



**AHSAA**  
ALABAMA HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

## **BEST PRACTICES**

Return to Play for Fall 2020

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## AHSAA Best Practices Return to Play for Fall 2020

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## **AHSAA Best Practices**

### **Return to Play for Fall 2020**

*Approved by the AHSAA Central Board of Control and Medical Advisory Committee.  
This document is subject to change by approval of the Central Board as needed.  
Best practices for championship play, winter and spring sports will be released as needed.*

**Purpose: To offer AHSAA member schools best practices in order to commence the 2020-21 school year athletic seasons as scheduled and have complete seasons through championship play; to educate our coaches and student-athletes how to safely live with the COVID-19 virus by following the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH), and Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) guidelines while fostering an educational athletic environment; to develop our student-athletes as physically and safely as possible; to provide best practices for students, coaches, officials, and fans while participating and attending athletic events.**

The following **best practices are suggested** for all AHSAA athletic activities for the 2020-21 school year.

### **Education**

- Before beginning any athletic activities, the local school (system) should review the most recent guidelines provided by the CDC, ADPH, ALSDE, and local county/city health agencies and decide how best to implement those guidelines.
- Local school administration should communicate to coaches, student-athletes, and parents CDC, ADPH, ALSDE, and AHSAA guidelines and best practices regarding COVID-19 and discuss all safety and cleanliness expectations.
- The AHSAA encourages administrators and coaches to be versed in the ALSDE “Roadmap to Reopening Schools”, particularly pages 4-24 and to complete the new NFHS Learn elective course “Covid-19 for Coaches and Administrators” that may be found at [www.nfhslearn.com](http://www.nfhslearn.com).
- **ADPH Effective Strategies to Mitigate COVID-19 Spread ([www.adph.gov](http://www.adph.gov))**
  - It is suggested that students avoid close contact with others and maintain a physical distance of six feet or greater.
    - Close contact is considered being within 6 feet for 15 minutes.
  - **When physical distancing cannot be maintained, facial coverings should be worn. Each person shall wear a mask or other facial covering that covers his or her nostrils and mouth at all times when within six feet of a person from another household...** (Based on the July 29, 2020 Current Order of the State Health Officer).
  - Daily self-health evaluations should be performed. (Suggested form may be found at [www.ahsaa.com](http://www.ahsaa.com))

- Encourage individual hygiene such as hand washing, coughing/sneezing etiquette, avoid touching face, etc.
- Athletes and coaches should be closely monitored for any symptoms.
- Those who have been exposed to COVID-19 (regardless of where the exposure occurred) should follow protocols set forth by the CDC, ADPH, and local health department.
- **Additional Mitigation Strategies**
  - Any student with a prior confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis should undergo an evaluation by their medical provider. Written medical clearance is recommended prior to participation. (*NFHS-AMSSM Guidance for Assessing Cardiac Issues in High Student-Athletes with COVID-19 Infection, July 9, 2020.*)
  - Any student who was isolated or quarantined must complete a minimum five-day acclimation period once released before returning to sport. A gradual return to activity is advised, and any athlete showing abnormal health issues should be evaluated and cleared by a physician prior to a return to sport activities.
  - As much as possible, practices, training, workouts, meetings, etc. should be held outdoors.
  - **In accordance with the ALSDE “Roadmap to Reopening Schools” contact tracing is an ADPH function and not the responsibility of local schools.**
  - **All individual mitigation practices should be observed at ALL times including non-athletic related activities.**

## **Rules Modifications**

2020-21 NFHS Sports and State Adopted Rules Modifications due to Covid-19 may be found at the following link:

<https://www.ahsaa.com/2020-Fall-Sports-Rules-Modifications>

## **General Operational Best Practices for Preseason and Regular Season**

- Schools may choose to begin fall practice on or after July 27. (Must have 13 days prior to first competition.) **Schools that choose to begin on July 27 must use this week for tryouts or as an acclimation period.** (Approved by the Central Board of Control on July 22, 2020 as a mandate.)
  - For all sports, no two-a-days are allowed during the week of July 27<sup>th</sup>. Two-a-day guidelines may begin August 3<sup>rd</sup> (see page 53 of the AHSAA Handbook).
  - In football, during the week of July 27<sup>th</sup>, all days must be in shorts and helmets allowing schools the opportunity to learn how to further implement “best practices” under current COVID-19 guidelines. Schools choosing to begin practice during the week of July 27<sup>th</sup> may count two days in shorts as part of the required acclimation period and may practice in shells on Monday and Tuesday (August 3-4) with full pads allowed on Wednesday, August 5. However, the first scrimmage is not allowed until Friday, August 7<sup>th</sup>.

