



Return to Play Guidelines

*The purpose of this document is to outline plans, guidelines and procedures in contemplation of a Return to Play, addressing **FIVE (5)** major areas of concern with respect to physical distancing and to provide a certain level of comfort to participants by outlining steps to be taken to help maximize their safety and well-being and allows for any enhanced PWSA/Event protocols that we might develop or that the province or municipalities may require us to do to rent the space.*

We extend our immense gratitude to all essential and Frontline workers. Be Safe.

The items listed in this document are suggestions of recommended safeguards for restarting Softball Activity in Ontario. Provincial/Territorial Associations, Leagues, Tournament Hosts, staff, Players, Coaches, Parents, and spectators must continue to follow Federal, Provincial and Local Governmental guidelines. Feel free to make your guidelines more stringent if you deem necessary. Remember that information and recommendations during the pandemic are very fluid and are subject to change.

These protocols will be the responsibility of the Association, Home team, Coach, Tournament Hosts, City/municipality in which the event is held.

1. ENTRY

All persons entering park must agree to be screened, if not, no admission (this screening may require a certified individual with private assurance protection)

**Declaration waiver from all participants re covid exposure must be validated with roster/contract
Signage must be well displayed in the entry area regards to the spreading of the virus, proper hygiene, information on physical distancing and what to do if you have any symptoms.**

Wellness testing inclusive of the Declaration and Temperature taking (within range, above range, re-testing/re admittance [heat factor/weather or other], monitoring) each time the athletes, coach, parent etc. attends a game, practice, tournament. If a person is denied entry, then a procedure/handout should be in place to encourage that person to visit a testing facility immediately and ensure you collect that individuals complete contact information.

During this process individuals may also be asked if they are experiencing any other symptoms (new or existing cough, fever, sore throat, respiratory illness, difficulty breathing, have you been in contact with anyone who had covid 19 and have they travelled outside the country in the past 14 days) to make a determination to help ensure the safety of all individuals involved.

- Questions that frontline workers ask before entering/taking care of patients to identify potential COVID-19
- Have app available to teams/coaches for participants to take before they leave their residents
- Have coaches re-assess at the field before each game
- Limit entrances to 1 or 2. Extra staff would be required (City – extra cost, Host) to ensure security
Any player, parent, coach, umpire etc. showing symptoms should not show up at the park but if they fail the screening then they would not be permitted for the weekend and the team/coach would be responsible to ensure the person showing symptoms is isolated from all others and also isolate those who were in contact before discovery.
- Individuals that show signs of a fever based on their temperature reading will be turned away before they enter the park or facility. **There is also an expectation that any individual experiencing symptoms should take the initiative and stay home.**

Entry ways to field/diamond area(s)

- Considerations in this area will be dependent on the type/location of the complex or playing fields
- Emphasis should be placed on providing safe travel areas to reduce contact between individuals entering and exiting the park/complex.
- Must monitor for mass gathering numbers in park for all teams, leagues, for tournament play this would be the responsibility of the Tournament Director(s) or the Association whose facilities are in use.
- Should not use indoor facilities, and plan for safe use of pathways/trails. Controlling crowds, pathway split into 2 so specific directions, as in grocery stores
- The use of caution tape may be recommended to safely mark off areas that should not be accessed, as well as helping to provide marked areas for travel to and from diamonds, etc.
- Volunteers will all need ppe, mask, gloves, again may need multiple tables to meet the distancing rules, work area to be taped off
- PPE defined as mask, gloves,

Team and Player-Sign In

- Should be avoided as much as possible. Strongly recommended use of electronic registration.
- Team registration – validation of the team contract could be completed by team ahead of tournament, exhibition games, practices etc. and submitted electronically prior to tournament
- Registration, announcer, scorekeeping tables, equipment must be disinfected after each use and personnel change
- Scorekeeping, announcing, spotters all need 6-foot distancing may need separate tables
- Medical team and each team's medic will need to be fully equipped with ppe to be able to be in close contact with the athletes, this includes team trainers etc.

Entry to concessions, washrooms, food areas

- Entry ways should be properly addressed to ensure 6-foot rule can be followed, or temporary closure of concession/washroom facilities may be required.
- Washrooms, maintain no lineups, clean every 2 hours, must have hand sanitizer in each, possible more porta potties, to prevent line ups as per city regulation.

