



2021 Softball Rules Modifications and Rules Recommendations and General Requirements and General Recommendations (3-11-21)

With the support from the NFHS Softball Rules Committee, the Ohio Department of Health and the Ohio High School Athletic Association, the rules modifications and rules recommendations and general requirements and general recommendations outlined in this document are meant to decrease potential exposure to respiratory droplets by encouraging social distancing, limiting participation in administrative tasks to essential personnel and allowing for appropriate protective equipment.

Note: This is not an exhaustive list and there might be additional steps in each school, city and state to help prevent the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus. Even when taking all precautions, there will still be risk of transmitting illnesses. Everyone should stay vigilant about the health of members of their teams. Lastly, the situation with COVID-19 is rapidly changing. These considerations may quickly become outdated. Please keep up with the latest from the CDC and other health officials in your area. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Visit the Ohio Health Director's Second Amended Sports Order <https://bit.ly/2RWa1jh> and these two documents

- Health Department's Responsible RestartOhio guidance document for sports: <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/responsible/Youth-Collegiate-Amateur-Club-Pro-Sports.pdf>
- Health Department's Responsible RestartOhio guidance document for sports venues: <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/responsible/Sports-Venues.pdf>

*for further requirements and recommendations that apply to all sports, including softball, **and includes mandatory requirements for youth, collegiate, amateur, club and professional sports.** Please know that some of the requirements and recommendations in this sport-specific document duplicate state guidance.*

Softball rules modifications and general requirements must be adhered to and followed. Softball rules recommendations and general recommendations are optional and not required but are permitted and strongly encouraged.

Note: Some softball facilities are privately-owned. Be sure non-school facility administrators know and follow these policies and procedures prior to practices or contests.

2021 NFHS RULE MODIFICATIONS

Softballs

- Any ball that comes into contact with bodily fluids must be replaced or disinfected.
- All balls must meet NFHS and OHSAA requirements and must be new or in good condition.

Player Equipment

- Personal items such as towels, facial coverings and water bottles shall not be shared.
- If equipment such as helmets and bats must be shared, proper sanitization must be performed between users.
- Player/team equipment shall be sanitized before and after each practice or game.

Face Shields

- Per guidance from the NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee, plastic shields covering the entire face (unless integrated into the face mask and attached to a helmet) shall **not** be allowed during contests.
- Use of these items during practices increases the risk of unintended injury to the person wearing the shield and their teammates.

Pregame Conference

- Attendees are limited to the head coach from each team plus the umpires.
- Coaches shall stay outside the width of the batter's box at home plate, maintaining six feet of distance between each person.
- Everyone attending this meeting must wear a face covering.

Substitutions

- Verbal exchanges shall occur six feet from the coach or substitute to the plate umpire and from the plate umpire to the opposing team's coach.

Bench and Field Conduct

- The number of individuals in the dugout is dependent on the size of dugout.
- Players and coaches must maintain six feet of social distance.
- NFHS rules allow for dugouts/designated warm up areas to be extended to provide for social distancing. If needed, these areas shall be clearly marked and located beyond the end of the dugout furthest from home plate.
- Players are not permitted to leave the dugout area to congratulate players scoring or after home runs.
- Players and all team personnel shall follow the "no touch" rule – refraining from high fives, handshakes and other physical contact with teammates, opposing players, coaches, umpires and fans. A "tip of the cap" can be used following the game in lieu of the handshake line.

Charged Conferences

- Coaches holding defensive conferences must stay on the home plate side of the pitcher's circle and the player(s) must be on the opposite side of the pitcher's circle maintaining the six feet distance.
- Only one coach is permitted during the conference.
- When a coach visits the pitcher, all other players shall stay outside the pitching circle.
- Team huddles without physical distancing are prohibited.

Exchange of Lineup Cards

- Lineups shall be handed to the umpire, and the umpire will verbally approve or ask any questions about the lineup.

Infractions by the Pitcher

- The pitchers shall not lick their fingers and wipe them off.
- Pitchers shall not put their hands to their mouths or blow into their hands prior to pitching the ball. This will be a "no pitch." Any umpire shall make this call. The ball is dead immediately. The ball will be replaced and sanitized and pitchers must sanitize their hands before play continues.
- A pitcher using a resin bag shall take that item to the dugout with him/her at the end of each half inning.

