will struggle with social distance behaviors on their own, and **the workload placed on volunteer coaches will increase because of COVID-19**. Examples of this include contact tracing, ensuring kids maintain social distancing during practices, staggering practice start times, and sanitizing gear, all of which requires time and effort from a volunteer coach. We would welcome your involvement, however small, in helping to make our program a safe, successful and enjoyable experience for all involved, especially our children. Please reach out if you can help!

Please also reach out with any questions or concerns – we need to know what people are feeling so we can adjust the program to suit the needs of the membership.

For the Waterford Soccer Board,

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Summary of US Soccer Return to Play Guidance

US Soccer has provided a five-phase plan, which is detailed on [their website](#). What is below does not replace that, but aims to summarize the important points and **WSC's specific implementation** of those points.

1. Phase 0 – “Stay and Shelter” – No play or activity
2. Phase I – “Individual and Small Group Training” – Soccer played in small groups but with socially distant sessions – no player contact allowed.
3. Phase II – “Full Team Training” – Soccer played with mostly socially distant sessions – limited duration contact amongst small groupings allowed during small side games.
4. Phase III – “Full Team Competition” – Soccer played mostly normally, but maintaining social distance when not playing.
5. Phase IV – “No Restrictions” – Return to play as normal.

WSC has been required by the town and CJSA to certify compliance with each phase as it has progressed this summer. Assessments for the fall program will be mostly phase I, with a brief period of contact which would constitute phase II. For our fall program, we will start on Phase I, and progress as slowly as is needed to subsequent phases, culminating in the club achieving Phase III, unless there is a reason to revert to an earlier phase. Examples of why we may revert include increasing transmission rates or state, local, or parent organization guidance. Phase IV (no restriction) is unlikely.

Any suspected or confirmed case within the club will immediately trigger the board to investigate and decide what further actions need to be taken. Communication of any change in status will be sent by [Facebook](#), email, and a post on our website.

All Phases:

During all phases, WSC will be enforcing:

- 1.) Assigned COVID officer for the club responsible for compliance and authority to ask any participant unwilling to comply to leave the facility.
- 2.) **Requirement to self-exclude and report any potential COVID symptoms to WSC IMMEDIATELY.**
- 3.) **Social distancing** for all players, coaches and spectators in all areas of the park (including parking area). Non-game related contact, such as high-fives, pre/post game handshakes, etc. are not allowed. Teams will honor each other in a socially distant manner.
- 4.) Players and coaches **wearing a mask** during arrival, departure, and any time a player or coach is not being physically exerted. Players may wear a mask while playing if desire. They are not required to, and US Soccer recommends they do not. This may mean the coach wears a mask full time. Mask wearing for spectators is always mandatory.
- 5.) Exclusive utilization of **own equipment** with the exception of shared balls. Players cannot share food or water.
- 6.) Players asked to **bring and frequently use your own hand sanitizer**. The club will have a limited supply, but cannot provide for everyone at all times.
- 7.) For training, only players, coaches, and minimum necessary family members allowed on the playing field. Others asked to remain in the parking lot. WSC used to allow family members to play in open spaces while training occurred, and that is no longer allowed.

- 8.) For games, we ask that **spectators be kept to a minimum** (one or fewer per player, if possible.) Social distancing is required, and will be demarcated on the field.
- 9.) **Increased practice space** to accommodate social distance – this may result in less frequent trainings than the past. You may have just one practice per week.
- 10.) Enhanced sanitization of bathroom facilities – if enough volunteers to help with this effort are not available, bathrooms may be provided by porta-potties or **there may be none at all**.
- 11.) **Contact tracing** by way of coach taking attendance and “team structure/pod concepts” and other things such as offset arrival times for competitions and practices.
- 12.) **Players and families may withdraw from any activity** or the entire program if they deem necessary. No player or family will be “penalized” because of this – safety and families being comfortable with the risk level associated with an activity is paramount.
- 13.) Players and spectators are asked to not arrive more than 10 minutes before the time suggested by the coach, and not loiter after the session is over.

Phase I Guidelines

Phase I is characterized by individual training and social distanced practice. Focus by the coach and players is on individual skills, practiced in a way that keeps players from physical or close contact. The key aims for this phase are learning new behaviors and returning to playing fitness. Here are some key points exclusive to phase I (in addition to things for all phases, listed above).

- 1.) Coaches will plan sessions that do not require contact and maintain social distance. **NO scrimmages or small sided-games are allowed during Phase I.**
- 2.) Players will remain social distant at all times, including entering and leaving the field, during the activity, and during water breaks.
- 3.) Coach will remain socially distant from the players to the extent possible.
- 4.) For teams larger than 9 players, sub-groups will be formed among the coach and assistants to adhere to 9 players + 1 coach per group.