- If the school begins practice the week of August 3<sup>rd</sup>, the school must meet the minimum acclimation period in shorts and shells (see page 88 of the AHSAA Sports Book). No full pad scrimmages are allowed until Friday, August 7<sup>th</sup>.
- **Note: Regardless of the school's first practice date, a minimum acclimation period is required before any full contact is allowed in the sport of football.**
- **All sports must have at least thirteen (13) days of practice before beginning competition (See Rule III. Section 14. Page 50 AHSAA Handbook.)**
- **Any time physical distancing cannot be maintained by students, coaches, spectators, etc. wearing a facial covering is suggested. *Players, coaches, officials, and spectators shall wear a mask or other facial covering that covers his or her nostrils and mouth at all times when within 6 feet of a person from another household except when a player or official is directly participating in the athletic activity.* (Based on the July 29, 2020 Current Order of the State Health Officer). (This includes sidelines, benches, etc. for all contest participants.)**
- Only school personnel, certified coaches, athletic trainers, and student-athletes should be present during practices. Attendance of non-essential personnel is not recommended until further notice.
- Equipment should be cleaned and sanitized daily after each use. Equipment should not be shared without following cleaning protocols.
- Individuals having or experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms should follow CDC and ADPH guidelines listed at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov), [www.adph.gov](http://www.adph.gov) or [www.ahsaa.com](http://www.ahsaa.com) before being allowed to participate or attend.

## **I. Communication**

- Host schools should communicate prior to an event these best practices and/or local restrictions regarding mitigation of COVID-19 to the visiting team, officials, media, fans, etc.
- Communication between member schools should also include, but is not limited to, information regarding parking, concessions, locker rooms, ticketing, payment methods, entrance/exit gates, bands, cheerleaders, etc.

## **II. Contracts**

On page 66 of the **2020-21 AHSAA Handbook**, you may find **Rule VI.**

**Administration. SECTION 4. CONTEST CONTRACTS:**

*The superintendent or principal shall electronically sign all contracts in DragonFly to engage in interscholastic contests. When contracting for a contest, provision must be made for a forfeiture fee to be paid by the school that fails to carry out the arrangement made. There shall be no cancellation of a contract once entered into, except by mutual agreement, unless the forfeiture fee provided by the contract is paid.*

**An incomplete contract is non-binding.**

*Note: If a school has a contract for a game and breaks it (by paying the forfeiture fee) without mutual agreement of the other school involved, this may count as one of the offended school's allowed games and will be officially a forfeited game. If the*

*game is replaced by the offended school, no forfeit will be granted. The school breaking the contract will not be allowed to replace the forfeited game.*

- Schools should amend or create contracts to include verbiage regarding outbreak situations including, but not limited to, state mandated closures, local school closures, vacated contests, etc. that prohibit a school from participation. Suggestions, whether two or one-year contracts, include, but are not limited to, adding forfeiture fees, reversing the home and home sites, playing on an alternate date, playing at a neutral site, splitting the gate 50/50, etc.
- Contractual amendments should be resolved between the two schools involved.

### **III. Contests**

- **In accordance with Alabama Act 2015-89, SB 72, AHSAA bylaws allow non-traditional students (virtual or homeschool) to participate in athletics if they have met all other AHSAA eligibility requirements.**
- **However, local school system(s) may have more restrictive guidelines. If a school or school system prohibits virtual school students from athletic participation, it is a local school decision.**
- Whether a school campus is open or closed regardless of the instruction model [traditional, blended, virtual, remote learning], in the event any contest is not played during the regular season the game will be a forfeited game by the team whose school is not participating, and the other team will be awarded a “win”. In this case, no fines or forfeitures will be assessed.
- **If a school is not able to participate in a contest, the local superintendent must notify the AHSAA Executive Director in writing.**

### **IV. Contingency Plans for Fall Sport Championship Play**

- Contingency plans for all fall sports have been developed and will be discussed at the October board meeting.
- As part of the contingency plans for cross country, volleyball and swimming, schools should schedule and complete area games and qualifying times or meets as soon as possible to allow for the maximum amount of time to complete all required games prior to the playoffs. Required dates, as listed in the 2020-21 Sports Book (available online), are the dates required games MUST be completed.

