



# THE CONNECTICUT INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETIC CONFERENCE

August 28, 2020

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Deidre S. Gifford, MD, MPH  
Acting Commissioner  
State of Connecticut, Department of Public Health

Dear Acting Commissioner Gifford,

The CIAC thanks DPH for the continued collaboration as it supports our schools and students through their return to in-person instruction and extracurricular experiences. At this point, the CIAC fall sports plan is aligned with DPH recommendations for soccer, field hockey, swimming, and cross country. The CIAC plans to make the following modifications to volleyball and football and are seeking DPH support to move forward. Will DPH support these modifications?

- Volleyball will be modified from a moderate risk indoor sport to a lower risk indoor sport by requiring all participants to wear masks.
- Football will begin as a low-risk sport with conditioning and non-contact sport specific skill work.
- Around September 21, 2020, football will continue as a moderate risk outdoor sport by engaging in activities that relate to the same level of contact experienced in soccer or field hockey.
- Around October 1, 2020, specific to the sport of football, the CIAC will review COVID metrics with DPH and assess whether the return to school has resulted in a negative impact to Connecticut's COVID climate. DPH's assessment at that time will determine whether football can be played as a high-risk outdoor sport.

## Volleyball

The CIAC agrees that only low-risk conditioning and sport specific skill activities should take place through at least the second week of school, which the CIAC has currently identified to be September 21, 2020, based on most of our member schools' start dates. The CIAC understands that the DPH's qualitative reason for limiting indoor moderate risk sports, such as volleyball, is the potential spread of COVID through air droplets resulting from the forceful level of verbal communication among players. In its letter on August 23, 2020, the DPH indicated that gyms may be used for practice activities in compliance with the Department of Economic Community Development (DECD) sector rules. As such, with approval and guidance from CIAC's medical experts, would DPH support the play of indoor volleyball where all participants wear masks to be a mitigating strategy that addresses the concern of indoor moderate risk sports?

The CIAC previously vetted the possibility of outdoor volleyball and determined that it is not a viable option for the following reasons:

- A lack of sturdy outdoor standards presents a safety concern.
- Inclement weather in the fall months, especially considering the season would not begin until October.
- Inequity of resources to establish outdoor courts.
- A significant loss of participants who would simply choose to play indoors for a club team during the fall season.

## CENTRAL OFFICE STAFF:

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The CIAC stresses that only low-risk activities would take place in volleyball up to September 21, 2020, as is the case with all other fall sports. The CIAC would only move to moderate risk full team practices on September 21<sup>st</sup> if the COVID metrics were to support such activities. The CIAC would only move to moderate risk sport competition on October 1<sup>st</sup> if the COVID metrics were to support such activities. Throughout this progression, volleyball players would wear masks at all times while in the gymnasium.

The DPH has cited the NFHS guidance on multiple occasions. The CIAC believes that this proposed mitigating strategy aligns with updated information provided to the CIAC by the NFHS. On August 27, 2020, the NFHS communicated that, "The phase-in approach suggested in the NFHS Guidance has been followed by state associations; small cohorts in conditioning, then moderate risk practice and scrimmage situations; then games between teams that are ready." Further, the NFHS stated, "State decisions are very aligned with COVID metrics... it seems that Connecticut's metrics are excellent."

The CIAC believes that wearing masks while playing volleyball mitigates DPH's concern of indoor moderate risk sports and aligns with NFHS guidance. Additionally, the CIAC believes this strategy aligns with guidance issued by the Connecticut State Department of Education on August 14, 2020, in Addendum 7 which identifies the use of a gym in consideration for general music, choral, and instrumental instruction. The CIAC believes that DPH's concern of spreading air droplets via forceful verbal communication would also apply to the playing of musical instruments. If the use of face coverings, as required by Addendum 7, mitigates the risk of instructional activities in a gymnasium, the CIAC believes application of that same mitigating strategy to athletics would apply.

