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United States Specialty Sports Association

POST COVID-19 Return-to-Play Guidelines, Procedures and Recommendations

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Version 1.5

Inside this manual are best practices for our sports, as developed by our USSSA POST COVID-19 Task Force. These best practices are designed to help directors with ideas and plans for operating events post COVID-19. They do not replace or supersede any protocols or restrictions outlined by state or local authorities. All directors must continue to follow those local or state guidelines.

As areas begin to open and play resumes, we strongly urge any director out in the field share with us details of any and all challenges that may arise and which might not be addressed in this document. Once an issue is identified, we will work with the Task Force on how to handle the issue and then share that information with all sport directors.



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This document will be posted and available at www.ussa.com/coronavirus.

It will also be posted in the DC2 system for all event directors.



POST COVID-19 100.1: Role of Task Force

A Task Force was assembled within USSSA. The Task Force features the national program directors for baseball, basketball, fastpitch, golf, slowpitch and soccer. The Task Force has developed return-to-play models for the entire association as well as for directors and sports.

POST COVID-19 100.2: Sport-Specific Language and Processes

Each USSSA-sanctioned sport has created its recommended best practices for return to play. Please note that all guidelines from local and state officials supersede USSSA's recommendations and guidelines. All sports, directors, and events are required to gain approval from their local and state officials when returning to play.

POST COVID-19 200.1: Event Procedures – ALL SPORTS

1. Follow all local and state guidelines for facilities and events.
2. **Prior to any events taking place, each State Director must submit the requested information to the National Program Director. Once a decision has been determined the State Director and Sport Chairperson will be notified.**
3. A team and event e-mail must be sent to all teams, team managers, coaches, players/parents, and officials/referees in the week leading up to an event of play. The e-mail should 1) encourage all event attendees to practice social distancing; 2) explain that any person who is experiencing symptoms of sickness will be prohibited from attending the event/venue of play; and 3) make clear that all posted and published local- and state-regulated guidelines shall be followed.
4. Take proactive steps in creating social distancing environments, where possible.
 - a. Inspect designated seating and viewing areas for fans.
 - b. When using a tent, please restrict it to family members only.
 - c. Minimize the use of fields at facilities to remain within the current mass-gathering limitations of the local jurisdiction, if necessary.
 - d. Create one-way entry and exit gates where possible, to direct foot traffic.
5. Minimize player contact by eliminating team/player handshakes and team/player high fives. No group prayers between teams on the field. Create plan to keep social distancing between teams in effect beyond the field of play. Suggest other means of game celebrations and team sportsmanship at the end of games (e.g., ask players to tip their caps/visors, or have teams bow to each other from across the field).
6. Directors, players, umpires and spectators must adhere to the guidelines from CDC, state and local authorities regarding potential state travel restrictions and stay-at-home orders, including return to state of residence.



7. In dugouts, discontinue use of water coolers that are provided by tournaments, parks or teams. Players should bring their own, personal cooler instead of using a team cooler. Players should plan on bringing an individual water bottle.

POST COVID-19 201.1: USSSA Baseball & Fastpitch Return to Play

Recommended Best Practices for the Field-of-Play:

1. Follow all local and state guidelines for facilities and events.
2. The managers meeting at home plate should be limited to one coach from each team plus the umpires. No players at plate meeting. Eliminate the meeting if possible.
3. Where possible, consider options for limiting both the pitching and the scorecard exchanges, in order to reduce person-to-person contact.
4. Allow teams to spread players out; expand the dugout area when room permits and only if player safety will not be compromised. Expansion of the team dugouts should not be done into foul ball areas. Attempt to limit bench personnel to essential team personnel.
5. Encourage parents to supply their players with antibacterial wipes and hand sanitizer for disinfecting shared playing equipment and cleaning hands between innings/quarters/periods.
6. Allow players to wear PPE items if they choose, as long as the items do not compromise the safety of any and all participants in the game.
7. Require teams to clean their dugout of all trash and other items after each game, and to wipe down (clean) hard surfaces such as benches, bat racks, etc.
8. Upon arriving at a dugout for the first time, teams are to disinfect hard surface areas (benches, bat racks, etc.). *Procedures #7 and #8 here will comply with the CDC recommendation of a two-step process for cleaning and disinfecting.*
9. Directors should consider adjusting the playing formats and increasing the amount of time between games, to minimize overlap and traffic flow where needed.
10. Ban the use of sunflower seeds.



