

Keeping your athletes safe on and off the field

September 29 2020, by Carol Steltenkamp

With new recommendations from public health officials and so much uncertainty surrounding a return to normal life, it's understandable that parents would want their children to have some form of normalcy and routine. Fall sports are gearing up, and like everything else, they look different this year.

While it's true that children don't seem to have the same severe COVID-19 complications as their parents and grandparents, they can still spread the virus. That's why it's important to remind your [young athletes](#) about the rules for staying safe and healthy.

Here are a few tips parents and coaches can incorporate into practices and games:

- See your pediatrician or [health care provider](#) for a pre-participation or "sports" physical
- Do not send your child to conditioning, practice or games if they are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19
- At indoor facilities, consider opening doors and windows to allow fresh air to circulate
- Prioritize non-contact activity. This could be a good opportunity to try new sports such as track and cross-country
- Keep hand sanitizer handy and encourage athletes to use it often
- Encourage distancing and the use of masks when players aren't actively participating, such as in the dugout or on the sidelines
- Discourage unnecessary physical contact, such as high fives,

- handshakes, fist bumps or hugs
- Create small practice groups to help limit team-wide outbreaks
- Frequently clean high-touch items such as bats, balls and other gear.
- Bring water from home and avoid using water fountains. Remind athletes not to share water bottles.
- Decrease, as much as possible, the use of shared equipment and communal spaces like locker rooms
- Restrict travel and only compete against teams within your community
- Educate yourself and your athletes; post signs at facilities that promote protective measures such as social distancing off the field, wearing a mask and washing hands thoroughly and often.

At games and practices, parents should maintain a social distance of a least six feet from other spectators and wear a face mask.

If you're not comfortable with your child returning to [team sports](#), consider taking the season off; they can do conditioning and drills at home to build their skills. Engage in other activities such as bike riding and hiking as a way to keep them active and healthy.

Not all guidelines apply to every sport and there are different challenges for each age group in regard to what directions kids can understand and follow. These guidelines are meant to supplement the ones set by local and state health departments. Check the website of your health department for the latest recommendations and regulations for keeping your athletes safe and healthy.

Provided by University of Kentucky

Citation: Keeping your athletes safe on and off the field (2020, September 29) retrieved 27 April

2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-09-athletes-safe-field.html>

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