



RETURN TO R.A.I.S.E.
OPERATIONS PLAN FOR MCPS ATHLETICS
December 17, 2021 (subject to change)

The MCPS athletics program has returned to full operations, along with the following procedures and protocols to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The Return to R.A.I.S.E. Plan aligns with guidelines from the [Maryland State Department of Education](#) (MSDE), [Maryland Department of Health](#), and the [Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association](#) (MPSSAA).

1. **Vaccinations** – Vaccinations are one of the most effective strategies to protect each individual student-athlete and team, along with making sure the games go on.

Student-Athlete Vaccination Requirements

Beginning with the start of the winter sports season, November 15 for high school, and December 7 for middle school, all high school and eligible middle school student-athletes will be required to submit proof of full COVID-19 vaccination prior to participation. This requirement applies to the winter and spring sports seasons, as well as all out-of-season activities conducted through MCPS Athletics.

Student-Athlete Vaccination Exemptions

Only medical exemptions will be permitted. Religious exemptions will not be permitted. Religious exemptions are not being permitted due to the direct threat of COVID-19 transmission to the health and safety of student-athletes and staff in close-contact sporting events and activities.

MCPS Form 560-30A: *COVID-19 Vaccine Medical Exemption Request for Student-Athletes* must be completed by a licensed health care professional and submitted during the registration process for athletics. The form is available in [English and Spanish](#).

Coaches & Athletic Department Personnel

Consistent with MCPS requirements for staff members, coaches and athletic department personnel must submit proof of vaccination. All staff employed by MCPS must provide verification that they have received at least the first COVID-19 shot by Friday, October 15, 2021, and verification of the second shot by Monday, November 15, 2021, unless staff request and are granted an exemption. If a medical/religious exemption is granted, the employee must submit to regular COVID-19 testing as required by MCPS.

Volunteer Coaches

Beginning October 1, 2021, all volunteer coaches will be required to complete an additional new module via their myMCPS Classroom/Canvas account called COVID-19 Vaccination Attestation in order to volunteer within our school district. The new module will consist of a volunteer a) attesting to being fully vaccinated, b) uploading their Certificate of COVID-19 Vaccination from the Maryland Department of Health, and c) agreeing to specific expectations of masking and social distancing while in MCPS facilities.

2. **Face Masks/Coverings**

Outdoors

Face coverings are not required outdoors, but persons who are not fully vaccinated are strongly encouraged to wear face coverings for outdoor operations of the MCPS athletics program. This applies to all stakeholders, including participation and competition.

Indoor Mask Guidance for MCPS Athletics – effective November 20, 2021

MCPS Athletics will return to previous guidance that requires masks to be worn indoors **at all times**, with limited exceptions. The updated guidance is below.

For indoor sports, masks must be worn at all times, except as noted below:

- Basketball – fully vaccinated student-athletes are not required to wear face coverings when actively engaged in practices and contests.
 - Officials/Referees – *game officials/referees who are fully vaccinated and engaged in the sport of basketball are not required to wear face coverings.* Masks/face coverings must be worn at all other times (to and from the court, hallways, etc.).
- Cheerleading – when actively engaged in stunting/tumbling/flying
- Swimming/Diving – in the water, because a wet face mask may be more difficult to breathe through
- Wrestling – during wrestling contact, a mask could become a choking hazard and is discouraged unless an adult coach or official is closely monitoring for safety purposes. Student-athletes who are breaking a sweat, jumping rope, doing calisthenics, demonstrating drilling moves prior to a match, are permitted to remove their mask.

Student-athletes must wear masks on the bench, when not actively participating. Therefore, student-athletes must have masks accessible to wear while on the bench. For basketball, a reasonable, common sense approach should be used for student-athletes entering/exiting a game (for instance, rapid subbing at the end of the game for offense/defense). For wrestling, student-athletes who are breaking a sweat, jumping rope, doing calisthenics, demonstrating drilling moves prior to a match, are permitted to remove their mask.

Spectators, officials (other than fully vaccinated basketball officials), and coaches must wear masks at all times indoors. All participants shall bring their own mask/face covering; extra masks are available at all activities.

This guidance will remain applicable across MCPS Athletics, pending future Montgomery County Board of Health review. The COVID-19 Task Force for MCPS Athletics, which includes representation from the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services and Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, will review future guidelines and provide updated guidance.

