



Updated October 2, 2020

## **Purpose:**

The purpose of this document is to provide athletes, parents, coaches, and other Lenoir Youth Soccer Association members information they can use in creating their return-to-activity programming in the context of COVID-19.

## **Summary:**

Our previous Return to Activity plans provided guidelines for training and safe interaction. The guidance covered roles, field use, group size, sanitary conditions, equipment and water rules, limiting spectators, and coaching safety. Lenoir Youth Soccer Association has since monitored the various expert recommendations from many sources, including:

- The US Soccer Federation Grassroots Recommendations in June and July
- The USYS Guidance in May and June
- The National and NC Federation of High School Athletics in May and June
- The NC Department of Health and Human Services Interim Guidance in May and July
- The CDC Youth Sports Program FAQs in June

## **Competitive Guidelines**

For organized games across the state, the following recommendations are adapted from *U.S. Soccer PLAY ON Phase III Grassroots Recommendations Guide*, updated July 8, 2020, and should be followed as appropriate for local and field conditions and player age groups.

### **Participating in Competitions & Tournaments**

1. Teams are recommended to only participate in local or regional single-day, outdoor events to avoid travel and especially overnight stays during Phase III.
2. If travel is required to an out-of-state tournament, NCYSA permission to travel rules will apply. If clubs want travel authorization, a letter from the club president will be required, stating they have reviewed safety plans and approve travel. Returning from an out-of-state tournament, teams and spectators should consider a quarantine of 14 days based on conditions.

### **Warm-Ups**

1. Warm-ups should not begin until previous teams have left the field and equipment and benches have been cleaned and sanitized. Allow for extra time between games to accommodate as necessary.
2. Competition warm-up recommendations follow Phase III training recommendations
  1. Coaches should not be within six feet of any player
  2. Progressions between warm-up drills should be set up prior to players arriving to field. The players should not touch any equipment.
  3. In general, maintain as much social distance as possible during warm-up activities.
3. Participants should avoid intentionally touching each other before or after competitions. This includes hugs, high-fives, or huddles.
4. If game balls are used during warm-up, they should be re-sanitized before the game.



## Referee Considerations

1. Fields should still be walked pre-game.
2. Physical items (nets, goals, corner flags etc.) should be inspected visually.
3. If issues are identified – for example a goal net needs to be repaired or an object needs to be removed from the field of play – the referees should sanitize his or hands after managing.  
Referees should maintain at least six feet distance when communicating with their referee crew, players and coaches. If a fourth official is present, they should maintain six feet distance when communicating with coaches, players or their fellow referees. If a fourth official's table is provided, the referee should check that it is six feet away from either bench or coaching area. The fourth official should wear a mask for the duration of the game.

## Pre-Game Activities

1. The coin toss should be socially distanced.
  - a. Only one referee and one representative per team should take part in the coin toss.
  - b. Only the owner of the coin should touch the coin.
  - c. All participants involved in the coin toss should wear a mask
2. No pre-game handshakes shall take place.
3. Uniform/jewelry checks should be visible checks only, maintaining 6-ft between the referee and player.
4. Team pre-game meetings should be kept brief.
  1. All participants should wear proper PPE (personal protective equipment) and endeavor to maintain space between themselves and others. Prolonged proximity, even with masks should be avoided.
  2. Huddles should be avoided.
5. Formalize a plan to communicate rosters in a way to minimize direct handoff to referees.
  1. Discuss if game reports can be provided to referees ahead of time.
  2. If rosters cannot be provided in advance, the coach may place the roster at the end of the bench to minimize close contact.

## Game Time

1. Players and coaches at the bench, as well as referees at the fourth official's table, are reminded to wear PPE for the duration of the game.
2. No handshakes, high fives, fist bumps, chest bumps, huddles, group celebrations, etc., should take place, including when goals are scored, or when substitutions are leaving or entering the field.
3. The following modifications to substitutions protocols are suggested:
  1. When subbing into the game, players should maintain distance from the referees and other players who are also subbing into the game.
  2. If a player is subbed out of the game, the player should stand at least 6-feet away from other individuals while recovering before, putting on facemask.
4. For throw ins, only active players are recommended to collect the balls.
5. Clean and sanitized balls may be readily available for use, in the case of the ball not being easily retrievable. It is the responsibility of the home team or competition organizer to supply sanitized balls.
6. When possible during breaks in play, consider making sanitized balls available to replace used balls.



7. Avoid delays in start of play, so that players do not have pro-longed periods of standing in close proximity. For example, encourage all participants to conduct free kicks and set plays with efficiency so players do not have prolonged periods in shoulder-to-shoulder defense walls.

### **Hydration / Cool-Down / Sanitation Breaks**

1. Game administrators should incorporate hydration / cool-down / or “sanitation” breaks during games.
2. Consideration should be taken to incorporating these at the mid-way point of any half lasting thirty minutes or longer.
3. During this break:
  1. Players should hydrate while socially distanced. This will also provide the brief opportunity for cooling down, which may not happen throughout the game while efficiency is enforced in game activities.
  2. Players should sanitize their hands.
  3. The hosting competition can sanitize game balls for use during the game.

