



RETURN TO R.A.I.S.E.
OPERATIONS PLAN FOR MCPS ATHLETICS
February 11, 2022 (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

All high school and eligible middle school student-athletes are required to submit proof of full COVID-19 vaccination prior to participation. This requirement applies to all in-season and out-of-season activities conducted through MCPS Athletics.

Student-Athlete Vaccination Exemptions

In alignment with CDC guidance, parents/guardians of student-athletes may request a medical or religious exemption to the vaccine mandate to participate in spring sports.

MCPS Form 560-30A: *COVID-19 Vaccine Exemption Request for Student-Athletes* must be completed by a licensed health care professional for a request for a medical exemption or a parent/guardian for a request for a religious exemption, 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, 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

All volunteer coaches are required to complete an additional 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

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.
- Cheerleading – student-athletes are not required to wear face coverings when actively engaged in stunting/tumbling/flying.
- Swimming/Diving – student-athletes are not required to wear face coverings in the water, because a wet face mask may be more difficult to breathe through.
- Wrestling – student-athletes are not required to wear face coverings 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.
- Gymnastics – student-athletes are not required to wear face coverings while on apparatuses.
- Officials/Referees – *game officials/referees who are fully vaccinated and engaged in the sports of basketball and wrestling are not required to wear face coverings.* Masks/face coverings must be worn at all other times (to and from the court/mat, hallways, etc.).

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 trains 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 trips are allowed; however, all overnight travel is cancelled through February 17. **Overnight trips may resume beginning February 18.** 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.
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 is not be permitted for spectators, including outside food and beverages.
11. **Meetings** – consistent with MCPS protocols, all large parent meetings (such as Meet the Coaches/Teams Nights) should be conducted virtually or outdoors to the extent possible. 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.
12. **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.
13. **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. Admission will be charged for events, per the MCPS Spectator and Game-Day Guidelines and local school operations. GoFan digital ticketing will be utilized to the extent possible.
14. **Spectator Restrictions – effective February 5** – the number of **ticketed** spectators at contests in MCPS facilities will be limited to **50% of facility capacity**. While capacity restrictions are in place, please note the following:
 - Tickets will be made available through GoFan digital ticketing at 12:00 noon on game day. For games with anticipated larger crowds, tickets will be available to families of participating student-athletes first through a presale (time communicated between the participating schools). A maximum of 4 tickets per transaction will be allowed.
 - MCPS and MPSSAA passes, season tickets, and MCPS staff admission will be honored.
 - Spectators and school operations will align with the Winter 2021–22 Spectator and Game-Day Guidelines.
 - For non-MCPS facilities, operations will comply with the procedures and protocols of the host facility and/or jurisdiction.
 - For swimming and diving meets, attendance will be limited to one spectator per student-athlete, if facilities allow.
 - There are no capacity limitations for outdoor competitions.
 - Gymnasium events will continue to be streamed through the NFHS Network.

Media will be allowed at contests per the following guidelines:

- Media must confirm their attendance with the MCPS Public Information Office and host school athletics specialist prior to the contest. Approval from the school principal must be secured during this process. A 24-hour notice is requested.
- School media (newspaper/yearbook) may attend contests, per the approved procedures of the MCPS extracurricular activities program, along with the approval of the sponsor and athletics specialist.

- Schools will designate a viewing location for media that ensures appropriate social distance at all times and does not interfere with the operations of the contest.
- Media must wear masks at all times and maintain social distance protocols.
- Post-game interviews will occur in a designated location and with the approval of the athletics specialist or game administrator onsite. A minimum of six feet of social distance must be maintained at all times, with masks being worn.

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.

Virtual Resources & Procedures for Team Pauses

The [RAISE Reimagined Plan](#) provides resources for coaches and teams when pauses are necessary to in-person activities. Following 10 days, or when a school is cleared that may be paused, teams/programs will transition back to in-person activities, starting with at least one day of practice, per the COVID-19 Task Force for MCPS Athletics (bocce exempt). The R.A.I.S.E. Reimagined plan provides MCPS Athletics stakeholders with guidance on delivering virtual activities during these brief pauses in programming.