3. **Other Counties and non-MCPS Facilities** – MCPS student-athletes, coaches, and operations will comply with the COVID-19 procedures and protocols of host counties and facilities, as appropriate. This includes masks/face coverings, use of locker rooms, and other COVID-19-related restrictions.
4. **Hand Hygiene** – hand hygiene is essential. Regularly washing hands with soap and water removes germs and allows for the safe use of shared items and apparatuses. When stakeholders do not have easy access to soap and water, sanitizer can be used to kill germs. All participants must bring their own hand sanitizer. Restrooms will be stocked with soap and MCPS-approved hand sanitizer will be available onsite.
5. **Hydration & Heat** – all participants must bring their own water bottle that includes their name clearly labeled. Students are encouraged to bring a gallon of water to each session or contest, along with a towel. Water coolers may be used; however, the sharing of water bottles is strictly prohibited. Water trays and other shared hydration devices are not allowed. Coaches and student-athletes are required to review and implement MCPS procedures and protocols regarding temperature and heat, including the [MCPS Fall Heat Plan](#) and [MCPS Heat & Hydration Resources](#).

6. **Transportation** – for away contests, whenever possible, families are encouraged to transport students directly to the site. If bus transportation is used, MCPS Athletics will comply with the current MCPS safety protocols and procedures. Currently there are no capacity restrictions; however, masks are required on buses.
7. **Overnight/Out-of-Area Trips** – out-of-area and overnight trips are allowed. All protocols and procedures for MCPS and MCPS Athletics must be followed, including securing advance approval and all COVID-19 safety measures. Additional guidance will be provided throughout the season. All volunteers and chaperones will be required to show proof of vaccination. Guidance around the collection of this information is forthcoming.
8. **Weight Rooms** – weight room capacity may be reduced, per facility limitations. Face coverings/masks must be worn at all times and equipment must be cleaned between each use, per MCPS procedures.
9. **Locker Rooms** – locker rooms may be used. Face coverings/masks must be worn in compliance with MCPS protocols. Time in locker rooms should be minimized and social distancing maximized to the extent possible for all student-athletes and coaches.
10. **Concession Stands** – outdoor and indoor concession stands may open. Eating and drinking in gymnasiums will not be permitted for spectators, including outside food and beverages.
11. **Ticketing** – admission will be charged for events, per the MCPS Spectator and Game-Day Guidelines and local school operations.
12. **Meetings** – consistent with MCPS protocols, all large parent meetings (such as Meet the Coaches/Teams Nights) must be conducted virtually or outdoors. Smaller meetings, such as booster club meetings, may be held in-person. Staff meetings, including coaches meetings, should be held in a hybrid model or fully virtual.
13. **Team Meals** – team meals may be conducted with the approval of the athletics specialist. Meals should be provided outdoors, if possible, or indoors in larger spaces.
14. **[Spectator & Game-Day Guidelines](#)** – will be implemented to mitigate risk and maximize the health and safety of student-athletes, coaches, officials, spectators, and all stakeholders. Guidelines were updated for the winter season.

Conditioning Activities and Weight Rooms

Conditioning activities and the use of weight rooms are allowed. Coaches must review and implement the [Conditioning Program Recommendations](#), along with MCPS health and safety resources. Only general conditioning may occur; no sport-specific activities may occur (school coaching staffs may work with up to two student-athletes per day). Coaches and student-athletes must comply the [MCPS Out of-Season Participation Standards and Regulations](#) and in alignment with the [MPSSAA 80% Rule](#) and guidance.

Required Registration and Documentation

Students must submit all required documentation. Registration is completed electronically through the ParentVue online registration portal for MCPS Athletics. In addition to existing registration forms and documentation, the following items are required due to COVID-19:

1. **[Pre-Participation Physical](#)** – per state guidelines, all students must complete an annual pre-participation physical examination. The MCPS physical form (SR-8) includes a supplementary page on COVID-19, per recommendations from the MPSSAA Medical Advisory Committee. This page must be included with the submission of all physicals. The updated form is available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#). Resources are available on the MCPS Athletics webpage regarding [clinics](#) and opportunities for securing physicals, including the [Care for Kids](#) program through Montgomery County.