POST COVID-19 201.2: USSSA GSL & Slowpitch Adult Return to Play

Recommended Best Practices for the Field-of-Play:

1. Follow all local and state guidelines for facilities and events.
2. Directors and tournaments may be required to cap the total number of teams that can enter an event, to stay within potential gathering limitations. Spectators will be encouraged to not attend events until gathering limitations are increased or removed.
3. Adjust playing formats to ensure events stay within gathering limitations.
4. Directors are asked to discuss these protocols/restrictions with all locations that host USSSA/GSL events and also cover any additional items said facilities might require. This information must be distributed to all participants prior to the start of the event, to ensure the safety of all attending, including facility staff.
5. All staff, players, umpires and spectators are encouraged to continue social distancing on and off the field during an event.
6. All staff, players, umpires and spectators are encouraged to wear a mask or other face covering until CDC, state and local authorities declare that masks are no longer recommended.
7. It is recommended that new softballs remain in their original packaging until they need to be introduced into a game.
8. Increase dugouts sizes where possible, to eliminate that space restriction. Recommend players stand outside the dugout to allow for social distancing, but do not allow them onto the field of play.
9. Recommend staff, players, umpires and spectators bring hand sanitizing products.
10. One coach per team will conduct a pregame meeting at home plate, all involved are requested to keep 6 feet social distancing during ground rules and coin toss.
11. Directors are encouraged to allow for adequate time in event scheduling, to ensure adherence to social distancing during the crossover of teams.
12. It is recommended that all players and umpires use their own equipment while participating. This includes gloves, bats, etc.
13. The catcher and umpire shall position themselves during a player's at-bat to allow for social distancing.
14. If bat testing is performed at an event, all staff involved must wear gloves. One representative will handle the bats for the entire team, and this person also should wear gloves.
15. Limit or space out staffing to ensure social distancing; this includes the team check-in process. There should be a single point of contact for teams during events.



16. Discontinue the physical posting of brackets, rules, etc., and utilize online options instead.
17. All teams are directed to clean their dugouts and team bench areas on arrival and departure.

POST COVID-19 201.3: USSSA Soccer Return to Play

Recommended Best Practices for the Field-of-Play:

1. Follow all local and state guidelines for facilities and events.
2. Opposing team benches should be on opposite sides of the field.
3. Rosters sizes and playing formats should be reviewed both to maintain a competitive structure and to allow for flexibility under the crowd restriction circumstances.
4. A spectator/parent-to-player ratio of 1:1 is to be followed during times of restricted gatherings.
5. No handshakes. No walk outs. No team huddles. A separate form of goal celebration and team sportsmanship with no contact should be created.
6. One player per team shall be allowed at the coin toss with the referee to begin a game. The referee shall always be in possession of the coin.
7. Play can be restarted with a kick-in after a sideline out of bounds. The ball may not be played over 10 yards on a kick-in.
8. No spitting. Spitting will result in automatic removal from the field.
9. Players must always keep proper social distance from referees. Only a team captain can approach the referee to ask questions and gain clarification.
10. Teams must leave the field immediately after their game concludes. Teams will have 10 minutes to vacate the bench area.
11. Game time slots should be lengthened so that an incoming team has no chance of personal contact with a team that has just played. Sample game-day schedule: 9 a.m., 11:30 a.m., 2 p.m., 4:30 p.m., 7 p.m.

POST COVID-19 201.4: USSSA Basketball Return to Play

Recommended Best Practices for the Court-of-Play:

1. Follow all local and state guidelines for facilities and events.
2. Spectator limit should be 1:1 ratio of parent/spectator to player.
3. No handshakes, high fives, or prayer or group assemblies.
4. Develop methods of noncontact celebrations and gestures of sportsmanship.



5. Spectators to always wear face masks.
6. Game balls to be sanitized every quarter, including halftime and after each game.
7. Game officials encouraged to wear gloves and face masks during all games.

POST COVID-19 201.4(2) NATIONAL PLAYING RULES ADDENDUM:

1. Middle & High School Boys & Girls (grades 7-12): previous two 16-minute halves reduced to two 14-minute halves.
2. Grade School Boys & Girls (grades 2-6): previous two 14-minute halves reduced to two 12-minute halves.