Scheduling

To maximize participation opportunities, high school schedules may be adjusted on an ongoing basis to allow a team that loses an opponent due to COVID-19 to compete against another school who also loses an opponent on the same play date. New matchups will only be scheduled with the approval of the athletics specialists from both participating schools and the Athletics Unit, in compliance with MCPS and MPSSAA regulations.

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 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

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 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.

Individual Isolation for Coaches & Athletic Department Staff

Isolation and quarantine guidelines for staff members, including coaches and athletic department personnel, include:

- Staff who test positive for COVID-19 or have suspected COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status, must stay home for at least five full days from the date of symptom onset if symptomatic or the date of the positive test if no symptoms.
- After Day 5, if the individual has no symptoms without the use of fever-reducing medication, the individual may return to school as long as they wear a well-fitting mask when around others for an additional five days, and as required by MCPS and MSDE guidelines regarding mask use in schools.
- If the individual is unable to wear a mask when around others, they should remain at home for at least a full 10 days.

Quarantine Guidelines for Coaches & Athletic Department Staff

These revised quarantine guidelines apply to staff who are in close contact of someone who tests positive for COVID-19 and are unvaccinated; adults 18 years and older who have completed the primary series of Pfizer vaccine over five months ago or Moderna vaccine over six months ago and are not boosted OR completed the primary series of J&J over two months ago and are not boosted; or have not had COVID-19 in the past 90 days.

- These staff must stay home for at least five full days after the last close contact.
- After Day 5, if the individual has had no symptoms, the individual is encouraged to get tested and may return to work as long as they wear a well-fitting mask when around others for an additional five days.
- If the individual is unable to wear a mask when around others, they should remain at home for at least 10 full days.
- If the individual develops symptoms at any point, they should remain at home, get tested and follow the isolation guidelines above.
- All other staff who are close contacts of someone who tests positive for COVID-19 do not need to quarantine.

Individual Isolation for Students

Students who test positive will continue to isolate for 10 days. This isolation will begin *from the date of symptom onset if symptomatic* or the date of the positive test if no symptoms.

Unvaccinated students with exemptions are required to quarantine but may return on Day 8 if they take a COVID test on Day 5 from exposure and the test is negative.

Team Pause Guidelines

To align with the latest guidance, if a team reaches the number of positive cases indicated below in the previous 10 days, team activities may need to pause. *A decision on the status of team operations would be determined by an individual analysis of the positive cases in regard to team operations, which would be conducted in collaboration with the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services.*

- For team rosters <25, if a team has three or more active positive COVID-19 cases of student-athletes in

the previous 10 days, team activities may be paused for 10 days. The 10-day pause begins from the last exposure (team activity, practice or contest).

- For team rosters 25 or greater, if a team has five or more active positive COVID-19 cases of student-athletes in the previous 10 days, team activities may be paused for 10 days. The 10-day pause begins from the last exposure (team activity - practice or contest).
- Boys/girls and JV/varsity in the same sport continue to be treated as separate teams when calculating the number of positive cases in student-athletes.

School Pause Guidelines

To align with the latest guidance for schools that transition to virtual instruction, due to the vaccination requirement for MCPS Athletics, the following mitigation strategies may be implemented to allow athletic activities to proceed during the school pause, in addition to current protocols outlined in the Return to R.A.I.S.E. plan:

- No spectators at the site
- No concession stands at the site
- No overnight travel for the program
- No all-school conditioning - only in-season teams may operate
- Proof of a negative test may be required to continue, with emphasis on the higher-risk activities of basketball and wrestling

MCPS, in consultation with the Department of Health and Human Services and through the COVID-19 Task Force for MCPS Athletics, will determine the appropriate mitigation strategies, including if activities need to be paused across the local school program.

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.
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 competition. Students who test positive and are symptomatic must complete the entire form. It is recommended that asymptomatic students also complete the entire form; however, only the parent/legal custodian consent section is required prior to return.
7. The individual may return to activities 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