Hand Sanitization

- The establishment of hand sanitization stations may be applicable for some complexes/facilities, but at minimum must be on the bench and equipment area of every team for all training, practices, games, and tournament play.
- Hygiene – hand sanitizer on each bench, park entrance, washrooms, at all concessions, souvenir areas
- Hand sanitizer may be distributed to teams/players upon entry. Teams must be advised of being required to bring their own supply of hand sanitizer to be able to participate.
- Frequent hand sanitization will be stressed for players in all league/tournament play and may be enforced as mandatory.

2. OFF-FIELD

Concession areas/Washroom facilities

- Concessions: may only be allowed to open if they can provide pre-packaged options, as well as the ability to provide consistent sanitization and abide by social distancing guidelines.
- Concessions – would be difficult but workers with appropriate ppe, and line ups at 6-foot intervals as in grocery stores. All payments by debit/credit
- Food areas: Dining room/ seating areas are recommended to remain closed to prevent gathering of individuals. If open, eating surfaces will require consistent sanitization.
- Washrooms: Will require consistent attention and sanitization. Leagues may opt to keep washroom facilities closed during play to reduce possible contamination. Must be cleaned/fully sanitized at least once per every 2 hours
- Team snacks, picnics, shared lunches, BBQ not allowed
- All garbage cans must have closed lids for the disposal of sanitizing materials, tissues, and other refuse.

Medic

- Will have their own training, own first aid kit and may be able to provide suggestions on further safety considerations and must have their own PPE.

Playground areas

- Guidelines for these areas should be consistent with local guidelines/regulations. Suggestion for tournaments to leave closed, but if open as part of the city property then the numbers in the playground will be included in the mass gathering numbers for your facility.

Vendors

- All vendors will be asked to follow outlined guidelines and regulations set out by the event organizer(s) and the Province of Ontario.
- Souvenirs – all payments by debit/credit card, no cash accepted, clothing cannot be tried on prior to purchase, limit amount of people in sales area, lineup grocery store style

Hotels

- Hotels will have their own procedures and guidelines in place to ensure the safety of their guests.
- Hotels may not allow previously accepted practices (such as sharing of rooms for X# of individuals).
- Hotel rooms, each room should be for a family unit only, no player only/team rooms, will they be open, what are regulations
- Alterations to the length or structure of events may be required if hotel accommodations remain unavailable.

Vehicles

- For shared vehicles (i.e. golf carts), frequent sanitization will be required. Provision of disinfectant wipes for each vehicle may be useful.
- Carpooling should be avoided. Only family members

Headquarters/Registration

- These locations should remain restricted to use by League/Tournament personnel only, roped off. Guidelines should be considered to keep players/coaches away from these locations as much as possible. Score reporting/complaints may need to be done electronically.
- Draw board will be viewed only at a distance of 12 feet

Banquets/ceremonies

- Banquets, fireworks, opening ceremonies - Not allowed

Designated Smoking Areas

- Must be in an area away from the playing field and proper disposable cigarette cannisters/ashtrays are required. No smoking or throwing away butts on the ground must be enforced

3. ON-FIELD

- Covid signage should be in park on fencing (verify with city when they will install)
- There will possibly be a limit on the number of diamonds in use, depending on the size of the complex/park, the proximity to each other and the mass gathering numbers.

Hand Sanitization

- Should be done consistently throughout the game.

Coin Toss/Rules and Exchange of Line-up Cards

- Ground rules procedure, one representative from each team should be allowed at home plate with 6-foot distance maintained by all parties.
- Coin flip – either virtual or with social distancing, line up cards filled out, disinfected, and placed on backstop for all to view, no exchange.
- Only one coach per team.

Bats

- No bat sharing.
- Each player must have their own, bat, helmet and or facemask which should be cleaned after each use
- Only the offensive team will remove a bat from the field, i.e. the batter if unsuccessful at bat or a designated team person with appropriate ppe.
- No bat boys/girls allowed
- Picking up the hitter's bat will be the responsibility of the bench coach, must be cleaned after each use
- In the event there is a bat near home plate that poses a danger for the players the umpire will kick it out of the way

Player's Equipment –

- no gloves on fence, no bringing out gloves, batting gloves, distancing of player's bags 6 feet
- Players should be reminded to not share equipment and keep each individuals equipment isolated – 6-foot distance and reduce coming into contact with the equipment of other players.
- No batting gloves. Handwashing/sanitizing is more efficient
- Catchers equipment, each catcher must have their own and should be disinfected after each game.
- Sharing of water bottles not allowed
- Label all water bottles and personal equipment so there is no confusion
- Make it a priority to provide your team with essentials to stay healthy – Hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, disinfecting spray, etc. Also, make it mandatory for players to disinfect everything that was used during participation
- AT ALL TIMES disinfect and sanitize your own personal equipment

Protective Face Masks/Helmets

- There should be no sharing of protective face masks or helmets at any time.