REQUIREMENTS

General Requirements

- **People (players, coaches, officials, spectators, etc.) feeling sick or that have been exposed to someone sick, should not attend or participate in competitions or practices.** For CDC COVID-19 symptom guidance, go to: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>.
- All participants and spectators shall practice at least six feet social distancing and wear face coverings at all times except when eating/drinking or on the field of play.
- Host facilities shall communicate with spectators "know before you go" before each event.
- Anyone attending a practice or game – players, coaches, officials, trainers, cheerleaders, volunteers, staff, spectators, etc. – must conduct a symptom assessment before each practice or contest, and anyone experiencing symptoms must stay home (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>).
 - Individuals with COVID-19 symptoms should isolate themselves per CDC's guidance and contact their healthcare provider (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/isolation.html>).

- Individuals with confirmed COVID-19 or who have symptoms should follow CDC’s guidance for when they can be around others again (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/end-home-isolation.html>).
- Individuals exposed to a person with COVID-19 must complete their quarantine before attending a practice or game.
- Any player, spectator, coach, or umpire who is under a modified quarantine due to an in-school exposure must not attend practice or competition until the completion of quarantine.
- Consistent with state guidance, schools/teams regarding “Confirmed or Suspected COVID-19 Cases:”
 - Immediately isolate, and seek medical care for, any individual who becomes ill or develops symptoms.
 - Contact the local health department about suspected COVID-19 cases or exposure.
 - The affected person should seek COVID-19 testing as soon as possible. Teams, schools, and clubs should work with parents to ensure they have access to testing through their healthcare providers or direct them to testing options.
 - Coaches/administrators must work with the local health department to identify individuals who were potentially exposed to help facilitate contact tracing. This includes, but is not limited to, athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers, parents and other support personnel.
 - A team or school must notify all athletes and parents/guardians associated with the affected team regarding a positive test. Athletes and families must be reminded of proper daily health screening protocols.
 - If the affected individual participated in competitive play, the team is responsible for notifying any opponents played between the date of the positive test and two days prior to the onset of symptoms. If the teams or schools in different counties, the health departments in each county should be notified to help facilitate effective contact tracing.
 - An athlete who tests positive for COVID-19, whether symptomatic or asymptomatic, must not return to sport activities until the athlete has completed a medical exam and documentation is provided that clears the individual to return to play. The documented medical exam must specifically include an assessment of the cardiac/heart risk of high-intensity exercise due to the potential of myocarditis occurring in COVID-19 patients. More information on this issue can be found at <https://www.acc.org/latest-in-cardiology/articles/2020/07/13/13/37/returning-to-play-after-coronavirus-infection>.
 - Follow protocol for cleaning and disinfecting if a COVID-19 case is identified at the venue.
 - Players, coaches, officials or other individuals who had close contact (within six feet of an infected individual for at least 15 minutes), or who had direct physical contact with the person (e.g., who were coughed on or sneezed on by the infected person), must self-quarantine.
 - **CDC continues to endorse quarantine for 14 days and recognizes that any quarantine shorter than 14 days balances [the] reduced burden [of quarantine] against a small possibility of spreading the virus [beyond 10 days]. CDC recognizes that reducing the length of quarantine may make it easier for people to quarantine by reducing the time they cannot play sports. Close contacts who remain asymptomatic may consider the following to consider stopping quarantine:**
 - After day 10 without testing.
 - After day 7 after receiving a negative test result (test must occur on day 5 or later).
 - **After stopping quarantine, close contacts should:**
 - Watch for symptoms until day 14 after exposure.
 - If you have symptoms, immediately self-isolate and contact your local public health authority or healthcare provider.
 - Youth who are not required to quarantine due to exposure occurring in a classroom setting under school-based exposure guidance are permitted to participate in outdoor sports activities as long as they remain symptom-free and follow applicable sports guidance.
 - If the identity of all persons in close contact with an infected individual cannot be readily determined or if the coaches, players or their parents/guardians or administration of the team do not effectively cooperate with the local health department contact tracing process, then the local health department may require the entire team, including coaches, to self-quarantine for 14 days following exposure. Individuals may return to play afterward if they have not had any COVID-19 symptoms.
 - **Your local health department shall determine if modifications to quarantines are appropriate.**

- Individuals must maintain a minimum of six feet of social distancing, including athletes when not on the field of play.
- Facial coverings are required under the Sports Order. At minimum facial coverings should be cloth/fabric and cover an individual's nose, mouth, and chin.
- CDC does not discourage gaiters, but recommends that gaiters should have two layers, or fold it to make two layers <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html>.