2. [COVID-19 Parent/Student-Athlete Participation Acknowledgement Statements](#) (pledge statements) – per state guidelines, students and parents/guardians must both acknowledge they have read provided information on the risk of COVID-19, as it relates to participation in interscholastic athletics and activities. This statement also includes acknowledgement of the symptom free requirements from the CDC for attendance at any activity, gathering or event.
3. [COVID-19 Liability Waiver](#) – this form requires students and parent/guardians to review the liability waivers required in order to participate in interscholastic athletics. This form is completed as part of the online registration process for athletics and is available on the MCPS athletics webpage.
4. **Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination or Approved Medical Exemption Form**

Participants and Stakeholders

All students who have completed the registration process and are eligible, per MCPS policies and regulations, will be permitted to participate. Additionally, the following considerations apply:

- If parents/guardians think their child is immunocompromised, they should check with the healthcare provider (Physician (MD/DO), Nurse Practitioner (NP), Physician Assistant (PA)) before returning the student to activities.
- It is recommended that students who have been hospitalized as a result of COVID-19 or multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C) have a thorough cardiovascular evaluation or cardiology consultation prior to return.
- Students, coaches, and officials who should consider delaying their participation in sports and activities are those with any of the following:
 1. Age Greater than 65;
 2. Diabetes;
 3. Chronic lung disease including moderate to severe asthma;
 4. Severe obesity (Body Mass Index >40 kg/m²);
 5. Chronic kidney disease treated with dialysis;
 6. Chronic liver disease (cirrhosis);
 7. Heart conditions (coronary artery disease, hypertension, heart rhythm problems (arrhythmia), and heart defects you are born with (congenital heart defects));
 8. Immunocompromised (e.g. any transplant recipient, needing immunosuppressant medications (e.g. steroids, biologics, etc.), patients receiving chemotherapy, etc.);
 9. Nursing home resident or long term care resident;
 10. Thalassemia or sickle cell disease.

Additionally, the [CDC identifies other individuals](#) who are at risk for severe illness. Such individuals should also consider delaying their participation in sports and activities.

Signs and Symptoms of COVID-19

Individuals with COVID-19 have experienced a wide range of symptoms reported – ranging from mild symptoms to severe illness. Symptoms may appear 2–10 days after exposure to the virus. People with [these symptoms](#) may have COVID-19.

NFHS Course: COVID-19 for Coaches and Administrators

All coaches, athletics specialists, and athletic department personnel must complete the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) free online course entitled [COVID-19 for Coaches and](#)

[Administrators](#) prior to the start of the season. The completed certificate must be submitted to the athletics specialist; completion will be recorded in the Coach and Athletic Department Certification and Compliance database.

Positive Case of COVID-19 Response – effective December 20, 2021

The procedures that govern the MCPS athletics program, when responding to a suspected and/or positive test/case of COVID-19, align with the procedures [outlined by MCPS](#) and include guidance from the CDC.

Fundamental Points

1. All student-athletes must be vaccinated, unless they have received an approved medical exemption.
2. Coaches must be vaccinated unless they have received an approved medical or religious exemption. Volunteer coaches must be vaccinated. If an exemption is granted, the employee must submit to regular COVID-19 testing as required by MCPS.
3. Individuals with a positive COVID-19 test must quarantine for 10 days, self-monitor for 14 days, and can only return to schools if free from COVID-19 symptoms, including fever of 100.4 or more, sore throat, cough, difficulty breathing, diarrhea, vomiting, and loss of taste or smell.
4. Student-athletes and coaches who have been determined to have been in close contact with a COVID-19 positive individual will comply with the following procedures:
 - Vaccinated individuals – will NOT need to quarantine if they are fully vaccinated and asymptomatic.
 - Non-vaccinated individuals – individuals with exemptions (students with medical exemptions or coaches with medical/religious exemptions) will need to quarantine, following MCPS quarantine guidelines, if they are determined to be close contacts.
5. If a team has three or more active positive COVID-19 cases, all team activities must be paused for 14 days (this will begin on December 20, not retroactive).

