

Can organized sports resume? What are the safety requirements for sports facilities?

Last Updated: 12/30/2020

Organized Sports

Effective Saturday, December 5th, indoor sports practices and competitions for youth and adults – inclusive of all risk levels set forth by the Department of Health – are placed on a full and complete pause through January 2nd, 2021.

On January 2, indoor practices and competitions for organized sports may resume in accordance with health and safety protocols -- however, indoor interstate youth sports competitions continue to be prohibited in New Jersey. For more information, see [Administrative Order No. 2020-25](#).

This does not prohibit classes, lessons, trainings, or individual activities at gyms or recreational businesses, including dance, martial arts, or gymnastics studios. However, those businesses cannot host practices, competitions, tournaments, or scrimmages of any kind. For more information, [refer to this article](#).

This ban also does not apply to collegiate or professional sports activities.

Under [Executive Order No. 194](#), all interstate games and tournaments for indoor youth sports, up to and including high school, are prohibited until further notice. In addition, New Jersey, Maine, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, and Massachusetts have announced a regional commitment to suspend interstate hockey competitions for public and private schools and youth hockey through at least January 31, 2021.

As of January 2, contact practices and no-contact practices for sports defined as "Low Risk", "Medium Risk", and "High Risk" are permitted in both outdoor and indoor settings. [Low-risk, non-contact sports](#) include golf and tennis. [Medium- and high-risk sports](#) include baseball, softball, soccer, basketball, football hockey, judo, boxing, karate, wrestling, rugby, and group dance.

The Department of Health has issued [updated guidance for sports activities](#).

Limits on Gatherings

Indoor Sports: Effective Saturday, December 5th, non-professional and non-collegiate indoor sports practices and competitions for youth and adults – inclusive of all risk levels

set forth by the Department of Health – are placed on a full and complete pause through January 2nd, 2021. For more information, see [Administrative Order No. 2020-25](#).

On January 2, indoor practices and competitions for organized sports may resume in accordance with health and safety protocols.

Collegiate and professional indoor practices and competitions are limited to 10 people. However, if the number of individuals who are necessary for practice or competition, such as players, coaches, and referees, exceeds 10, the practice or competition may proceed if no unnecessary individuals such as spectators are present. Even if this exception applies, the number of individuals at the practice or competition cannot exceed 25% of the capacity of the room, and such limit cannot exceed 150 persons.

Outdoor Sports: Outdoor competitions or tournaments must abide by the limit on outdoor gatherings, which is [currently limited](#) to 25 people. Athletes, coaches, referees and other individuals necessary for a professional or collegiate sports competition are not counted towards the 25-person limit. For other adult and youth sports occurring outdoors, the number of individuals necessary for a game or practice can exceed the 25-person limit, but only if no individuals who are not necessary for the event, such as spectators, are present.

As of January 2nd, outdoor interstate youth competitions are prohibited in New Jersey.

Facilities and participants must also abide by a number of health and safety protocols outlined in the Department of Health's "[Guidance for Sports Activities](#)," such as screenings for athletes, coaches, and staff; limitations on equipment sharing; and requirements for disinfecting and sanitizing surfaces and equipment.

Staff, parents, guardians, and visitors are required to wear face coverings at practices and games. Athletes are encouraged to wear masks during downtime, but not during physical activity.

The Department of Health's [guidance](#) also includes further details on which sports are defined in which category, how to create a sports program preparation plan, how to prepare a facility for sports practices, how to conduct sports practices, and how to prepare for games and tournaments.

Additional Guidance

Sports under the jurisdiction of the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association (NJSIAA) or the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) must also abide by those associations' rules.

For additional information and updates, refer to the [NJSIAA's COVID-19 alert page](#).

NOTE: A student-athlete's ability to participate with their team will not be altered in any way - regardless of whether they participate in remote-learning or in-person instruction.

A new law [waives](#) the requirement to complete an annual pre-participation physical examination for any student-athlete enrolled in grade six to 12 who either completed a physical examination during the 2019-2020 school year or completed a physical examination that allowed the student to participate on a school-sponsored interscholastic or intramural athletic team or squad during the 2019-2020 school year.

A student-athlete who has not completed a physical examination within 365 days prior to the first day of official practice in the athletic season is permitted to participate on a school-sponsored athletic team provided they complete the physical examination before the end of the athletic season.

Safety Requirements for Professional and Collegiate Sports Venues

Note: Beginning November 5, employers must adhere to new employee protection guidelines, [summarized here](#). Detailed requirements, as well as exemptions for certain employers, can be found in [Executive Order No. 192](#).

Facilities hosting professional and collegiate athletic competitions must follow health and safety guidelines found in [Executive Order No. 157](#), [Executive Order No. 183](#), and [Administrative Order No. 2020-22](#).

The following summarizes some of the protocols contained in [EO 157](#), [EO 183](#), and [AO 2020-22](#). However, this summary is not a replacement for fully complying with the terms of [EO 157](#), [EO 183](#), and [AO 2020-22](#) and businesses should read the full guidance carefully to ensure full compliance.

Professional and collegiate sports facilities must institute the following policies:

- Limit attendance for professional and collegiate athletic competitions to the State [indoor and outdoor gathering limits](#). All indoor practices and competitions are limited to 10 people. However, if the number of individuals who are necessary for practice or competition, such as players, coaches, and referees, exceeds 10, the practice or competition may proceed if no unnecessary individuals such as spectators are present.
- Even if this exception applies, the number of individuals at the practice or competition cannot exceed 25% of the capacity of the room, and such limit cannot exceed 150 persons. Athletes, coaches, referees, trainers, and other individuals necessary to the performance of a competitive sporting event are not included in the number of individuals present at a gathering for purposes of the limits on gatherings, nor are individuals dining at restaurants located within such facilities.
- Outdoor competitions or tournaments must abide by the limit on outdoor gatherings, which is [currently limited](#) to 25 people
- Restaurants located within such facilities must follow the health and safety protocols for [indoor and outdoor dining](#).

- Facilities must make best efforts to ensure that individuals in restaurants located within sports facilities remain separate from all other individuals granted admission to the facility.
- **Require workers and customers to wear face coverings while indoors and in outdoor areas when social distancing is difficult to maintain**, except where doing so would inhibit that individual's health.
- If a customer refuses to wear a face covering for non-medical reasons then the business must decline the individual entry into the indoor premises.
- Limit occupancy in restrooms that remain open to avoid over-crowding and maintain social distancing through signage and, where practicable, the utilization of attendants to monitor capacity.
- Limit the use of equipment rented or otherwise provided by the business to one person at a time.
- Provide sanitization materials, such as hand sanitizer and sanitizing wipes, to customers
- Require reservations, cancellations, and prepayments be made via electronic or telephone reservation systems to limit physical interactions.

Source: [Executive Order No. 148](#); [Executive Order No. 149](#), [Guidance for Sports Activities](#); [Executive Order No. 161](#); [Executive Order No. 163](#); <https://nj.gov/governor/news/news/562020/approved/20200812b.shtml>; [Executive Order No. 187](#); [Administrative Order No. 2020-22](#); [Executive Order No. 194](#), [Executive Order No. 196](#); [Governor's Remarks 11/30/20](#)