

HCPSS COVID-19 FALL ATHLETICS/ RETURN TO PLAY RESPONSE FAQs

Following are answers to frequently asked questions regarding the operations of the Howard County Public Schools (HCPSS) interscholastic athletics program as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This document will be updated regularly to provide the latest information to HCPSS Sports Community.

Q: What is the current start date for fall sports tryouts and practices?

A: As of July 20, 2020, the first date for fall sports tryouts and practices is August 12, 2020, per the Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association (MPSSAA). The MPSSAA Executive Council will be meeting weekly to receive updates and take appropriate action based on guidance from the Maryland State Department of Education and the Maryland Health Department.

Q: Who makes the decision on the status of the sports seasons – the MPSSAA or HCPSS?

A: The MPSSAA, under the direction of the governor, state superintendent of schools and state board of education, determines the sports seasons. As members of the MPSSAA, HCPSS sports will operate within the confines of the designated seasons. However, once seasons are established, based on Howard County health guidelines and HCPSS operating procedures, HCPSS will determine the timeline for entering the various risk levels of activities, per CDC and MPSSAA guidance.

Q: When will a decision be made regarding the start of fall sports?

A: It is anticipated that an announcement regarding the operations of the HCPSS interscholastic athletics program will occur by the end of July 2020. This is dependent on any state-level decisions, which may be made prior to this time that may impact HCPSS Athletics.

Q: What are the various risk levels of activities? Where do those come from?

A: Within stages one and two of the Governor's recovery plan there will be segmented approaches for gradual resumption and administration of athletics and activities. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) describes the segmented approach through a risk assessment. • Lowest Risk: Performing skill-building drills or

conditioning at home, alone or with family members. • Increasing Risk: Summer out-of-season school-based open conditioning, exercise, weight training, and non-sport specific student gatherings/In-Season Team Based Practices • More Risk: Within-team competition. • Even More Risk: Full competition between teams from the same local geographic area. • Highest Risk: Full competition between teams from different geographic areas.

Q: What risk level is the HCPSS athletics program operating under now? How long will that last?

A: HCPSS Athletics is currently operating in the lowest risk level, outlined in Phase 1. This will continue through August 11, 2020, at the recommendation of the Return to Play Committee for
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HCPSS Athletics and in alignment with HCPSS operating procedures. The next update is scheduled by the end of July 2020.

Q: What about risk levels for sports? Are they differentiated?

A: Yes. Sports are differentiated by risk level, which aligns with the potential for contact. The risk levels are included in the NFHS Guidance for Opening High School Athletics and Activities. The higher risk level sports are football, boys' lacrosse, wrestling, competitive cheerleading and dance (pompons).

Q: What is the Return to Play Plan?

A: The Return to Play Committee Plan provides the framework, guiding principles, and operating procedures for the interscholastic athletics program. The plan will incorporate national, state and local health guidelines and recommendations.

Q: Where do I find the latest information regarding the operations of the HCPSS Athletics program?

A: The latest information and updates regarding the operations of the HCPSS interscholastic athletics program are available on the COVID-19 Athletics Information section of the HCPSS Athletics webpage. This page will be updated on an ongoing basis, to reflect the latest resources and program operations.

Q: What will sports look like if/when they return to in-person activities?

A: The next risk level, per CDC and MPSSAA guidance is the “Increasing Risk” level. This includes school-based all-school conditioning, exercise, weight training, and non-sport specific student gatherings, along with in-season team-based practices. When safe to proceed, the program will operate in the subsequent levels, leading up to local competition beginning in the fourth stage.

Q: When will Phase 2 be released?

A: Phase 2 is currently being reviewed and vetted through HCPSS and health officials, as appropriate. When finalized, Phase 2 will be shared with stakeholders in advance of the start of in-person activities for the HCPSS athletics program.

Q: Will the program incrementally and sequentially proceed through the phases during the season or school year?

A: The progression through phases will occur sequentially; however, there is the potential that operations may return to a previous risk level of operations, if deemed necessary by state and/or local health officials.

Q: What factors does HCPSS consider when making decisions? What is the “Why” of HCPSS Athletics in regard to COVID-19 decisions?

A: The guiding principles of the HCPSS Return to Play include: Promoting our core values of equity and access to allow for the participation for ALL students.