### **Halftime**

1. During halftime, referees, players and coaches should maintain at least six feet distance.
2. All players and coaches should be wearing proper PPE. If a player needs to recover before participating in halftime activities, player should stand 12 ft away from other individuals while recovering before putting on their face covering or mask.
3. Players should sanitize their hands.
4. Coaches should limit the amount of time the entire team is near the bench area at one time.
5. Referees should sanitize and use only their own equipment (whistle, flags, etc.).

### **Considerations in The Case of Injuries**

1. As able, the Referee should keep a six-foot distance from the injured player while determining if medical attention is necessary
2. If needed, allow a coach or medical professional from the injured player’s team to enter the field and attend to the player. The coach/medical professional should wear PPE and gloves. The Referee should remind other players to keep their distance from each other, and the injured player, during the break in play. Players should not congregate.

### **Post-Game**

1. No post-game handshakes should take place. Consider other forms of sportsmanship or instituting new acknowledgement traditions, such as clapping, etc.
2. If a referee needs the coach’s signature for a roster, place the paper down on the end of the bench and step away to have them sign it.
3. Teams should pack-up and immediately leave the field following the game, exiting at the designated exit point. Post-game meetings should be kept brief, if any meeting is held at all. All participants should wear proper PPE and endeavor to maintain space between themselves and others. Prolonged proximity, even with masks, should be avoided. Huddles should be avoided.
4. Do not have a team snack that is shared among the team members.
5. Players should not take off any equipment until they have left the facility.
6. Teams should clean up bench area so that it is clean of ALL trash.



7. Competition hosts should ensure all equipment, including benches, balls, flags, etc. are sanitized.
8. Spectators are encouraged to maintain social distancing following the game while waiting for their child. Dependent on field layout, spectators may need to wait further away from the field.
9. Referees should leave field immediately following the game and referee duties have been completed assuming they have no other games to officiate. Referee debrief sessions should be a conducted in a space where the referees can social distance but still in view of the game field. If referees are working later in the day, the referee should stay away from other individuals, may consider departing the facility or using their personal vehicle as a place to take a break in between games.

### **Inclement Weather**

1. Facilities should have a plan in place in the event of inclement weather. As this plan may be different from pre-COVID-19 protocols, it should be adjusted and then communicated with all teams in advance of competitions. If inclement weather is forecasted, consider posting protocols at all entrances and arrival/check-in locations. Social distancing must be observed during any shelter-in-place or evacuation protocols. PPE should be worn, and participants should not take off their equipment during the delay.
2. Encourage all participants and spectators to return to their vehicles in the event of inclement weather. When possible, individuals in the car should be limited to members of the immediate family. If nonfamily members must be present in the vehicle, everyone in the vehicle should wear PPE. If possible, have a back-up option for those who were dropped off or do not have a vehicle on-site. This location should only be used as a last resort. The number of people in these locations should be predetermined and posted on the wall. In accordance with the Safe Soccer Framework and the U.S. Center for SafeSport policies and guidance, a minor and an adult who is not the minor player's parent/legal guardian may not be alone in a room together.
3. If inclement weather is forecasted, depending on the size of the field complex, the competition hosts may consider taking a conservative approach by communicating game delays or cancellations well in advance of game time.

**Specifically, at Mack Cook Stadium and Rotary Soccer Park, if inclement weather halts a match or training, participants will be asked to shelter in their own car, as there is little to no space to shelter while socially distanced.**



## Other Considerations and Resources

Many of the recommendations rely upon rules and regulations set forth by public health authorities, which will be different across the country. In addition, we all must recognize that there will be other logistical and implementation challenges for activity organizers, participants and their families given COVID-19.

The information in this document is NOT intended or implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. All content, including text, graphics, images, and information, are provided for general informational purposes only. The knowledge and circumstances around COVID-19 are changing constantly and, as such, none of US Youth Soccer, NCYSA, or Lenoir Youth Soccer makes no representation and assumes no responsibility for the completeness of this information. Further, you should seek advice from medical professionals and/or public health officials if you have specific questions. These guidelines address only early phases of return to play, and additional guidelines may, or may not, follow as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve. Our state will have a phased approach to masks, reopening of fields, and easing of social distancing requirements. This may vary town to town, county to county. All participants need to be aware of and adhere to all Federal, State and Local guidelines and requirements.

Finally, although the young and healthy may be subject to less severe cases of COVID-19, every case of this disease is potentially life-altering or deadly, particularly in those with risk factors that may occur within our communities. Health consequences may be long-standing and only apparent weeks after initial infection and recovery. Until COVID-19 is eradicated, a vaccine is developed, or a cure is found, there is no way of eliminating the risk of infection. This view should always be at the forefront when designing and considering return to activity programming. USYS state associations and soccer organizations should be in contact with their respective insurance carriers to determine that all coverages are appropriate for the organization and its needs. The risks of participation should be clearly communicated to parents and participants in your respective programs.

### Resources:

NCYSA: <http://ncyouthsoccer.org/>

US Soccer docs: <https://www.ncsoccer.org/file.aspx?DocumentId=2323>

NC Government: <https://www.nc.gov/covid19>

CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Special Olympics: <https://resources.specialolympics.org/resources-to-help-during-the-crisis>

Federation for Children with Special Needs: <https://fcsn.org/>

Johns Hopkins Covid-19 Data: [coronavirus.jhu.edu](https://coronavirus.jhu.edu)