## Football

As stated earlier, the CIAC agrees that only low-risk conditioning and sport specific skill activities should take place through at least the second week of school, which the CIAC has currently identified to be September 21, 2020, based on most of our member schools' start dates. The CIAC understands DPH's qualitative reason for not supporting football as a high-risk sport is the potential spread of COVID through the close contact and collision nature of the sport. The CIAC shares this concern and is only permitting low-risk football activities, in cohorts no larger than 10, through September 21, 2020, in alignment with all other fall sport activities. The CIAC requests the following support from DPH pertaining to the sport of football:

1. Would DPH support football engaging in low-to-moderate risk activities after September 21, 2020, if supported by COVID metrics that would permit sports such as soccer and field hockey to proceed in that manner? The CIAC will work with member school coaches and athletic directors to design low-to-moderate risk activities during the time frame of August 29, 2020, through September 21, 2020. Through that process, the CIAC will vet the appropriateness of the 7 v 7 option recommended by DPH as a possible moderate risk football activity. In doing so, the CIAC would like to clarify the NFHS's position on 7 v 7 football, as DPH has consistently referenced NFHS guidance. In a communication to the CIAC on August 27, 2020, the NFHS stated, "The NFHS Guidance for Returning To Activity document that was shared with state associations suggested three tiers of "risk" and examples of sports that might be placed in each category. 7 v 7 football was listed as an example in the "moderate risk" category. The NFHS was not suggesting that states should play 7v7 football instead of 11-player football. It was only listed as an example of an activity that occurs in some states at the high school level. The NFHS does not write rules for 7v7 football, and there are no NFHS member state championships for 7v7 football. No other state association is playing 7v7 football as a championship program."
2. Would DPH support reevaluating the COVID metrics with the CIAC at the end of September or early October to determine whether it would be appropriate for high-risk interscholastic sport activities to take place at that time? During our conversation on August 20, 2020, it was mentioned by DPH that it was concerned with the negative impact activities such as the reintroduction of low-to-moderate risk sports on June 17<sup>th</sup>, the allowance of high-risk sports on July 6, July 4<sup>th</sup> celebrations, and graduation events would have on Connecticut COVID metrics. However, Connecticut's metrics remained positive following the allowance of each of those activities. Likewise, if the return to on-campus learning does not produce the negative impact to Connecticut's COVID metrics that many experts believe it will, the CIAC is requesting the DPH to revisit its position on high-risk interscholastic sports at a later date. The CIAC's request is informed by the NFHS' August 27, 2020 update, which stated, "Multiple states have staged interscholastic contests in football with precautionary measures in place. Reports to us thus far have been positive. State decisions are very aligned with COVID metrics... it seems that Connecticut's metrics are excellent."

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The CIAC believes our plan for football and volleyball is safe and logical, and follows a progression determined by COVID medical science while supporting the physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and mental health needs of student-athletes.

### Quantitative COVID Metrics

The CIAC, again, requests for DPH to share the quantitative COVID data it relies on to support its qualitative positions on public health. In its updated fall sports plan, the CIAC references the State Department of Education's Indicators for Consideration of Learning Models (<https://data.ct.gov/stories/s/CT-School-Reopening/ddy2-ijgu/>), which were developed with DPH. Relying on the leading and secondary indicators identified in that model, the CIAC and its experts evaluate Connecticut to be at the low risk level, which favors in-person learning. During CIAC's conversation with DPH on August 20, 2020, when asked about the current risk level for learning, Dr. Carter stated that the current numbers support reopening schools primarily using a hybrid model and not a five-day-a-week in-person model. In review of today's COVID metrics as published on <https://data.ct.gov/stories/s/CT-School-Reopening/ddy2-ijgu/>, all Connecticut counties indicate a low level of risk for both leading and secondary categories. The CIAC would like to ensure that it is using the most accurate and up-to-date quantitative COVID data to support its decision-making, as it believes it has done since March 2020. As such, can you share what quantitative COVID data DPH is using to support its qualitative positions on interscholastic athletics, particularly football and volleyball? This information will be valuable to ensure the CIAC is using the most precise data available in determining appropriate interscholastic athletic experiences for our member schools.

Finally, in its letter on August 23, 2020, the DPH acknowledged "the need to continue to clarify the advisability of youth sports outside of interscholastic competition (e.g., fall club and recreational sports)" and indicated that it would "have further communication on those issues both internally and with you in the coming days." As there was no further communication provided on this topic from DPH during the following week, and our member schools begin their fall season, the CIAC appreciates the DPH's recognition of the inconsistency between interscholastic and non-interscholastic athletics, however, does not feel the need to examine this concern further. Regardless of what opportunities exist under DECD sector rules, superintendents will be inclined to follow any recommendation issued by DPH. Therefore, the CIAC wishes to focus its continued collaboration with DPH only on interscholastic athletic opportunities.

Thank you for your continued willingness to discuss meaningful interscholastic opportunities that engage Connecticut student-athletes during the pandemic.

Sincerely,



Glenn Lungarini  
Executive Director  
CAS-CIAC