



To: NJSIAA Member Schools
From: NJSIAA Sports Advisory Task Force
Date: August 20, 2020
RE: Return-to-Play Plan

The NJSIAA Sports Advisory Task Force is pleased to announce the Return-to-Play Plan for the 2020 – 2021 school year. Please note that this plan is fluid and may be changed at any time based on either guidance from the Department of Health or Governor-mandated changes to the school day.

As is detailed below, to accommodate Girls Volleyball and Gymnastics (the fall indoor sports), and any fall outdoor sport that is rescheduled from its regular season as a result of changed circumstances, an additional season has been added to the schedule this year.

Sports Advisory Task Force Guiding Principles

1. Ensure the health and safety of all student-athletes.
2. Re-engage all student-athletes as soon as possible for their social, emotional and mental well-being.
3. Provide opportunities for participation in all sports.
4. Keep competition as local as possible for as long as possible.
5. Develop multiple return-to-play models to minimize the risk of a cancelled season.
6. Maintain the ability to pivot to back-up plans when deemed necessary.
7. Minimize potential impact on the spring season.
8. Minimize the importance of post-season, state-wide championships. The focus this year is on participation, as opposed to championships.

Fall Sports – Season 1

All outdoor fall sports (Cross Country, Field Hockey, Football, Soccer, and Girls Tennis) will start practice on Monday, September 14, 2020. Due to the current health concerns surrounding indoor competition, as well as limitations on indoor capacity, Girls Volleyball and Gymnastics will move to Season 3.

From Saturday, August 29th, – Sunday, September 13, 2020, coaches may only have virtual contact with their student-athletes. This will be in effect for all schools. It is important that all students, whether they are attending class in-person or virtually, acclimate to their new school setting before beginning athletic activities.

However, Heat Acclimatization for Field Hockey and Football may start on Friday, September 11, 2020– this is an optional early start.

The regular season and post-season dates for the fall season are as follows:

Sport	Regular Season Start	Regular Season Finish	Post-Season Dates
G Tennis	Sep. 28 th	Oct. 23 rd	Oct. 24 th – Oct. 31 st
Cross Country, Field Hockey, Soccer	Oct. 1 st	Nov. 12 th	Nov. 13 th – Nov. 22 nd
Football	Oct. 2 nd	Nov. 7 th	Nov. 13 th – Nov. 22 nd

Please refer to each sport’s Modified COVID-19 Sports Regulations and Considerations for further information on maximum games, weekly game limits and post-season competition dates. These documents will be available on the NJSIAA website under each sport’s specific web page beginning Monday, Aug. 24, 2020.

Thanksgiving football games will be permissible after Sunday, November 22, 2020 at each school’s discretion.

Scrimmages:

Schools will have the opportunity to participate in one pre-season scrimmage, preferably with a neighboring school. The scrimmage may occur any time within seven days of the regular season start date for that sport. However, football teams may begin scrimmaging on Thursday, September 24, 2020. When possible, schools are encouraged to participate in intra-squad scrimmages and utilize officials to provide additional preseason preparation.

Post-Season:

The NJSIAA will strive to open post-season participation to any school wishing to participate. Depending on the sport, the post-season will be structured regionally based on counties or based on NJSIAA Sections. The 2019 – 2020 classifications will be relied on if Sectional championships are hosted.

Seeding committees will be convened for each sport in order to reduce the reliance on power points and other ranking systems. Objective data may be reviewed by the seeding committee, but it may also consider school location and other criteria.

Out-of-State Competition:

Out-of-state competition is prohibited, unless a waiver is granted for exceptional circumstances.

Transfers:

Any student-athlete that is subject to a transfer sit-period will be eligible for participation on Thursday, October 15, 2020. This eligibility date is applicable to every fall sport. As a reminder, those student-athletes that transferred between March 16, 2020 and September 1, 2020 are not subject to the transfer sit-period. If a student-athlete transfers after September 1, 2020, the student-athlete shall be ineligible to participate for a period of 30 calendar days, or one half of the maximum number of games being played, whichever is less.

Contingency Plans:

Season 3 will be used as a back-up should the fall season need to be suspended due to deteriorating health circumstances. In the event of a suspension, NJSIAA will consider the percent of the season that has been completed and will evaluate whether the season should be resumed during Season 3.