Masks (non-protective)

- Face masks for the purpose of reducing potential virus transmission will be a required stipulation for entering the park/complex/facility. Catcher, umpire, batter, and any offensive player who reaches base safely must wear a face mask, bandanna, or buff will suffice.
- In lieu of medical masks, (if recommended at that time) mandate team coloured balaclavas/bandanas for players, coaches, and umpires. We have sourced someone who can do custom print for 1.50/piece or for 60 cents if not customized.

Balls

- Potential solution – Having defensive team supply their own balls while in the field to reduce contact with individuals on the opposing team no one on the offensive team to retrieve or touch ball
- Consideration should be made for safe ball retrieval (homeruns, foul balls) defensive team only
- Balls may require consistent sanitization (by team every half inning) consider how often for practices.
- Put more balls into play and have a designated person on each bench “sanitize” the ball. This would require clean water and soap.
- Foul ball must be retrieved by the defensive team only
- Each team will have a bucket, soap and water, cloth and towel, will also be provided their own game balls, each team is responsible for cleaning their balls between innings, and will be the supplier of the same while on defense, umpires will not handle the balls.
- Clean water/water source must be provided by the Association, Home Team, Tournament host or city/municipality in which the event is held.

Catcher and Batter

- Will need to maintain 6-foot distance, when possible.
- Both must wear a face mask

Catcher and Umpire

- Will need to maintain 6-foot distance, when possible. May need different conditions dependant on the size of the field/backstop.

Batter

- On the bench – bench mom/manager only – batter, then on deck, then in the hole outside dugout, then the batting order would have to be spread out at 6-foot intervals behind the dugout (will vary depending on park) Bench mom/manager to disinfect the dugout after each player
- Sanitizer on benches to allow for frequent handwashing ... in between innings/after at bats. Cordon off the dugouts. Have the “bench” along the baseline/outfield fence, perhaps mark off “boxes” painted on the grass in 6’ squares to ensure social distancing.
- No contact with coaches at 1st, 3rd, after home run etc.
- Should attempt to reduce any unnecessary contact with other players. Should also avoid using their hands to contact the ball at any time.

On-Deck Batter

- Consideration should be made as to whether having an on-deck batter reduces the ability of the batter/umpire/catcher to remain 6-feet apart. If so, on-deck batter may need to be removed.

General Protocols

- No handshakes, team huddles, high fives, etc. not allowed. Suggest a new show of respect for the opposition at safe distance.
- Medals/banners – give direct to coaches in original packaging, no handshakes, presentations (individual) Protest to be held at a safe distance, any coach/umpire getting heated and yelling will be removed from the venue
- Conferences at pitcher circle limited to one person who must remain outside the circle
- Mound visits with catcher/coach both must remain outside circle, catcher must have glove in front of face
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- No bat girls/boys permitted.

No sunflower seed, gum chewing or spitting

- General spitting will be discouraged for all participants, both on and off the field. Difficult to enforce.
- Sunflower seeds/chewing tobacco/gum will be handled with a zero-tolerance policy, that will become enforceable through ejection from the game and/or removal from events.

Final Game Sheet/Lineup cards

- If lineup cards are required to be submitted following the completion of the game, these cards should be submitted electronically by sending a picture of the card to the appropriate party or dropped into a designated container.

