



# UPMC Sports Medicine Playbook: Return to Sports During COVID-19 AUGUST 2021 ADDENDUM

## UPMC Sports Medicine Playbook: August 2021 Update

As we continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, UPMC Sports Medicine is committed to providing our partner schools the most up to date information and recommendations to assist in their planning processes.

First and foremost, we at UPMC Sports Medicine in collaboration with medical professionals and scientists throughout the world, recommend everyone who is eligible be vaccinated for their health and the well-being of all those around them. While vaccination does not prohibit one from becoming infected with the virus, it has been repeatedly shown to reduce the severity of illness, hospitalization, death and possibly contagiousness. The vaccination has now been given to billions of people worldwide with very few adverse outcomes. Of the three vaccines currently available, only the Pfizer product is approved for those under 18 years of age and there is no approved vaccine for 12 and younger; but, otherwise the “best” vaccine is the one that is currently available to you.

Even those who have previously tested positive for COVID-19 infection will benefit from the added immunity the vaccination provides. In 2020-21, we have seen multiple young people who were unvaccinated test positive for COVID on two separate occasions months apart. Vaccination per the CDC guidelines currently allows vaccinated individuals to forgo long quarantine periods should they have a close contact exposure. Elimination of close contact quarantine for athletes can mean less missed practice and game time. Vaccination status will also significantly impact collegiate athletes’ testing mandates, masking, quarantine, and conceivably travel requirements. Please consider that some individuals experience mild flu like symptoms for 24 hours after vaccination. This should be considered when scheduling vaccination for athletes (for instance we would not recommend a dose the night before a scheduled competition).

## Collegiate Sports

On August 4, 2021, the NCAA released a comprehensive up-to-date plan for COVID-19: [Link to Resocialization of Collegiate Sport: 2021 Fall Training and Competition](#).

This document outlines testing and mitigation strategies for vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals. Collegiate programs, like professional teams, have the ability to accurately capture vaccination rates of all individuals in their programs. This may allow for some flexibility in implementation of COVID prevention strategies (especially when vaccination rates are at or near 100%). Based on vaccination rates and community disease prevalence, UPMC Sports Medicine would simply echo the NCAA recommendations and suggest that each individual collegiate program create an individualized plan that makes sense for their community, school, and conference using the NCAA document as a foundation.

## High School/Youth Sports

The challenge in the high school and youth population is the inability to accurately determine vaccination status/rates. Currently, most schools are only asking for voluntary reporting of vaccine status, and as of the time this document is written, there is no approved vaccine for children under the age of 12. With the emergence of the COVID Delta variant, which is known to be four times more contagious and appears to have a greater effect on younger unvaccinated individuals, there is growing concern for the health and safety of this population. We recognize the burden and acknowledge the challenges of ongoing COVID protocols; however, due to the current trends in disease spread, UPMC Sports Medicine supports universal precautions in regard to masking and social distancing. This would entail masking for all when in an indoor environment and masking outdoors when unable to maintain social distance for an extended period of time.

Our health care providers, due to the inability to socially distance during evaluation, ask that student-athletes mask regardless of environment when being evaluated in a medical capacity. All of our UPMC providers will be masked when evaluating your child. We hope this mutual protection barrier decreases the risk for both parties involved in an unavoidable close interaction. UPMC Sports Medicine does not promote masking during strenuous activity indoors or out. Data over the last year has shown very little disease transmission in all sports on the field of play during competition. We have observed and documented most sickness spread from close contact on transportation, in bench areas, and in locker room facilities.

We continue to promote frequent handwashing and individual hydration vessels. When possible, social distancing should be put into practice. We continue to ask that if any individual experiences symptoms of illness they remove themselves from the group and take a time out until they are recovered. Lastly, following current CDC guidelines, if an individual is identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive for the COVID-19 virus and fully vaccinated they, will be exempt from any quarantine procedures.

**All of us at UPMC Sports Medicine look forward to the day when we no longer have to publish COVID-19 recommendations! Until that time, we want you to know that our team is doing our very best to provide the communities we service with the most current recommendations to keep all athletes healthy and keep sports in session. We will continue, with the rest of the world, to pivot and adjust when needed and believe that some of these small (but admittedly tiring) protocols allow our teams the best chance at full seasons of play during the evolving COVID-19 pandemic.**