### **V. Facilities**

- ***Indoor venues shall limit facility occupancy to 50 percent of the normal occupancy load as determined by the fire marshal. Outdoor venues or those not assigned a normal occupancy load by the fire marshal shall limit occupancy as required to comply with the social distancing requirements [Spectators shall wear a mask or other facial covering that covers his or her nostrils and mouth at all times when within 6 feet of a person from another household.] (Based on the July 29, 2020, Current Order of the State Health Officer).***

- It is an expectation member schools will comply with CDC, ADPH and local health agencies related to best practices for facilities. **When physical distancing cannot be maintained, facial coverings are suggested.**
- Host schools should communicate all guidelines, including local restrictions, to visiting schools and officials prior to an event.
- Host schools may consider posting visible signage encouraging physical distancing, facial coverings, and hand washing, etc. and urging anyone with COVID-19 symptoms not to enter an athletic event. (Examples of signage may be found at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).)

## **VI. Ticketing**

- If attendance restrictions are in place, **equal access for visiting fans must be provided.**
- The AHSAA does offer a CONTACTLESS, digital ticketing platform. Instructions may be found at the AHSAA website or at <https://gofan.co/app/school/AHSAA>
- GoFan offers a “CASHLESS” platform. *[Schools using the Cashless platform will be offered a restructured process fee.]*

## **VII. NFHS Network**

- If restrictions prevent fan attendance, a live-streaming platform through the NFHS Network is available. Please contact Ron Ingram, at [ringram@ahsaa.com](mailto:ringram@ahsaa.com) for additional information.

## **VIII. Transportation**

- The local school system and school administration may determine the safest way to travel to and from contests in accordance with CDC, ADPH, and ALSDE guidelines.
- **When physical distancing cannot be maintained, facial coverings are suggested.**
- To avoid quarantining the whole team, assigned seating is suggested.

## **IX. Locker/Dressing Rooms**

- Host schools should be responsible for providing a clean environment for all visiting teams to dress and have pre-game meetings. When possible, the area should be large enough to maintain social distancing.
- If locker/dressing rooms are not large enough to maintain physical distancing, visiting teams may consider traveling dressed, dressing in groups, and/or limiting travel team numbers.
- **When physical distancing cannot be maintained, facial coverings are suggested.**

## **X. Gameday & Event Management**

- **In addition to the following best practices, all current AHSAA and NFHS contest rules and NFHS fall sports' and state adoption rule modifications should continue throughout the 2020-2021 school year.**
- All game day personnel involved in the athletic event should be screened prior to working the event. Game day personnel include, but are not limited to, chain crew, officials, athletic trainers, timers, judges, scorers, ball boy/girl, etc.
- The host school should be responsible for providing a clean environment for contest officials and provide contest officials an area to enter and exit separate from fans when possible. When possible, the area should be large enough to maintain physical distancing. When physical distancing cannot be maintained, facial coverings are suggested.
- When possible, team bench areas should be arranged so access is for team personnel only. In addition, bench areas should accommodate proper physical distancing. When not feasible, other mitigation methods, such as facial coverings, may be implemented.
- Teams are encouraged to use take-out or curbside dining for pregame or team meals.
- Pregame interactions with opponent coaches and players should be limited and physical distancing guidelines should be maintained. Procedures for postgame gestures of sportsmanship should be discussed and agreed upon by both coaches during the pregame meeting. (Examples of postgame gestures of sportsmanship may be found at [www.nfhs.com](http://www.nfhs.com) under the respective sport.)
- All decisions concerning spectators, student sections, stadium seating, etc., are under the guidance of home management and should be in accordance with CDC, ADPH, and local health guidelines. **When physical distancing cannot be maintained, facial coverings are suggested.**
- Note: If attendance restrictions are in place, **equal access must be granted to visiting team.**

## **XI. Auxiliary Participants**

- Any auxiliary persons (ticket takers, concession stand workers, security, media, and volunteers) should be screened prior to working an athletic event. Method of screening may be determined by host school. (Examples of screening methods may be found at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).)
- Student groups such as marching bands, cheerleaders, drill teams, and any other school groups may attend and perform at games or contests **if local school/district approves**. Schools should plan accordingly and consider limiting number of participants to those essential to performances. These groups should always remain separate from game participants and remain away from the fans or non-group members.
- Any auxiliary participant who experiences any symptoms of COVID-19 should follow CDC and ADPH guidelines before being allowed to work an event.