Pre-Game/Post-Game Huddles/ Handshakes

- Should not be conducted at any time.
- Will not be allowed or required following games at any level.
- Give yourself space from your fellow teammates and coaches (No tight team huddles/ touching)
- Allow larger circled team huddles and beginning of game cheers, allow distance when giving advice one on one, prioritize being engaged during conversations while giving yourself space
- Do not share skin on skin contact (No high fives, handshakes, elbows, etc.)
- Air fives, cheers for certain situations and accomplishments, hand gestures and a group cheer thanking your opponent for participating
- Create a method to show support without having to high five – a practiced in sync clap/ collectively as a team, touch the dirt/ a cheer/ synchronically a hand gesture

Capacity of Players on bench / dugout

- Will need to be consistent with government guidelines relating to number of individuals allowed to gather in each area. Recommend 1 at each end with a bench mom/manager/coach total 3 max
- Players may be required to sit behind the bench/dugout to help maintain safe distances between them.
- AT ALL TIMES disinfect and sterilize shared equipment after practice/ games
- Make it a priority to provide your team with essentials to stay healthy – Hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, disinfecting spray, etc. Also, make it mandatory for players to disinfect everything that was used during participation
- AT ALL TIMES disinfect and sterilize your own personal equipment
- Keep a hand sanitizing station in your personal team dug out
- This will allow players and coaches to have the option to feel like they have the resources they need quickly and safely without having to leave the diamond
- Prioritize not putting your hands or equipment accessible to everyone near your face Please stress to your players that this is a MUST (exception: your own safety helmet and mask)
- Do not eat in the dug out (spitz, snacks, etc.)
- Respect other's space
- Touching of any areas in the dugout must be kept to a minimum to reduce the amount of sanitization required after each player has left the dugout.

Exit from playing field during game

- During the game, players entering and exiting the playing field should do so in an orderly fashion that allows a 6-foot distance to be maintained between players as much as possible.
- Any player not required to be on the field should not enter the playing surface (e.g. homerun celebrations).

First and Third Base Coaches distance, hand taps

- If the coaches are on the playing field, they should remain a minimum of 6-feet away from the base they are coaching to prevent contact with the defensive player. Also, coaches should not engage an offensive player with high-fives or other physical contact.
- Field dependent: Coaches may be asked to coach from outside of the playing field if a safe distance is unable to be maintained.

Injured Player

- If medical personnel are on hand, injured players should be dealt with primarily by these individuals, unless further assistance is requested.
- The number of individuals attending to an injured player should be limited to the number necessary based on the severity of the injury. Sufficient first-aid kits should be provided that include latex gloves and facemasks to help increase the safety of their interaction with the injured player.

- Players injured during the game must be positioned in safe area or at the other end of the dugout, younger ages the parent will need to remove the child from the field and place them in a safe place respecting the social distancing rules. (Recommend the bleachers since they will be off limits to any spectators)

Pitching Conferences/On-Field Conferences

- Will need to be reduced to coach-pitcher conferences only, if not entirely removed.

Scorekeepers

- Scores should be reported electronically to reduce congestion at headquarter locations and scoresheets dropped in designated container

Call Challenges/Protests

- Challenges/Protests may be made as long as the challenge is made by a recognized coach in a controlled and orderly fashion, and the coach/umpire are able to remain at a safe distance in which neither is put at risk.

Bat Testing/Checks

- Bat testing prior to the start of games/tournaments (when applicable) will be done using a visual check done by the umpire crew to ensure all bats have the appropriate thumbprint and do not show any visible signs of damage.
- Bat testing/stickering done by leagues/tournament organizers may be postponed for the season to prevent unnecessary contact with equipment.

Post-Game Bench/Dugout Cleaning

- Emphasis will be placed on mandatory cleaning and sanitization of the bench area following the completion of the game. Access to extra garbage/recycling containers may be a request made to specific parks/municipalities. Responsibility of host or home team association if practice or exhibition play

4. IF APPLICABLE: SPECTATORS

****PLEASE NOTE: The allowance of spectators will be dependent on the guidelines set out by the Ontario government and local health officials. For U12 and below we will only permit competition/practice if we can adhere to the mass gathering allowances.***

Seating

- Spectators will not be allowed to watch the game from inside the infield baselines. It will be required that any spectators (if allowed) will need to bring their own chairs or blankets and sit down the foul line or outside of the outfield fence. Seating areas including bleachers and picnic areas will be considered off limits to prevent congregation of groups of spectators. Players who are not required to be present for a game should be considered spectators and will be required to follow spectator guidelines. (injured players attending to support team)

Hand Sanitization

- Established hand sanitization guidelines will need to be followed by all spectators. Personal supply of hand sanitizer is required.

No sunflower seeds, gum chewing or spitting

- As is consistent with guidelines for participants, spectators will not be allowed any seeds, gum, or chewing tobacco and will be asked to remove it from the area.

