



Joint Guidance on Modified Sports Seasons for School Year 2020-21

Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

August 18, 2020

As the Commonwealth of Massachusetts begins the process of opening schools, we must also look at the possibility of providing athletic experiences for our students. Sports can be an important part of a well-rounded educational experience, even during the current public health crisis. Notwithstanding the risks associated with COVID-19, organized physical activity should be encouraged, within clear health and safety parameters. Most sports can be played in ways that minimize those risks. In many cases, that will mean that inter-scholastic competitions may not look the same and may need to be played under fairly stringent restrictions with modified rules. Unfortunately, in some cases, competitive play may need to be cancelled or postponed. While difficult for all involved, it is essential that we keep health and safety paramount, both for everyone directly involved and the wider community.

Working in close consultation with a variety of stakeholders and our medical advisors and based on the [Youth and Adult Amateur Sports Guidance](#) recently provided by the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA), the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA) and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) have collaborated to provide the following modified sports schedule for school year 2020-21 and guidance for sports participation for students who are learning remotely. Please note that this guidance is pending ratification by the MIAA board and is subject to change throughout the school year.

The MIAA, in consultation with their medical advisers and EEA, will develop sport-specific modifications to meet the guidance from EEA for issuance prior to the start of each season. At this time, based on current statewide health data, sports that the EEA guidance lists as lower and moderate risk may be held during their normal seasons, provided that MIAA's recommended modifications specific to those sports meet the standards outlined in the EEA guidance. For the fall season, higher risk sports, including football, cheer, and unified basketball, will be practice only, using the cohort method described in the [EEA guidance](#). Schools/districts choosing to engage in practice for these sports must complete the [Sport Attestation Compliance](#) form and keep it on file.

Higher risk sports in later seasons will continue to be evaluated in light of health metrics and the EEA guidance, and MIAA will make final decisions in consultation with their medical advisers closer to the start of each season. The sports that MIAA ultimately does not approve to be played

in their normal season will be moved or considered for later in the year during the floating season.

The health and safety of our school communities must remain the top priority, and we recognize that any plans for athletic opportunities must adapt to evolving public health metrics.

2020-21 Modified Sports Seasons

All sports must adhere to the minimum modifications outlined in the EEA guidance to achieve Level 3 play (inter-team competition). If those modifications cannot be met, the sport may consider moving to a later season or adopting a “practice only” model using the EEA cohort method and in alignment with other EEA guidelines. Guidance from EEA will be re-issued prior to the start of each season, based on public health data, testing availability, and any new information, and MIAA will make final decisions for each season following that updated guidance.

| Season | Dates | Sports |
|------------------------|-------------------|--|
| Fall | Starting Sept. 18 | Golf, XC running, field hockey, soccer, gymnastics, girls volleyball, fall swimming/diving, football practice,* cheer practice,* unified basketball practice* *Practice only using EEA cohort modifications : Football, cheer, unified basketball |
| Winter | TBA by MIAA | Winter gymnastics, boys and girls indoor track, ski, dance, winter swimming/diving, cheer, hockey, basketball, wrestling |
| Floating season | TBA by MIAA | Sports unable to play in earlier seasons may engage in Level 3 play (competitions) if permitted by updated EEA guidelines. Schools that offered only remote learning in early fall may use this season for play that was missed during their remote schedule. |
| Spring | TBA by MIAA | Girls golf, baseball, softball, tennis, boys volleyball, girls and boys lacrosse, track and field, rugby |

At this time, the sports listed above have been conditionally approved for the fall season, provided they are able to meet the minimum modifications outlined in the EEA guidance. For the fall season football, cheer, and unified basketball will be practice only, using the cohort method described in the [EEA guidance](#). Schools/districts choosing to engage in practice for these sports must complete the [Sport Attestation Compliance](#) form and keep it on file.

Higher risk sports in later seasons (including hockey, basketball, wrestling, boys lacrosse, and rugby) will continue to be evaluated in light of health metrics and the EEA guidance and final decisions will be made closer to the start of each season. Those that are ultimately not approved by MIAA to be played in a season will be moved or considered for later in the year during the floating season, as reflected above. All sports, regardless of risk level, must follow the EEA guidelines, and moderate and higher risk sports must adopt the required minimum modifications for achieving different levels of play. To be able to engage in competitive play, modifications should include eliminating deliberate contact, modifying or eliminating intermittent contact, and increasing distancing. If these modifications are not possible, the sport may achieve a modified Level 2 play (competitive practice) using the cohort method outlined in the [EEA guidance](#). Again, schools/districts choosing to engage in practice for these sports must complete the [Sport Attestation Compliance](#) form and keep it on file. The EEA guidance also outlines best practices for all sports, including the use of protective equipment and masks. The sport specific modifications and plan for implementation will be developed by MIAA in consultation with their medical advisors.

Based on the schedule above, school districts should work with MIAA to develop their schedules for the year and be ready to modify those schedules as needed. More detailed information on the guidelines for practices and the start of competitions will be outlined in the guidance that MIAA will release.

Sports participation for remote learners

Districts designated as “red” based on the [Department of Public Health \(DPH\)’s metric](#) of average daily cases per 100,000 residents and which therefore have their high school students learning remotely at the start of a season, *must postpone their entire season, including practices*, until the floating season later in the year.

Districts designated as yellow, green, or unshaded based on the DPH metric that nonetheless have their high school students learning remotely at the start of a season *may similarly delay their season to the floating season*. If a yellow, green, or unshaded district that is only offering remote learning to its high school students wishes to participate in the regularly scheduled sports season, this must be approved by the local school committee.

The MIAA will develop a timeline for looking at data prior to the start of each season to determine which color-coded designation a district should fall into for the purposes of engaging in sports. For example, the MIAA could determine a school’s color-coded designation/eligibility on September 1 to determine initial eligibility and check again on October 1 to determine if the school remains eligible to participate in the fall season.