Winter Sports – Season 2

Winter Sports will start practice on Thursday, December 3, 2020. Regular season competition will begin Monday, December 21, 2020 and end on Wednesday, February 3, 2021. NJSIAA will host post-season competition from Friday, February 5, 2021 through Wednesday, February 17, 2021.

Scrimmages:

Schools will have the opportunity to participate in one pre-season scrimmage, preferably with a neighboring school. The scrimmage may occur any time within seven days of the regular season start date for that sport. When possible, schools are encouraged to participate in intra-squad scrimmages and utilize officials to provide additional preseason preparation.

Post-Season:

The NJSIAA will strive to open post-season participation to any school wishing to participate. Depending on the sport, the post-season will be structured regionally based on counties or based on NJSIAA Sections. The 2019 – 2020 classifications will be relied on if Sectional championships are hosted.

Seeding committees will be convened for each sport in order to reduce the reliance on power points and other ranking systems. Objective data may be reviewed by the seeding committee, but it may also consider school location and other criteria.

Out-of-State Competition:

Out-of-state competition is prohibited, unless a waiver is granted for exceptional circumstances.

Transfers:

Any student-athlete that is subject to a transfer sit-period will be eligible for participation on Monday, January 11, 2021. This eligibility date is applicable to every winter sport. As a reminder, those student-athletes that transferred between March 16, 2020 and November 1, 2020 are not subject to the transfer sit-period. If a student-athlete transfers after November 1, 2020, the student-athlete shall be ineligible to participate for a period of 30 calendar days, or one half of the maximum number of games being played, whichever is less.

Girls Volleyball/Gymnastics – Season 3

Girls Volleyball and Gymnastics will start practice on Tuesday, February 16, 2021. Regular season competition will begin Wednesday, March 3, 2021 and end on Wednesday, April 14, 2021. NJSIAA will host post-season competition from Thursday, April 15, 2021 through Saturday, April 24, 2021.

These same dates will apply to any fall sport that must be played during Season 3.

Scrimmages:

Schools will have the opportunity to participate in one pre-season scrimmage, preferably with a neighboring school. The scrimmage may occur any time within seven days of the regular season start date for that sport. When possible, schools are encouraged to participate in intra-squad scrimmages and utilize officials to provide additional preseason preparation.

Post-Season:

The NJSIAA will strive to open post-season participation to any school wishing to participate. Depending on the sport, the post-season will be structured regionally based on counties or based on NJSIAA Sections. The 2019 – 2020 classifications will be relied on if Sectional championships are hosted.

Seeding committees will be convened for each sport in order to reduce the reliance on power points and other ranking systems. Objective data may be reviewed by the seeding committee, but it may also consider school location and other criteria.

Out of State Competition:

Out-of-state competition is prohibited, unless a waiver is granted for exceptional circumstances.

Transfers:

Any student-athlete that is subject to a transfer sit-period will be eligible for participation on Wednesday, March 24, 2021. Those student-athletes that transferred between March 16, 2020 and September 1, 2020 are not subject to the transfer sit-period. If a student-athlete transfers after September 1, 2020, the student-athlete shall be ineligible to participate for a period of 30 calendar days, or one half of the maximum number of games being played, whichever is less.

Spring Sports – Season 4

The dates for the spring sports season will be announced a later date. There are many variables that will affect the start of the spring season, including the status of the virus and how many sports, if any, have been moved to Season 3. The practice start date and regular season start date will most likely be pushed back for all spring sports. Also, the regular season and post-season will most likely end later than prior years for those sports that have such flexibility. The task force is striving to get each sport started as timely as possible; however, minimizing potential overlap and the risk of student-athletes having to choose between seasons is a priority. Therefore, the spring start dates, regular season and post-season dates may be staggered by sport; however, the task force recognizes the need to maximize the spring season due to the loss of season last school year.

We appreciate your continued flexibility and understanding as we navigate the start of the fall sports season.

Sports Advisory Task Force Members:

Dave Frazier, Rutherford HS, Chair; and NFHS Board of Directors member

Tom Mullahey, Clifton HS, Executive Committee 1st Vice-President

Denis Nelson, River Dell HS

Kevin Murphy, Washington Township HS

Ryan Miller, Scotch Plains-Fanwood HS

Todd Ricker, Parsippany Hills HS

Dan Uszaki, Northern Burlington Regional HS