

To: Westchester County School Superintendents

From: Sherlita Amler, MD

RE: Response to Governor Cuomo's Authorizing Sports Associated with High Risk COVID-19 Transmission to Resume

Date: February 2, 2021

The documents herein are:

- A. This Memorandum;
- B. Health Risk Communication which must be disseminated to parents in paper form and/or via the school's email service to all parents of student athletes, and athletic staff (at a minimum). This should also be available on the school website, where appropriate and posted in a conspicuous place.
- C. Code of Conduct for Student Athletes which must be signed in either the form provided or in some other form acceptable to the School Board and/or Superintendent (or equivalent thereof for private schools).

Governor Cuomo announced he would allow higher risk sports to commence in New York schools effective February 1, 2021 subject to local health department approval. Given that the prevalence of COVID-19 in the Hudson Valley region is higher than the statewide average, it is important that student athletes, their parents/guardians, and schools carefully consider a variety of factors before making an individual decision.

### **Important Reminders**

- Participation in school sports is not mandatory. School districts may opt out of any or all sports as they choose; particularly if they believe the guidance from NYS, the region and/or the Westchester County Health Departments cannot be fully met.
- Parents/guardians, students and school staff should be especially diligent in their awareness of social distancing requirements as practicable, potential safety concerns, and adverse health symptoms and COVID-19 protocols for students participating, and all those who attend athletic activities, if spectator participation is allowable.
- **High risk school sports may be suspended if public health concerns so require.** The CDC "Indicators and thresholds for risk of introduction and transmission of COVID-19 in schools" is outlined in the document found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community/schools-childcare/indicators-thresholds-table.pdf>

The County Health Commissioners in the Mid-Hudson Region met to develop the guidance for such high risk sports to commence at the school level. These guidelines are broken out into two sections herein: Administrative and Activity-Based.

### **Administrative Guidelines**

- Provide a school board resolution or the written consent of the School Superintendent/President detailing:
  - which sports will be permitted to be played<sup>1</sup>; and
  - which grades will be permitted to play each sport.
- **Each player must have a physical this academic year. Individuals with previous COVID-19 diagnosis must have cardiovascular clearance before engaging in any high risk sports activity.**
- Students and Parents/guardians must give their informed, written consent for participation in a high risk sport during a pandemic, as well as a code of conduct approved by the School Board or Superintendent or the private school equivalent thereof (see sample code of conduct attached);
- The school district must retain the original of Code of Conduct or a computer-scanned version of the same and produce the same upon the request of the Commissioner of Health of any such County where the student-athlete plays sports.
- The school must establish a hierarchy for oversight/violations (Coach should not have sole responsibility of controlling all established regulations and consequences). The school must provide the Westchester County Department of Health with the name and contact information of its COVID-19 athletic coordinator.
- Schools may establish testing protocols, mandatory or random, for athletic teams and events if they choose to do so. Because these are school sponsored activities, Westchester County will assist in the same manner we assist schools with their testing efforts, as long as supplies are available.

#### **Activity-Based Guidance:**

- New York State’s “Master Guidance for Sports and Recreation” must be followed, unless more stringent guidance is provided herein. For current State guidance see: <https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/SportsAndRecreationMasterGuidance.pdf>;
- American Academy of Pediatrics guidance must be followed relative to the wearing of face coverings. See: <https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-interim-guidance-return-to-sports/> (as amended from time to time);
- Players and coaches must adhere closely to the required daily attestation regarding COVID-19 symptoms and potential exposure.
- The symptom and temperature check must occur with all coaches, staff and players before each practice and/or athletic contest. Anyone who is sick, or has been exposed, or who is pending COVID-19 diagnostic test results (not part of routine surveillance) must be excluded from activities and contests.
- Attendance logs for all practices, contests, and tournaments including visiting team players and coaches and any spectators, **must** be kept. Such log, at a minimum, must include Name, Address, and phone number. This will allow proper contact tracing and notification if a COVID-19 exposure occurs.

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<sup>1</sup> We note that sports requiring ongoing physical contact are those most likely to cause the spread of COVID. Accordingly, if schools are contemplating prohibiting any such sport, those requiring the most physical contact are the ones which we deem the greatest threat to transmitting COVID-19.

- Social distancing and reduced contact is important. Locker rooms can only be used with strict social distancing practices in place. Players must have dedicated water bottles. Players must refrain from unnecessary physical contact, sharing equipment and other routine behaviors that could potentially transmit the virus.
- Spectators are not permitted for “Indoor Sports” as per Section 1. “Outdoor Sports” permit spectators for the home team only and must be kept to a maximum of 2 per athlete. Social distancing and mask protocols remain in place.
- Participation in tournaments outside of the Section 1 scholastic catchment area is not recommended at this time. Coaches should be aware and have contact information, including off-hours, for the school or school district’s designated COVID-19 coordinator. This should be used to inform the school and health officials if there is an exposure, but also to inform the coaches if a student is to be excluded from team activities.
- For a general list of Best Practices please refer to the New York Municipal Insurance Reciprocal Association (NYMIR) *High Risk Sport Protocols for Counties*. (See attachment.)

If additional guidance is developed by any Commissioner for their designated County, the same will be separately forwarded.