

# **GUIDANCE FOR OPENING UP HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETICS**

## **Ventura County Football Coaches (VCFCA)**

The COVID-19 pandemic presents state high school associations with a myriad of challenges and the Ventura Country Football Coaches Association (VCFCA) offers this document as guidance on how our member football programs can consider approaching the many components of “opening up” high school athletics across our county. The VCFCA believes it is essential to the physical and mental well-being of high school students to return to physical activity and athletic competition and endorses the idea of returning students to school-based athletics in any and all situations where it can be done safely.

### **Points of Emphasis:**

Decreasing potential exposure to respiratory droplets is the guiding principle behind social distancing and the use of face coverings to decrease the spread of respiratory droplets.

#### **1. Mandatory Face Coverings**

A. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is additionally “advising the use of simple cloth face coverings to slow the spread of the virus and help people who may have the virus and do not know it from transmitting it to others.”

B. Recognizing the benefits and potential drawbacks of the use of cloth face coverings during conditioning and physical activity.

C. We recommend that cloth face coverings be worn by students during Phases 1 and 2 as outlined below. Exceptions are distance running or other high intensity aerobic activity. Cloth face coverings may continue to be used during Phase 3 when not engaging in vigorous activity, such as sitting on the bench during contests, in the locker room and in the athletic training room.

D. Coaches, officials and other contest personnel should wear cloth face coverings at all times during Phases 1 through 2 and possibly Phase 3.

#### **2. Social Distancing**

A. This would apply for areas of gathering such on the field, in classrooms, in weight rooms, in locker rooms and on buses.

B. During Workouts and Practices the required amount of social distancing between individuals will be enforced.

#### **3. Other Related Items:**

A. Artificial noisemakers such as an air horn or a timer system with an alarm can be used to signal in place of a traditional whistle.

## **PHASE 1 GUIDELINES**

### **Pre - Workout Screening:**

- All coaches and students should be screened for signs/symptoms of COVID-19 prior to a workout. Screening includes a temperature check.
- Responses to screening questions for each person should be recorded and stored so that there is a record of everyone present in case a student develops COVID-19.
- Any person with positive symptoms reported should not be allowed to take part in workouts and should be sent home to contact an appropriate health-care professional.
- Vulnerable individuals should not oversee or participate in any workouts during Phase 1.

### **Limitations on Gatherings:**

- No gathering of more than locally controlled permitted athletes at a time (inside or outside).
- Locker rooms should not be utilized during Phase 1. Students should report to workouts in proper gear and immediately return home to shower at end of the workout.
- Workouts should be conducted in “pods” of students with the same small group of students always working out together. Smaller pods can be utilized for weight training. This ensures more limited exposure if someone develops an infection.
- There must be a minimum distance of 6 feet between each individual at all times. If this is not possible indoors, then the maximum number of individuals in the room must be decreased until proper social distancing can occur.

### **Facilities Cleaning:**

- Adequate cleaning schedules should be created and implemented for all athletic facilities to mitigate any communicable diseases.
- Prior to an individual or groups of individuals entering a facility, hard surfaces within that facility should be wiped down and sanitized (chairs, furniture in meeting rooms, locker rooms, weight room equipment, bathrooms, athletic training room tables, etc.).
- Individuals should wash their hands for a minimum of 20 seconds with warm water and soap before touching any surfaces or participating in workouts.
- Hand sanitizer should be plentiful and available to individuals as they transfer from place to place.
- Weight equipment should be wiped down thoroughly before and after an individual’s use of equipment.
- Appropriate clothing/shoes should be worn at all times in the weight room to minimize sweat from transmitting onto equipment/surfaces.

- Any equipment such as weight benches, athletic pads, etc. having holes with exposed foam should be covered.
- Students must be encouraged to shower and wash their workout clothing immediately upon returning to home.

### **Physical Activity and Athletic Equipment:**

- There should be no shared athletic equipment (towels, clothing, shoes, or sports specific equipment) between students.
- Students should wear their own appropriate workout clothing (do not share clothing) individual clothing/towels should be washed and cleaned after every workout.
- All athletic equipment, including balls, should be cleaned after each use and prior to the next workout.
- Individual drills requiring the use of athletic equipment are permissible, but the equipment should be cleaned prior to use by the next individual.
- Resistance training should be emphasized as body weight, sub-maximal lifts and use of resistance bands. (These workouts can also take place outside of the weight room)
- Free weight exercises that require a spotter cannot be conducted while honoring social distancing norms. Safety measures in all forms must be strictly enforced in the weight room.
- Examples (including by limited to):

-A football player should not participate in team drills with a single ball that will be handed off or passed to other teammates. Contact with other players is not allowed, and there should be no sharing of tackling dummies/donuts/sleds.