POST COVID-19 201.5: USSSA Golf Return to Play

Recommended Best Practices for the Course-of-Play:

1. Follow all local and state guidelines for facilities and events.
2. Follow social distancing/personal safety rules through the 2020 year as indicated below:
 - a. No closer than 6 feet to another person/team. Your caddie will be assumed to be part of your family, so the 6-foot rule does not apply to them.
 - b. The flagstick is to stay in the hole; if you must remove it, you should do so using a glove.
 - c. No extra spectators on the course.
 - d. Cart use is to be restricted to injured players or over-50 caddies (at their own risk).
 - e. Only one group at a time at the scoring table. You do not need to sign your own scorecard. You can examine it on the table, but you do not need to touch it or sign it.
 - f. No pre-round or post-round handshakes. A tip of the cap or a thumbs-up will suffice for showing respect to your fellow competitor.
 - g. Personal equipment only. Nothing community, such as bottled water, snacks, tees, souvenir balls, T-shirts, etc., shall be given out.
 - h. We will use intervals of a minimum of 9 minutes, with 10 or 11 minutes preferred, when possible.
 - i. No exchanging of scorecards at the pre-tee rules conference. Starter will hand golfers the scorecard of the person they will be scoring and point them out.
3. Tournament director has the authority to take the temperature of anyone in the competition. Tournament director also has the authority to send home any participant showing a fever or signs of illness.
4. No extra staff will be employed. Need to do more with less. So maybe no pace-of-play marshals or starters. This would need to be communicated to the field.



POST COVID-19 201.6: USSSA Sport Not Named in This Document Return to Play

Recommended Best Practices for the Field/Court/Venue-of-Play:

1. Follow all local and state guidelines for facilities and events.
2. In using this manual of protocols, submit your standards and guidelines to the national office for your event to be approved.

POST COVID-19 202.1: Recommended Best Practices for Returning to Team Activities

1. Follow all local and state guidelines as well as facility and event guidelines for all team activities.
2. Encourage all attendees to practice social distancing.
3. No team/player handshakes, no team/player high fives, and no group gatherings between teams on the field. Try to keep social distancing between teams. Ask team members to tip their caps to the other team – from across the field – after a game.
4. The managers meeting at home plate should include just one coach from each team plus the umpires. No players at the plate meeting.
5. Allow teams to spread players out; expand the dugout area when room permits and only if player safety is not compromised. Expansion of the team dugouts should not be done into foul ball areas.
6. Encourage parents to supply their players with antibacterial wipes and hand sanitizer for disinfecting shared playing equipment and cleaning hands between innings.
7. Limit person-to-person contact as much as possible.
8. Allow players to wear PPE items if they choose, as long as the items do not compromise the safety of the game.
9. Teams should clean their dugout of all trash and other items after each game. Teams are encouraged to disinfect hard surface areas (benches, bat racks, etc.) upon first arriving at a dugout.
10. In dugouts, discontinue use of water coolers that are provided by tournaments, parks or teams. Players should bring their own, personal cooler instead of using a team cooler. No sharing of water bottles. Each player must have their own water container, or teams should provide disposable cups for their players and coaching staff.

POST COVID-19 203.1 Recommended Tournament Best Practices within Facilities

1. Follow all local and state guidelines, including those for the exchanging of money at the gate, concessions, vendors, and potential cashless payment processes, where feasible. Ensure all staff are equipped according to protocols.



2. Reduce event staff to maximize event participants, if restrictions about gatherings are in place.
3. Direct all teams to clean dugout/bench area when departing after their respective games.
4. When entering a dugout/bench area, the arriving team is required to sanitize this area.
5. Ensure there are sufficient communications and signage within the facility regarding safe practices for all attendees. Post laminated signage throughout the facility reminding people to practice social distancing. Display signage about safe and healthy practices at entrance and in applicable locations throughout the facility.
6. Maximize social distancing at larger facilities; have multiple one-way traffic entry and exit points where possible and feasible.
7. Follow city, county and state requirements for crowd gatherings and concession stands.
8. Regularly clean restrooms, following local requirements.
9. Stagger the start times of games to enable separation of teams and prevent their interaction as they arrive at or leave the facility. One-way directional signage will help further reduce interactions.
10. Spectator fees: Evaluate and follow local state guidelines for cash exchange systems or other ticket systems. Spectators must enter and exit at separate locations where possible. Events are advised to follow the local and state government guidelines for event/facility capacity.
11. Minimize the number of coaches and bench personnel in dugout/team bench areas.
12. Award ceremonies shall be contact-less, with a team representative designated to receive and distribute awards to players. Submit pictures and the names of award recipients to event designee via e-mail or text message.