Restaurant/Bar/Concession/Playground Area

- Spectator use of these areas will be dependent on the operational guidelines of these areas/facilities outlined by facility management.

Pets/Minor Children

- Spectators/participants will be asked to leave small children/pets at home if possible, to reduce the number of individuals present at a game or event. If they are present, they must always be supervised by a parent/guardian.

Crowds

- Crowding will not be tolerated. Individuals will always be asked to respect the 6-foot rule when possible and gatherings of individuals will be asked to separate when necessary.

5. UMPIRES

Catcher and Home Plate Umpire

- Umpires change, may need multiple tents or limit to number inside tent at any given time, umpire clothing not hung in park etc. but must go into their own vehicle

- To ensure a maintenance of safe distance, umpires will be required to utilize an exaggerated inside/outside slot position as long as the umpire has the ability to perform their duties as the home plate umpire from these positions.
- In situations where appropriate distance cannot be accommodated (due to field size for example) umpires may be required to wear masks. Home plate umpire will be required to wear a nonmedical mask

Player Equipment (removal of bat, handing to on-deck batter)

- Will not be considered the responsibility of the umpire. Specifically, the removal of bats from the field will be the responsibility of the offensive team based on guidelines outlined previously in the 'On-Field' section.

2nd Base Umpire/ Other Field Umpires

- Must be able to position themselves in a position at least 6-feet away from any defensive player.

Umpire Conferences

- Umpire conferences may be allowed to take place, as long as they are conducted in a safe manner such that the umpires can be away from any players and can maintain a 6-foot distance between one another.

Call Challenges/Protests

- As mentioned, challenges/protests can be made by a coach in a safe and controlled manner. The umpire will have the authority to eject said coach if they feel their safe distance is being encroached upon and the coach has not respected any request to remain at distance.

Water Bottles

- No sharing of water bottles between umpires, and refillable water bottles will be strongly recommended.

Hand Sanitization

- Umpires will be subject to any hand sanitization guidelines provided by the league/tournament organizer.
- Umpires will be asked to supply their own personal hand sanitizer.

Responsibility

- Umpires responsible for enforcing guidelines on-field/inside the dugout during the game.

Lightning/Inclement weather

- All persons must return to the vehicle in which they arrived at the park, no congregating under tents, shelters etc.

Other Considerations

- Restaurants – is there enough locally, given social distancing to feed teams etc.
- Sunscreen – there is conflicting recommendations and will be used only at the discretion of the player/parent and not shared with any other person/persons
- Need to have at least an hour between game end/game start to minimize/maintain maximum participant numbers in the space. This allows one set of teams/participants to leave the premises, before the next set of team needs to come and warm-up appropriately.
- Bring your own personal snacks and or food and be sure to consume away from other's or during participation of your practice/ games
- If we are limited by participating numbers, run old school grand prix style PWSA events to crown regional/provincial champions/ double knockout, qualifier not seeding but actual advancement to gc, or series of gc's not all in one location
- Play a couple of series in your regional over the course of a few weekends, you earn points based on placing; at the conclusion of the grand prix series, top teams come out and play a larger grand prix style event or best 2 of 3 series to crown provincial champ
- If season is short, run a series of festivals regionally

Less than 30 Participants Mass Gathering limitations

- 2 teams – no spectators
- 1 - 2 umpires
- 1 - 2 PWSA representative
- Volunteers – depends on park, entrances, numbers etc. but Est 4 – 10+

30 - 50 Participants

- 2 teams @ Maximum roster sizes with coaches would have to 14 to 20 (assuming no spectators) I think the number of coaches present is going to have to be limited so that there is only the permitted number of participants at the venue.
- 1-2 umpires/game
- 1-2 PWSA representative.
- Volunteers – depends on park, entrances, numbers etc. but Est 4 – 10+

50-75 Participants

- Maximum roster size 20, puts 2 to 3 teams with some spectators at the higher end of the threshold
- Maximum 2 umpires/game
- Maximum 2 PWSA reps
- Volunteers - depends on park, entrances, numbers etc. but Est 4 – 10+

75-100 Participants

- Maximum roster size 20 ... puts 3 to 5 teams depending on spectator numbers to be considered
- Maximum 2 umpires/game
- Maximum 2 PWSA reps
- Volunteers - depends on park, entrances, numbers etc. but est. 4 – 10+

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