### **Hydration:**

- All students shall bring their own water bottle. Water bottles must not be shared.
- Hydration stations (water cows, water trough, water fountains, etc.) should not be utilized.

## **PHASE 2 GUIDELINES**

### **Pre-Workout/Contest Screening:**

- All coaches and students should be screened for signs/symptoms of COVID-19 prior to a workout. Screening includes a temperature check.
- Responses to screening questions for each person should be recorded and stored so that there is a record of everyone present in case a student develops COVID-19.
- Any person with positive symptoms reported should not be allowed to take part in workouts and should contact an appropriate health-care professional.

- Vulnerable individuals should not oversee or participate in any workouts during Phase 2.

### **Limitations on Gatherings:**

- No gathering of more than the permitted amount of people at a time inside. Up to 50 individuals may gather outdoors for workouts.
- If locker rooms or meeting rooms are used, there must be a minimum distance of 6 feet between each individual at all times.
- Workouts should be conducted in “pods” of students with the same 10 students always working out together. Smaller pods can be utilized for weight training. This ensures more limited exposure if someone develops an infection.
- There must be a minimum distance of 6 feet between each individual at all times. If this is not possible indoors, then the maximum number of individuals in the room must be decreased until proper social distancing can occur. Appropriate social distancing will need to be maintained on sidelines and benches during practices. Tape or paint will be used as a guide for students and coaches.

### **Facilities Cleaning:**

- Adequate cleaning schedules should be created and implemented for all athletic facilities to mitigate any communicable diseases.
- Prior to an individual or groups of individuals entering a facility, hard surfaces within that facility should be wiped down and sanitized (chairs, furniture in meeting rooms, locker rooms, weight room equipment, bathrooms, athletic training room tables, etc.).
- Individuals should wash their hands for a minimum of 20 seconds with warm water and soap before touching any surfaces or participating in workouts.
- Hand sanitizer should be plentiful and available to individuals as they transfer from place to place.
- Weight equipment should be wiped down thoroughly before and after an individual’s use of equipment.
- Appropriate clothing/shoes should be worn at all times in the weight room to minimize sweat from transmitting onto equipment/surfaces.
- Any equipment such as weight benches, athletic pads, etc. having holes with exposed foam should be covered.
- Students must be encouraged to shower and wash their workout clothing immediately upon returning to home.

### **Physical Activity and Athletic Equipment:**

- Modified practices with social distancing and masks may begin.

- There should be no shared athletic towels, clothing or shoes between students.
- Students should wear their own appropriate workout clothing (do not share clothing), and individual clothing/towels should be washed and cleaned after every workout.
- All athletic equipment, including balls, should be cleaned intermittently during practices and contests.
- Hand sanitizer should be plentiful at all contests and practices.
- Athletic equipment such as bats, batting helmets and catchers gear should be cleaned between each use.
- Maximum lifts should be limited and power cages should be used for squats and bench presses. Spotters should stand at each end of the bar.

### **Hydration:**

- All students shall bring their own water bottle. Water bottles must not be shared.
- Hydration stations (water cows, water trough, water fountains, etc.) should not be utilized.

## **PHASE 3 GUIDELINES**

### **Pre- Workout/Contest Screening:**

- Any person who has had a fever or cold symptoms in the previous 24 hours should not be allowed to take part in workouts and should contact his or her primary care provider or other appropriate healthcare professional.
- A record should be kept of all individuals present.
- Vulnerable individuals can resume public interactions, but should practice physical distancing, minimizing exposure to social settings where distancing may not be practical, unless precautionary measures are observed.

### **Limitations on Gatherings:**

- Gathering sizes of up to 50 individuals, indoors or outdoors.
- When not directly participating in practices or contests, care should be taken to maintain a minimum distance of 3 to 6 feet between each individual. Tape or paint will be used as a guide for students and coaches.

### **Facilities Cleaning:**

- Adequate cleaning schedules should be created and implemented for all athletic facilities to mitigate any communicable diseases.