Requirements for Coaches

- For out-of-state travel, follow the COVID-19 guidance of the state and local public health jurisdiction to which the team is traveling. Also be aware of Ohio's Travel Advisories (<https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/families-and-individuals/COVID-19-Travel-Advisory/COVID-19-Travel-Advisory>).
- Coaches and other personnel must wear face masks at all times, including when arriving and departing the facility and during active play.
 - Under the state's Sports Order, at minimum facial coverings (masks) should be cloth/fabric and cover an individual's nose, mouth, and chin.
- Sanitize equipment as often as time permits.
- Coaches who wish to discuss a rule or a ruling on the field must maintain at least six feet of physical distance from the umpire.
- Base coaches must stay six feet from all runners at all times.
- Do not shake hands or fist bump other officials, players or coaches.

Requirements for Players

- Conduct daily symptom assessments before each practice or contest.
- No congregating before or after practices or games is permitted.
- Do not share equipment, towels, facial coverings, water bottles, other drinks or food. If equipment must be shared, proper sanitation must be performed between users.
- All players must sanitize their hands should their gloves be removed before and after warm-ups and at period breaks.
- All those on the bench shall observe social distancing of six feet.
- Facial coverings are required under the Sports Order for student-athletes not participating in the contest, and/or players in the dugout/bench area when not playing defense. At minimum, facial coverings should be cloth/fabric and cover an individual's nose, mouth, and chin.
- Do not shake hands or fist bump other officials, players or coaches.

Requirements for Facility Hosts

- Inform the local health district when events are scheduled and establish a plan to handle those persons who fail a symptom assessment or temperature check or exhibit signs and symptoms of COVID-19.
- Limit bench and/or sideline personnel to participants, coaches, medical staff and game-day staff.
- If possible, provide designated space (locker room, classroom, etc.) for officials' pregame and post-game activities. If the designated space cannot accommodate six-foot social distancing of all officials, then a separate space should be provided where officials can observe six-foot social distancing and be removed from spectator/team interaction.
- Clearly review prior to the contest mandates, best practices and school/host facility policies with visiting team administrators and/or coaches and officials as they relate to, but are not limited to, parking; entrances and exits; medical care; spectators; ticketing; locker rooms/showers; athletic training rooms and restrooms; water; towels; equipment, and shelters in the event there is inclement weather.
- Seating must be in groups of no more than four people who know one another, although up to six members of the same household may be seated together.
- Each seating group must be separated from the next group by at least six feet in each direction.
- In fixed seating, seating groups must be assigned in staggered rows to prevent contact between groups.
- General admission (e.g., lawns, standing room, in-fields) is allowable only to the extent six feet of distance between groups of patrons can be clearly marked and strictly maintained.

- High touch areas (railings, restrooms, athletic training rooms, locker rooms, etc.) must be cleaned and disinfected frequently.
- Hand sanitizer must be readily available throughout the venue.
- Designate a Compliance Officer who is responsible for compliance with the Ohio Department of Health Director's Sports Order.
- Follow Responsible RestartOhio Guidance for Restaurants for concession stands:
<https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/responsible/Restaurants-and-Bars.pdf>

Requirements for Spectators

- Conduct daily symptom assessments before each contest.
- No congregating before or after practices or games is permitted.
- Six-foot social distancing must be maintained between individuals/family groups.
- Facial coverings are required unless exceptions can be met as listed in Ohio Department of Health Director's Sports Order. At minimum, facial coverings should be cloth/fabric and cover an individual's nose, mouth, and chin.

Requirements for Umpires

- Facial coverings must be worn at all times with the exception of active officiating or warm up. At minimum, facial coverings should be cloth/fabric and cover an individual's nose, mouth, and chin.
- Take your temperature prior to attending your competition. If temperature is above 100.4 or you do not feel well, notify your contracted school immediately.
- No congregating before or after games is permitted.
- Six-foot social distancing required during pre- and post-game conferences and during stoppage of play during contests.
- The plate umpire calling balls and strikes shall allow adequate distance behind the catcher while still being able to perform his or her duty.
- Do not shake hands or fist bump other officials, players or coaches.