## **Best Practices Regarding Contest Officials**

- Host schools should communicate all local restrictions regarding COVID-19 prior to the event.
- Host schools should provide contest officials an area to enter and exit separate from fans when possible. Officials should be provided a dressing and meeting area that has been cleaned and disinfected prior to their arrival that provides for appropriate spacing between individuals.
- Dressing rooms should have hand sanitizer **if soap and water are not readily available.**
- Officials should self-screen every day for COVID-19 symptoms for themselves and family members.
- Pregame meetings between teams and contest officials should be planned to allow appropriate distancing between individuals.
- Officials' table should be limited to essential personnel which includes home team scorer and timer with a recommended distance of 3 to 6 feet between individuals. Visiting team personnel (scorer, statisticians, etc.) are not deemed essential and may need to find an alternative location. The number allowed at the officials' table is determined by the space available at the table. **When physical distancing cannot be maintained, facial coverings are suggested.**
- The ball should be cleaned and sanitized throughout the contest as recommended by the ball manufacturer. Suggested ball cleaning methods may be found at the following link: <https://bit.ly/3g531et>
- Officials may use an electronic whistle and wear cloth face coverings.
- Officials should have their own labeled, beverage container, and these should be brought onto the field or court for their use during time outs or breaks.
- Suggest the suspension of handshakes during the coin toss and pregame festivities.

**DISCLAIMER:** *The AHSAA, Central Board of Control, and Medical Advisory Board offer this document as best practices for member schools while participating in high school athletics that will be in accordance with state or local directives. Information contained within this document is best practices and is provided for general guidance only and is not intended to be a substitute for professional or medical advice. Information is offered as a resource for member schools to use in coordination with applicable government and related institutional policies and guidelines. Please refer to federal, state, and local health agencies for professional and medical assistance. Please be aware some local guidelines may be more restrictive. We understand these best practices will not eliminate the risk but may reduce the risk of contracting (mitigate) COVID-19.*

**Note: The AHSAA will continue to work with state officials and other related agencies to determine potential modifications. As information and data are updated, the AHSAA will adjust accordingly.**

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Will fall sports (*cross country, football, swimming, and volleyball*) start on time?  
**Current plans are for the schools to begin fall practice as planned with the first contests allowed on August 20-21.**
2. Who determines when and if a school will participate in athletic competition?  
**The AHSAA Central Board of Control sets the beginning dates for practice and competition in all sports; however, the decision of when or if a school will participate is under the jurisdiction of the local school board.**
3. Will fans be restricted from attending contests?  
**All decisions concerning spectators, student sections, stadium seating, etc., are under the guidance of home management and should be in accordance with CDC, ADPH, and local health guidelines. When physical distancing cannot be maintained, facial coverings are suggested.**  
**Note: If attendance restrictions are in place, equal access must be granted to visiting team.**
4. Does the AHSAA govern the health and safety guidelines provided by the CDC, ADPH and ALSDE concerning COVID 19?  
**No. The mission of the AHSAA is to provide member schools best practices for return to play for the fall of 2020.**
5. What is the protocol for a player or coach who tests positive for or has been exposed to COVID-19?  
**Those who have tested positive or been exposed to COVID-19 (regardless of where the exposure occurred) should follow protocols set forth by the CDC, ADPH, and local health department. In accordance with the ALSDE “Roadmap to Reopening Schools” contact tracing is an ADPH function and not the responsibility of local schools.**
6. If a school starts the school year with remote learning or a full virtual model of instruction, are students allowed to participate in sports?  
**In accordance with the AHSAA By-Laws, Eligibility Rule, Section 9 Academic Rule, students in a non-traditional virtual or remote learning program are eligible to participate as long as all other eligibility requirements are met.**
7. Will there be any contest rule modifications for fall sports due to COVID-19?  
**Yes. Based on NFHS recommendations, while the playing rules remain the same, state associations may adopt rule modifications. For a list of board approved fall sport modifications visit the AHSAA website at [www.ahsaa.com](http://www.ahsaa.com).**
8. What will result if a school board does not allow a sport team to participate in a scheduled athletic competition?  
**Whether a school campus is open or closed regardless of the instruction model [traditional, blended, virtual, or remote learning], until the school allows all declared fall**