- Prior to an individual or groups of individuals entering a facility, hard surfaces within that facility should be wiped down and sanitized (chairs, furniture in meeting rooms, locker rooms, weight room equipment, bathrooms, athletic training room tables, etc.).
- Individuals should wash their hands for a minimum of 20 seconds with warm water and soap before touching any surfaces or participating in workouts.
- Hand sanitizer should be plentiful and available to individuals as they transfer from place to place.
- Weight equipment should be wiped down thoroughly before and after an individual's use of equipment.
- Appropriate clothing/shoes should be worn at all times in the weight room to minimize sweat from transmitting onto equipment/surfaces.
- Any equipment such as weight benches, athletic pads, etc. having holes with exposed foam should be covered.
- Students must be encouraged to shower and wash their workout clothing immediately upon returning to home.

### **Physical Activity and Athletic Equipment:**

- Sports practices and competitions may begin with modifications.
- There should be no shared athletic towels, clothing or shoes between students.
- Students should wear their own appropriate workout clothing (do not share clothing), and individual clothing/towels should be washed and cleaned after every workout.
- Hand sanitizer should be plentiful at all contests and practices.
- Athletic equipment such as bats, batting helmets and catchers gear should be cleaned between each use. Other equipment, such as hockey helmets/pads, wrestling ear guards, football helmets/other pads, lacrosse helmets/pads/gloves/eyewear should be worn by only one individual and not shared.
- Maximum lifts should be limited and power cages should be used for squats and bench presses. Spotters should stand at each end of the bar.
- Modified\* practices may begin for Higher risk sports:
  - o \*Continue pre-practice screening as in Phases 1 and 2. Shower immediately after practices/contests.
  - o Re-assess epidemiology data and experiences in other states and other levels of competition to determine when Higher risk sports competition may resume.

### **Hydration:**

- All students shall bring their own water bottle. Water bottles must not be shared.

- Hydration stations (water cows, water trough, water fountains, etc.) may be utilized but must be cleaned after every practice/contest.

### **Contests**

1. Potential Infection Risk by Sport should be evaluated, and appropriate rules and guidelines should be followed. Football is considered a Higher Risk sport, so all guidelines should be followed strictly.

2. Transportation to events Schools must consider social distancing requirements when scheduling contests and events for the fall. Social distancing (as required by state or local health department) will need to be maintained on buses/vans. Thus, multiple buses/vans and/or parental/guardian transportation will likely be needed.

3. Social distancing during Contests/Events/Activities

A. Sidelines/benches Appropriate social distancing will need to be maintained on sidelines/bench during contests and events. Consider using tape or paint as a guide for students and coaches.

B. Who should be allowed at events? Group people into tiers from essential to non-essential and decide which tiers will be allowed at an event:

1. Tier 1 (Essential): Athletes, coaches, officials, event staff, medical staff, security

2. Tier 2 (Preferred): Media

3. Tier 3 (Non-essential): Spectators, vendors (Only Tier 1 and 2 personnel will be allowed to attend events until state/local health departments lift restrictions on mass gatherings.)

4. Athletic trainers in high schools are positioned to play a vital role as sports return following this pandemic. As health-care professionals, they can take lead roles in developing and implementing infection control policy throughout the school.

5. Return to Physical Activity:

Current pre-season conditioning and acclimatization models assume that athletes have deconditioned over the summer months. The current pandemic may result in students being deconditioned for four to five months. The NFHS is currently involved with a number of other organizations in developing consensus guidelines for fall sports practices. These guidelines will be sent to state associations immediately after they are finalized and approved by all involved organizations.

6. Hygienic

A. Illness reporting Create notification process for all event athletes, coaches, event staff, media, spectators and vendors if the organizers/medical personnel learn of suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 at the event.

B. Considerations for Officials, Coaches, Other Personnel

1. Vulnerable individuals should not participate in any practices, conditioning activities, contests or events during Phases 1 and 2.

2. Masks may be worn, social distancing enforced and “Hygiene Basics” adhered to in all situations.

C. Hygiene Basics

**CONTINUE TO PRACTICE GOOD HYGIENE**

- Wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer, especially after touching frequently used items or surfaces.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Sneeze or cough into a tissue, or the inside of your elbow.
- Disinfect frequently used items and surfaces as much as possible.
- Strongly consider using face coverings while in public, and particularly when using mass transit.

**PEOPLE WHO FEEL SICK SHOULD STAY HOME**

- Do not go to work or school.
- Contact and follow the advice of your medical provider.

**OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

1. Wide availability of hand sanitizer at contests and practices. Participants, coaches and officials should clean hands frequently.
2. Wiping down ball and equipment frequently.
3. No pre-game and post-game handshakes/high-fives/fist bumps.
4. Officials and sideline volunteers should be given option to wear face coverings (may use artificial noisemaker in place of whistle).