

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Deidre S. Gifford, MD, MPH
Acting Commissioner



Ned Lamont
Governor
Susan Bysiewicz
Lt. Governor

August 13, 2020

Glenn M. Lungarini
Executive Director, CAS-CIAC
30 Realty Dr., Cheshire, CT 06410

Dear Mr. Lungarini and CAS-CIAC Board Members,

Thank you for reaching out to the CT Department of Public Health regarding the fall athletic season. This letter is in response to your conversations with DPH staff on August 9 and 10, and your August 12 request for a written DPH recommendation (attached).

Like you, we believe it is important to balance the real and significant benefits of high school athletics for student health and well-being, with the competing demands of establishing an optimally safe environment for our school communities. This letter is to advise CAS-CIAC on the position of the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) regarding the upcoming fall interscholastic athletic season as it relates to our statewide efforts to reopen schools for in-person learning and the overall health and safety of students, staff, and their families.

Currently, the public health data in our state support some initial level of in-person learning for the coming academic year. DPH does not believe it is necessary at this point to abandon the idea of having a fall interscholastic athletic season entirely, but we do recommend a very cautious approach to athletics, with a slow introduction of the lowest risk activities first. As is clear in guidance and recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Sports Medicine Advisory Committee, and the United States Olympic & Paralympic Sports Medicine Committee, DPH recognizes that not all sports are equal in their risk and that certain sports and activities have more potential to be conducive to the spread of COVID-19 infections in our school populations. DPH's advise therefore focuses on re-starting academic activities first, allowing schools and students to acclimate to social distancing and mask-wearing requirements that are critical to successful re-opening, followed shortly thereafter by the introduction of lower-risk sports.

DPH would recommend the following for the upcoming fall interscholastic sports season in Connecticut:

- Postpone the start of any interscholastic sport activities (including conditioning and practice sessions) until at least two weeks after the reopening of in-person instruction in schools. As schools begin welcoming students back into their buildings, communities will be able to

assess the proper implementation of the mitigation strategies outlined in the State Department of Education's re-opening guidance and put into place any necessary corrective actions. It makes sense from a public health perspective to allow this process to become well-established before introducing sports.

- This initial period can also be used to further educate coaches, parents, and student-athletes about the mitigation strategies to be implemented during the fall interscholastic athletic season.
- Education should emphasize the importance of these strategies in the overall protection of the health of students, staff, and their families, the expectation that all of the rules surrounding mitigation strategies will be followed fully and at all times, and the consequences to coaches, student-athletes, and interscholastic sports in general if strict adherence cannot be achieved.
- For all sports, limit the total number of games, and extent of travel for interscholastic contests (for example having 12 total games, one home and one away with the six closest schools).
- For all athletics in the 2020 academic year, the use of locker rooms should be limited when possible, and strict cleaning and other protocols must be in place to ensure the safety of locker rooms. Ensure coaches and athletes understand and comply with strict face covering, social distancing, and other controls for each sport prior to the initiation of the season.
- With proper education and mitigation strategies in place, consider allowing indoor and outdoor fall sports identified as "lower risk" by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC). In Connecticut, these sports are boys' and girls' cross country and girls' swimming.
- With proper education and mitigation strategies in place, consider allowing outdoor fall sports identified as "moderate risk" by the NFHS, SMAC. In Connecticut, these sports are boys' and girls' soccer. In these sports, because there is intermittent and limited close contact between athletes, cohorting of student-athletes during practice activities should also be considered.
- Postpone to the spring season or cancel indoor sports identified as "moderate risk" by the NFHS, SMAC. In Connecticut, this includes girls' volleyball. Although there is infrequent close contact between opposing players involved with this sport, the fact that activities for this sport are occurring indoors and involve significant physical exertion and forceful

communication with teammates, the risk for person-to-person spread of infectious droplets is elevated for this specific sport.

- Postpone to the spring season or cancel sports identified as “higher risk” by the NFHS, SMAC. In Connecticut, this includes football. Full-contact football is unique among the fall interscholastic sports in our state in its level of risk to student-athletes for the person-to-person spread of infectious respiratory droplets. As you are aware, most of the collegiate conferences and many state high school interscholastic sport organizations have already postponed or canceled football for the upcoming season.

These recommendations take into account our research and consideration for the risk-benefit of interscholastic athletics to our high school students and their families. DPH will continue to work closely with CAS-CIAC and the Connecticut State Department of Education to support a model for school reopening that we believe will minimize the health and safety risks to our children, school staff, and their families while allowing them to regain their identities as teachers, students, classmates, and athletes. .

Sincerely,



Deidre S. Gifford, MD, MPH
Acting Commissioner

cc: M. Cardona, Commissioner, CSDE
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