Response Procedures

1. Coach/athletics specialist immediately informs the school health services personnel (nurse). If the nurse is not available, proceed to next step. Be ready to provide as much information as possible regarding the exposure.
2. Nurse/coach/athletics specialist contacts the [Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services](#) (DHHS) – the contact number at DHHS Disease Control is 240-777-1755. This number is answered during normal business hours and provides directions for after-hours emergency situations. Coordination and collaboration with DHHS Contact Tracing and Outbreak Investigators is imperative. Have team rosters and close contacts (per MCPS definitions) available.
3. Athletics specialist informs the principal and director of systemwide athletics of a suspected and/or positive test/case of COVID-19.
4. Follow all [MCPS operating procedures](#) for responding to a positive case. Notifications to parents/guardians will be made in alignment with this process.
5. DHHS Contact Tracing and Outbreak Investigators will provide guidance regarding the suspected exposure or positive case, through the contact tracing process. Appropriate notifications to parents/guardians will be made per MCPS operating procedures.
 - ⇒ The following [updated guidelines](#) regarding quarantines and exemptions for vaccinated individuals will be used.
 - ⇒ The director of systemwide athletics must be notified, along with [Heather Dublinske](#) and the appropriate director in the Office of Teaching, Learning, and Schools – School Support and Improvement.

6. A student who has tested positive for COVID-19 must complete and submit the [Return to Play Clearance Form: COVID-19 Infection Medical Clearance](#) prior to returning to completion.
7. The individual may return to activities following 10 days and/or when all requirements have been satisfied, per MCPS procedures.

Additional Notes

1. Parents/guardians are expected to notify the coach and athletics specialist (AD) immediately of a suspected and/or positive test/case of COVID-19, per the pledge form completed during the registration process.
2. Coaches are encouraged to stay in touch (via phone) with the student and parent/guardian throughout the duration of exclusion from the activity.

Testing Information

Testing information for students and stakeholders is available on the Montgomery County [COVID-19 Information Portal](#). A list of clinics is available on the [information portal](#).

COVID-19 Task Force for MCPS Athletics

The COVID-19 Task Force for MCPS Athletics serves as the return-to-play committee for program operations. The task force has been meeting since June 2020 and will continue to meet throughout the pandemic to plan and guide the safe return of in-person activities for interscholastic athletics. The task force reports to Mr. James P. Koutsos, Area Associate Superintendent, and provides recommendations to school system and Montgomery County health officials for review and consideration. The task force, led by Dr. Jeffrey Sullivan, director of systemwide athletics, is comprised of the following individuals:

Dr. Jeffrey Sullivan, Director, Systemwide Athletics
Mr. Clark Beil, Senior Administrator, Licensure and Regulatory Services, DHHS
Ms. Trudy Henson, Office of Emergency Mgmt. & Homeland Security
Mr. Doug Hollis, Executive Director, Office of Finance and Operations
Ms. Heather Dublinske, Coordinator, MCPS Systemwide COVID-19 Contact
Ms. Kathy Green, Systemwide Athletics Specialist
Ms. Anne Rossiter, Compliance Specialist, Systemwide Athletics
Mrs. Shella Cherry, Director, Student Leadership and Extracurricular Activities
Dr. Randy Rumpf, Supervisor, Fine Arts
Mr. Gary Mosesman, Facilities Manager, Division of Construction
Ms. Sarah Siddons, Supervisor, Office of Communications
Mr. Peter Park, Team Leader, Systemwide Safety and Emergency Management
Ms. Laurie Lyons, Manager, Systemwide Safety and Emergency Management
Ms. Claudette Eader, Administrator of Business and Finance Support
Mr. Preston Anderson, ATC Supervisor, Pivot Physical Therapy
Ms. Katie Brodka, ATC Supervisor, MedStar
Ms. Michelle Babcock, ATC Supervisor, Adventist
Mr. Nathan Parry, Commissioner, Montgomery Boys' Lacrosse Officials Association
Mr. Kevin Yates, Principal, Damascus High School
Ms. Heather Podosek, Athletics Specialist, Paint Branch High School
Mr. Jeffrey Rabberman, Athletics Specialist, Quince Orchard High School
Mr. Jason Woodward, Athletics Specialist, Sherwood High School
Mr. David Gonzalez, Sport Director, Boys' Lacrosse
Mr. Michael Nesmith, Sport Director, Football
Mr. Kevin O'Neill, Sport Director, Wrestling