sports to begin participating in athletic contests, every game not played will be a forfeited game by the team whose school is not participating, and the other team will be awarded a “win”. In this case, no fines or forfeitures will be assessed.

**Note: If a school is not able to participate in a contest, the local superintendent must notify the AHSAA Executive Director in writing.**

9. If a school is closed or a team is quarantined during the state playoffs or during a state meet, will that school or its student-athletes be eliminated from participation?  
**Yes. AHSAA Championship Play policy requires removal of the team unable to participate. Swimming and cross-country team members must participate and qualify in the section meets to advance to the state championships.**
  
10. Will volleyball, cross-country, and swimming teams be allowed to compete in or host out-of-state regular-season tournaments or meets?  
**Participation in or hosting events with out-of-state teams will be a decision of the local school system in accordance with restrictions set by the local government and/or health officials. Schools scheduled to compete in other states should be aware of any local or state restrictions that may be in place that could affect participation.**
  
11. Will masks be required?  
**In accordance with AHSAA Best Practices, when physical distancing cannot be maintained, facial covering should be worn. (*Based on the Current Order of the State Health Officer, July 16, 2020*). It is suggested that students avoid close contact with others even on the sidelines or team benches and maintain a physical distance of six feet or greater. Close contact is considered being within 6 feet for 15 minutes. Schools should follow local school, ADPH and ALSDE guidelines.**
  
12. Will there be guidelines for visitors’ dressing rooms?  
**The host school should provide a clean environment for visiting teams to dress and have pre-game meetings. When possible, the area should be large enough to maintain social distancing. If locker/dressing rooms are not large enough to maintain physical distancing, visiting teams may consider traveling dressed, dressing in groups, and/or limiting travel team numbers. When physical distancing cannot be maintained, facial coverings are suggested.**
  
13. Due to the AHSAA adoption of the football rule modification that extends the Players’ Box to the 10- yard lines, are cheerleaders, dance teams, media, etc. still allowed on the field?  
**The local school determines who is allowed on the sidelines. It is the hope of the AHSAA that school administration will work to provide these groups space. However, these groups should be aware that additional sideline restrictions may be in place that may limit or prohibit their access to the field due to social distance guidelines.**
  
14. Will students still be allowed to use bus transportation to and from contests?  
**The local school system and school administration may determine the safest way to travel to and from contests in accordance with CDC, ADPH, ALSDE, and local school board**

**guidelines. Assigned seating is suggested in all modes of travel to avoid the possibility of an entire team being quarantined.**

- 15.** If a school does not participate in athletics due to COVID-19, can a student transfer to another school and be eligible to participate?

**In accordance with Rule 1. Section 12: A student may transfer to any school and be eligible to participate at the sub-varsity (middle school, junior high or junior varsity) if all other eligibility requirements are met.**

- 16.** Do players and officials who are participating in a contest have to wear facial coverings?

**In accordance with the Current Order of the State Health Officer, players and officials shall wear a mask or facial covering except when directly participating in an athletic activity.**

- 17.** Do players on the sideline, coaches, chain crew, and other sideline personnel have to wear facial coverings? **Yes. In accordance with the Current Order of the State Health Officer, anyone not directly participating in the contest shall wear a mask or facial covering at all times. (This includes sidelines, benches, etc. for all contest participants.)**

- 18.** Do fans have to wear facial coverings?

**The AHSAA encourages all spectators to wear facial coverings; however, fans must meet the minimum requirements as outlined within the Current Order of the State Health Officer. [*Spectators shall wear a mask or other facial covering that covers his or her nostrils and mouth at all times when within 6 feet of a person from another household.*]**