



COVID-19 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

MCPS ATHLETICS

July 17, 2020

Following are answers to frequently asked questions regarding the operations of the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) interscholastic athletics program as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This document will be updated regularly to provide the latest information to MCPS Sports Nation.

Q: What is the current start date for fall sports tryouts and practices?

A: As of July 17, 2020, the first date for fall sports tryouts and practices is August 12, 2020, per the Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association (MPSSAA). The MPSSAA Executive Council will be meeting weekly to receive updates and take appropriate action based on guidance from the Maryland State Department of Education and [Maryland Health Department](#).

Q: Who makes the decision on the status of the sports seasons – the MPSSAA or MCPS?

A: The MPSSAA, under the direction of the governor, state superintendent of schools and state board of education, determines the sports seasons. As members of the MPSSAA, MCPS sports will operate within the confines of the designated seasons. However, once seasons are established, based on Montgomery County health guidelines and MCPS operating procedures, MCPS will determine the timeline for entering the various risk levels of activities, per CDC and MPSSAA guidance.

Q: When will a decision be made regarding the start of fall sports?

A: It is anticipated that an announcement regarding the operations of the MCPS interscholastic athletics program will occur by the end of July 2020. This is dependent on any state-level decisions, which may be made prior to this time that may impact MCPS Athletics.

Q: What are the various risk levels of activities? Where do those come from?

A: Within stages one and two of the Governor's recovery plan there will be segmented approaches for gradual resumption and administration of athletics and activities. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) describes the segmented approach through a risk assessment.

- Lowest Risk: Performing skill-building drills or conditioning at home, alone or with family members.
- Increasing Risk: Summer out-of-season school-based open conditioning, exercise, weight training, and non-sport specific student gatherings/In-Season Team Based Practices
- More Risk: Within-team competition.
- Even More Risk: Full competition between teams from the same local geographic area.
- Highest Risk: Full competition between teams from different geographic areas.

Q: What risk level is the MCPS athletics program operating under now? How long will that last?

A: MCPS Athletics is currently operating in the lowest risk level, outlined in Phase 1 of the *Return to R.A.I.S.E. Strategic Plan*. Phase 1 will continue through August 11, 2020, at the recommendation of the COVID-19 Task Force for MCPS Athletics and in alignment with MCPS operating procedures. The next update is scheduled by the end of July 2020.

Q: What about risk levels for sports? Are they differentiated?

A: Yes. Sports are differentiated by risk level, which aligns with the potential for contact. The risk levels are included in the [NFHS Guidance for Opening High School Athletics and Activities](#). The higher risk level sports are football, boys' lacrosse, wrestling, competitive cheerleading and dance (pompons).

Q: What is the *Return to R.A.I.S.E. Strategic Plan*?

A: The *Return to R.A.I.S.E. Strategic Plan*, which incorporates the R.A.I.S.E. acronym for the core values of MCPS Athletics, provides the framework, guiding principles, and operating procedures for the interscholastic athletics program. The plan incorporates national, state and local health guidelines and recommendations.

Q: Where do I find the latest information regarding the operations of the MCPS Athletics program?

A: The latest information and updates regarding the operations of the MCPS interscholastic athletics program are available on the [COVID-19 Athletics Information](#) section of the MCPS Athletics webpage. This page will be updated on an ongoing basis, to reflect the latest resources and program operations.

Q: What will sports look like if/when they return to in-person activities?

A: The next risk level, per CDC and MPSSAA guidance is the "Increasing Risk" level. This includes school-based all-school conditioning, exercise, weight training, and non-sport specific student gatherings, along with in-season team-based practices. When safe to proceed, the program will operate in the subsequent levels, leading up to local competition beginning in the fourth stage.

Q: When will Phase 2 be released?

A: Phase 2 is currently being refined and vetted through MCPS and health officials, as appropriate. When finalized, Phase 2 will be shared with stakeholders in advance of the start of in-person activities for the MCPS athletics program.

Q: Will the program incrementally and sequentially proceed through the phases during the season or school year?

A: The progression through phases will occur sequentially; however, there is the potential that operations may return to a previous risk level of operations, if deemed necessary by state and/or local health officials.

Q: What factors does MCPS consider when making decisions? What is the "Why" of MCPS Athletics in regard to COVID-19 decisions?

A: The guiding principles of the COVID-19 Task Force for MCPS Athletics include:

- Promoting our core values of equity and access to allow for the participation for ALL students.

- Ensuring the gradual, safe return of student-athletes to in-person participation in interscholastic athletic activities.
- Maximizing participation opportunities, including the timely implementation and incremental transition to new phases.
- Providing ongoing communication regarding the current operations of the MCPS Athletics program, in alignment with state and local guidelines, considerations, and recommendations.

Q: What will happen with schedules? What is MCPS preparing for?

A: Due to the uncertainty with COVID-19, MCPS Athletics is prepared for multiple contingencies in regards to scheduling including (but not limited to) the following:

- Regular schedule – all three seasons starting on time
- Delayed start to each season (built into each schedule with flexibility)
- A 4-6 week “pod” of contests that could potentially be moved and shifted, as needed throughout the school year. To the extent possible “pods” include division contests, which are oftentimes key rivals.
- Most MCPS divisions are geographically based by school location within Montgomery County. This shapes up nicely, per CDC guidelines, if we need to only compete in clusters of schools, by sport.
- Only in-county competition
- Local-school intramurals
- Virtual engagement opportunities

It should be noted that interscholastic competitions may not occur until Phase 4, the “Even More Risk” level of operations.

Q: Is there a course I can take to learn more about the impact of COVID-19 on interscholastic athletics?

A: Yes. The COVID-19 Task Force for MCPS Athletics and the 25 high school athletics specialists (ADs) unanimously recommend that all stipend coaches and athletic department personnel complete the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) free online course COVID-19 for [COVID-19 for Coaches and Administrators](#). Students and parents/guardians are also encouraged to take the course.

Q: Should students proceed with getting a physical? Are there any changes to the form due to COVID-19? Do I need the new form if I already have a valid physical? Are there options for students and families who require financial assistance?

A: Yes. Students are encouraged to pursue getting physicals for the upcoming school year. Please note that the [new physical form](#) includes a COVID-19 supplement, which is required for all new physicals after July 20, 2020. MedStar, one of the vendors that supplies certified athletic trainers for MCPS, is offering [free pre-participation physicals](#) for students. In addition, [Care for Kids](#) is a program that may assist students and families, if eligible.

Q: Where do I find the latest MPSSAA updates and information?

A: The MPSSAA has also created a [website](#) with the latest state information. Updates will be posted on Tuesdays – July 21, July 28, August 4, 2020, in advance of the August 12 start date.