POST COVID-19 204.1 Changes to USSSA Waivers

USSSA Official Waiver, as found at: www.usssa.com/coronavirus

RETURN TO PLAY WAIVER

In consideration of being allowed to participate in any way in the UNITED STATES SPECIALTY SPORTS ASSOCIATION athletics/sports program, related events and activities, the undersigned acknowledges, appreciates, and agrees that:

1. The risk of injury and/or illness from the activities involved in the program is significant, including the potential for permanent paralysis and death, and while particular rules, equipment, and personal discipline may reduce the risk, the risk of serious injury does exist;



2. The risk to have contact with individuals, who have been exposed to and/or have been diagnosed with one or more communicable diseases, including but not limited to COVID-19 or other medical conditions, diseases, or maladies does exist, and it is impossible to eliminate the risk that I could be exposed to and/or become infected through contact with or close proximity with an individual with a communicable disease;

3. I KNOWINGLY AND FREELY ASSUME ALL SUCH RISKS, both known and unknown, EVEN IF ARISING FROM THE NEGLIGENCE OF THE RELEASEES or others, and assume all full responsibility for my participation;

4. I willingly agree to comply with the stated and customary terms and conditions for participation. If, however, I observe any unusual significant hazard during my presence or participation, I will remove myself from participation and bring such to the attention of the nearest official immediately; and

5. I, for myself and on behalf of my heirs, assigns, personal representatives and next of kin, HEREBY RELEASE AND HOLD HARMLESS THE UNITED STATES SPECIALTY SPORTS ASSOCIATION, their officers, officials, agents and/or employees, other participants, sponsoring agencies, sponsors, advertisers, and if applicable, owners and lessors of the premises used to conduct the event ("Releasees"), WITH RESPECT TO ANY AND ALL INJURY, ILLNESS, DISABILITY, DEATH, or loss or damage to person or property, WHETHER ARISING FROM THE NEGLIGENCE OF THE RELEASEES OR OTHERWISE.

6. I HAVE READ THIS RELEASE OF LIABILITY AND ASSUMPTION OF RISK AGREEMENT, BEFORE ACKNOWLEDGING THE CHECKBOX BELOW, FULLY UNDERSTAND ITS TERMS, UNDERSTAND THAT I HAVE GIVEN UP SUBSTANTIAL RIGHTS BY AGREEING TO IT ON MY OWN BEHALF OR ON BEHALF OF THE YOUTH PARTICIPANT ASSOCIATED WITH THIS GUARDIAN ACCOUNT, AND I SIGN IT FREELY AND VOLUNTARILY WITHOUT ANY INDUCEMENT.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT BY ADULT PARTICIPANT: By acknowledging and agreeing to the checkbox below, I agree and verify the following: 1) I consent and agree to assume the risks of participation in these programs; and 2) that I specifically agree to the release as provided herein of all the Releasees, and, for myself, my heirs, assigns and next of kin, I release and agree to indemnify the Releasees from any and all liabilities incident to my involvement or participation in these programs EVEN IF ARISING FROM THE NEGLIGENCE OF THE RELEASEES OR OTHERWISE.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT BY PARENTS AND/OR LEGAL GUARDIANS OF YOUTH PARTICIPANTS: By acknowledging and agreeing to the check box below, I agree to and verify the following: 1) I am the parent or legal guardian for the youth participant associated with this guardian account, 2) that the date of birth of the youth participant associated with this guardian account is correct,



3) that as parent/legal guardian with legal responsibility for this youth participant, I consent and agree to assume the risks of his/her participation in these programs; and 4) that I specifically agree to his/her release as provided herein of all the Releasees, and, for myself, my heirs, assigns and next of kin, I release and agree to indemnify the Releasees from any and all liabilities incident to this youth participant's involvement or participation in these programs as provided above EVEN IF ARISING FROM THE NEGLIGENCE OF THE RELEASEES OR OTHERWISE

POST COVID-19 205.1 Protocol for Changes to This Document

Due to the uncertain aspects in return to play, this document is expected to change based on new procedures and feedback from our directors. You should always follow your local and state guidelines. USSSA Directors are advised to revisit this document found at:

www.ussa.com/coronavirus prior to a sanctioned event. In the event of any conflict in language between any printed version of the POST COVID-19 Return to Play Guidelines, Procedures and Recommendations and the ussa.com/coronavirus online version, the ussa.com/coronavirus shall prevail.