Phase II Guidelines

Phase II is characterized by mostly individual training and social distance; however, limited player contact within a team is introduced for a limited duration. Larger groups are allowed, and small sided games and intra-team scrimmages are allowed for limited duration (< 30 min). The key aims for this phase are fitness to return to “normal” play, and to assess the team for COVID transmission as “increased contact” happens. Key points:

- 1.) Most phase I restrictions and guidance remain.
- 2.) Coaches mainly plan sessions for social distance. Up to 30 minutes player contact may occur within the team – No inter-team scrimmages allowed.
- 3.) Small sided games and intra-team scrimmages are allowed (limit 30 mins).

Phase III Guidelines

Phase III is where play starts to be normal again, however, all participants should still follow social distance and mask wearing during non-exertion periods. Some key points:

- 1.) Player contact within a team and between teams within a club or region becomes less restrictive – coaches are requested to still consider the transmission risk of these activities.
- 2.) WSC teams may scrimmage each other, and teams may engage in competition with other towns.
- 3.) Limitations on spectators, social distance during non-exertion periods, etc. are all still in effect.

Phase IV Guidelines

WSC will likely not progress to phase IV until the pandemic is considered “controlled” and the risk of COVID-19 transmission becomes similar to that of other life-threatening diseases (i.e. vaccine available widely and/or “herd immunity” is achieved). Phase IV is a return to “life as we knew it” pre-pandemic. Some key points:

- 1.) This phase is only achievable when there is very low transmission rate, and as advised by government or parent organizations.
- 2.) No restrictions on activities or player contact.
- 3.) Mask wearing, social distance, etc. may be dropped as recommended by our governing bodies.

WSC Implementation of US Soccer Guidance

Training Policies:

To reduce the risk of transmission as much as possible, WSC ask that **spectators refrain from being on the playing surface during training** to the extent possible. We understand that for some of our youngest players, this may not be possible, and exceptions will be made. We’re asking you cooperate as much as possible with this, and refrain from bringing siblings, other family members, etc. to play at Spera during training (unless they are also training with another team). For example, many parents would run/walk laps around Spera, play with their kids, etc. While we value all those things, in a COVID world, we are asking that you don’t.

We are very likely to create a dropoff and pickup structure, and ask that you have patience and allow extra time for this to happen. More will be communicated as we try various things to help this happen.

Game Policies:

To minimize the risk to players and respect our opponents, we ask that families minimize attendance at matches. As with training, we ask that families carefully consider how many spectators to bring to a game and expose to possible transmission. Ideally, one spectator per player will help us keep number of people at the field to a minimum and help with contact tracing.

WSC Players are asked to choose a side of the field and sit there. Spaces will be marked to maintain social distance. **Players should bring a camp chair to place in their space (no benches).** Spectators are asked to sit on the same half of the field as the players, but on the “parent’s side.” Spectators are asked not to mingle with the opposing team. Spectators are asked to place their camp chairs at socially distant spots that will be demarcated. Spectators are asked to not loiter before or after games.

Bathroom Policy:

We ask that you do your best to have your player use the restrooms before coming to the field to avoid unnecessary trips to the restroom and possible exposure. WSC is a volunteer organization. Spera Park is maintained by volunteers, and our bathrooms are no exception. To comply with increased sanitization frequency, we will need more volunteers to help clean the bathrooms. If such volunteers do not come forward, we will be forced to close them out of concern for the health and safety of all. WSC is looking at the possibility of porta-potties as an alternative.

Additional Resources (Soccer & Sports Related):

There are a lot of resources related to COVID. Some are specific to soccer, and others are not. We hope you may find some of these links useful:

US Soccer PLAY ON (main site) - <https://www.ussoccer.com/playon>

US Soccer PLAY ON Guidelines - <https://www.ussoccer.com/playon/guides>

US Soccer PLAY ON FAQ (sorted by role) - <https://www.ussoccer.com/playon/faqs>

List of resources cited by US Soccer - <https://www.ussoccer.com/playon3/resources>

CDC Considerations for Youth Sports - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/youth-sports.html>

Connecticut Junior Soccer Association Home Page (has COVID resources at top level) - <http://www.cjsa.org/home.php>

CT Reopening Guidelines for Sports - https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DECD/Covid_Business_Recovery-Phase-2/Sports_FitnessCenters- Jul2.pdf