

Preparing for the Return of High School Athletics

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Schools in Pennsylvania and across the country are beginning to address the countless issues associated with returning to in-person instruction. While the prospect of high school athletics resuming this summer and fall is unclear, recent guidance paints a picture of what athletics and activities will look like if they do resume.

The Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association recently [held a virtual press conference](#) for media members across the state to provide updates on where the group stands on how to bring sports back to students.

The answer, according to the PIAA, is to allow athletics and activities to happen in accordance with the governor's directives. "With the Governor's development of the red; yellow and green phases of opening counties across the Commonwealth, the Board is committed to permitting activities in those areas of the state that may be opened under the Governor's orders," read a statement from the PIAA following the press conference. As such, the PIAA will no longer hold to a common reopening date of July 1.

While those seniors in spring activities in 2020 - and others from some winter activities - lost their senior year, the PIAA said they are working to safely ensure that doesn't happen to the class of 2021.

But how those students participate in athletics and activities may look very different than it did just a few months ago. The National Federation of State High School Associations has [released its own guidance](#) for how the PIAA and other state athletic associations can begin to reopen safely.

Divided into three distinct phases, the NFHS guidance addresses pre-workout screenings, limitations on gatherings, facilities cleaning, physical contact, use of athletic equipment and hydration.

The recommended safety measures include COVID-19 screenings, temperature checks, limited or no use of locker rooms, "pods" of only 5-10 students working out together to minimize exposure risks to entire teams, use of resistance bands rather than weight training since spotting of lifters is not consistent with social distancing, and not sharing any athletic equipment, including balls.

High school athletics is one of the many institutions that may be changed forever because of the pandemic. And while we don't yet know the full extent of those changes, it seems clear that they could be extensive. This will require careful and thoughtful planning by school administrators as they navigate guidance from the CDC, the governor, the Pennsylvania Department of Health, NFHS, the PIAA and other interested stakeholders, including players, parents and the community.

If you have questions about reopening your athletics programs, please contact any member of the [Barley Snyder Education Practice Group](#).