Softball Umpire Mechanics Modifications

- The plate umpire calling balls and strikes shall allow adequate distance behind the catcher while still being able to perform his or her duty.
- The catcher and batter shall be at a six-foot distance when the umpire is dusting off home plate.
- Fielders shall be at a six-foot distance when the umpire is dusting off the pitcher's plate or any other base.
- Base umpires shall maintain six feet from any player when in any starting or initial position.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Coaches

- Communicate your guidelines in a clear manner to students and parents prior to events with reminders as appropriate.
- Consider conducting practices in "pods" of same students, always training and rotating together in practice to ensure more limited exposure if someone develops an infection.
- Keep accurate records of those athletes and staff who attend each practice and contests in case contact tracing is needed.
- At a minimum, before and after every practice or contest, sanitize equipment as often as time permits with an EPA approved sanitizer for emerging pathogens.
- Consider limiting contests against only teams in your local area or, if out-of-state, against teams located in counties that are contiguous to Ohio.
- Should not share clipboards, whiteboards, dry erase boards or any other equipment used for coaching purposes.
- It is recommended that each team have an equipment handler to remove bats and helmets from the field of play. This person may wear gloves and/or sanitize equipment after use.
- Consider limiting day-of roster to 22 dressed players.

Recommendations for Players

- Athletes should tell coaches immediately when they are not feeling well.
- Arrive at the facility dressed in partial or full uniform and plan to leave the facility in partial or full uniform.
- Consider making each student responsible for their own supplies and ensure distancing of equipment to avoid cross contamination.
- Students should wear their own appropriate workout clothing (do not share clothing), and individual clothing/towels should be washed and cleaned after every workout.
- If equipment must be shared, proper sanitation must be administered between users.
- Cloth face coverings/masks are permitted during active play if an individual prefers to wear one. Cloth face coverings/masks are not required while engaged in active play. State and local requirements for face coverings are to be followed when not actively engaged in play.
 - If worn on the field, face coverings may be of any number of colors, but not distracting.
 - Gaiters are permitted as face coverings. If a gaiter is worn, it should have two layers, or fold it to make two layers, per CDC's recommendation.
- Bring your own water bottle.
- It is recommended that sunflower seeds, gum and similar products be prohibited in the confines of the field.

Recommendations for Umpires

- Arrive at the facility dressed in partial or full uniform and plan to leave the facility in partial or full uniform.
- Bring personal hand sanitizer. Wash hands frequently.
- Do not share equipment.
- Follow social distancing guidelines. Consider six feet minimum distance when talking to others (players, coaches, other officials).
- Cloth face coverings/masks/shields are permitted, if an individual prefers to wear one.
- Gloves are permissible.

Recommendations for Parents

(A family's role in maintaining safety guidelines for themselves and others):

- Make sure your child and immediate household members are free from illness before participating in practice and competition (if there is doubt stay home).
- Provide personal items for your child and clearly label them.
- Disinfect your student's personal equipment after each game or practice.
- Educate yourself on the risks and benefits of athletic participation in the time of COVID and ensure you and your athlete are aware of the guidance surrounding athletic events.

Recommendations for Facility Hosts

- If applicable, stagger the entry of all participants, coaches, officials, student game-day auxiliary groups and spectators to adhere to six-foot social distancing.
- Consider multiple points of entry to help ensure there is six-foot social distancing.
- Use contact-less payments where possible.
- Limit press box/official scorers area to essential personnel only and demonstrate social distancing as much as possible.
- Appoint an individual(s) who is responsible for assisting the host facility manager(s) in logging all incidents and action plans when mandates have not been followed and/or incidents occur; logging recommendations for improving the host facilities' game-day strategies, and creating reports on said items that were logged.

Exchange of Lineups

- Beside the requirements listed previously regarding lineup cards for the umpire, it is recommended that lineups be exchanged team-to-team and teams-to-scorekeeper being shared via photo or text.

OHSAA Postseason Note

Potential options may be considered regarding all levels of OHSAA Tournament games/format depending upon the status of COVID-19.

A Note on Public Health Issues

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Ohio Governor, Ohio General Assembly, Ohio Department of Health and/or the local health district will offer guidance as to whether to close a school or university due to a public health issue. Local decisions can also be made by the local health authority or each board of education/governing board.

Helpful Links

These resources are provided to guide operations during this Covid-19 pandemic.

- Ohio Department of Health – Coronavirus (COVID-19):
<https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/responsible-restart-ohio/>
- Centers for Disease Control – Coronavirus (COVID-19):
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- National Athletic Trainers Association – Coronavirus (COVID-19):
<https://www.nata.org/practice-patient-care/health-issues/covid-19-coronavirus>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Emergency Preparedness and Response:
<http://emergency.cdc.gov/planning/>
- Ohio Department of Health:
<https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/odh/home/>