

Ohio High School Athletic Association

TO: OHSAA Member Schools' Superintendents, Principals and Athletic Administrators

FR: Bob Goldring, Interim Executive Director

Good afternoon to each of you as we continue to provide updated information on the Governor's Responsible Restart with sports programs. We hope these updates are helpful. They are an attempt to help eliminate confusion and rumors.

To begin and to reiterate, the OHSAA Office is moving forward with the normal start of the fall sports seasons, **meaning practices will begin on August 1 and we will conduct our usual series of tournaments in 10 fall sports.** We also realize that the Governor's Office has yet to approve contact sports scrimmages and/or contests being permissible with other school teams (*see below regarding information on extension of the latest Department of Health Order*). However, we are committed to moving forward in starting our fall sports on August 1 and are hopeful that school-to-school competition in ALL sports will be permissible by that date. As you all have seen during this pandemic, those plans can be modified or cancelled quickly since, just like the Governor's Office and all of you, our focus is on the health, safety and well-being of our student-athletes, which is paramount in moving forward with interscholastic athletics.

PURPOSE

We want to assure you that we certainly are in concert with understanding that the physical and mental benefits of participation in education-based interscholastic athletics are numerous and are heightened even more during this pandemic. Students who participate learn life lessons in an environment that cannot be duplicated. Academic achievement, the development of leadership and social skills as well as the mental health benefits are known to be greatly enhanced in students who participate in our programs compared to those who do not. There is no doubt that the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic has already resulted in thousands of our students missing out on these life-shaping educational experiences over the past several months, and we certainly hope we can return to some type of normalcy as it relates to interscholastic athletics soon.

GUIDANCE

Since March 12, no doubt each member school has developed their own health and safety guidelines to allow student-athletes to train, condition and, in some cases, compete as they prepare for the upcoming interscholastic sports season. To that end, we have heard the membership **loud and clear** that recommendations on return to play are needed from the OHSAA Office. Believe me, we have been working tirelessly to finalize such guidance, but we absolutely want to be in concert with the Governor's Office and the Department of Health to ensure that what we provide is not in conflict with the requirements, orders and other recommendations that are in place. **The OHSAA's Return To Play Recommendations document will be sent once it is approved by the Governor's Office and Department of Health.** As previously mentioned, we are also planning to share a student-athlete acknowledgement/pledge document that we hope you will consider using. This educational tool will provide student-athletes with information on their responsibilities in participating during the pandemic.

#IWantASeason

Just like the majority of our member school administrators, coaches, student-athletes, contest officials, parent/fans and others associated with interscholastic athletics, the OHSAA wants a season to occur and, in particular, our fall seasons. I would be remiss if I did not remind everyone that, as Governor DeWine said in his address Wednesday afternoon, if we want a season, we all have to be "willing to sacrifice today for a better tomorrow." We all need "to take action now – to sacrifice now – so our kids can be in school this fall, so they can at least have a chance to play sports." So, as an organization, the OHSAA is reminding everyone that, in order for interscholastic athletics to occur, we all need to follow the protocols that have been put in place.

Related and as already shared, the OHSAA, in conjunction with the Governor's Office, has announced a social media awareness campaign to engage student-athletes and younger Ohioans in efforts to slow the spread of the coronavirus. Everyone who looks forward to return to play can join in the campaign by sharing a video or photo that emphasizes how they plan to wear a mask, practice social distancing and wash their hands more regularly in order to slow the spread and keep the path open for sports to return in 2020. Those participating in the campaign should use the hashtag **#IWantASeason**.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH ORDER ON CONTACT SPORTS EXTENDED

As noted in the second paragraph of this update, the Ohio Department of Health has extended a Director's Order that provides guidance for CONTACT SPORTS. **Intra-team** practices, training, open gyms, scrimmages, games and tournaments are permitted. **Inter-team (with another team)** practices, training, open gyms, scrimmages, games and tournaments are also permitted **so long as all teams involved agree to comply with the requirements set forth in the Director's Order.** As Lt. Governor Husted emphasized when this "trial" order first came out, the responsibility is with all of us to continue exercising safe practices to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Here is a link to the Director's Order that has been extended through July 22 (originally expired July 15):

<https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/publicorders/Ext-Exp-2nd-Amended-Order-Contact-Sport-Practices.pdf>

Here is a link to additional, short-term guidelines related to the Order to help sports team continue their efforts to return to play:

<https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/responsible/Games-Leagues-Conferences-Tournaments-Contact-Sports.pdf>

AND FINALLY

Thank you for your patience and understanding during this time, and we will continue to provide updates as they become available!