



MEMO

TO: NYSPHSAA Section Executive Directors
FR: Dr. Robert J. Zayas, NYSPHSAA Executive Director
RE: Mask Toleration for Student-Athletes
DATE: September 22, 2021

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On September 2, 2021, the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) released the Interim NYSDOH Guidance For Classroom Instruction in P-12 Schools During the 2021-2022 Academic Year. The full guidance document is linked below:

<https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2021/09/school-guidance.pdf>

The above referenced guidance mandates that all students, personnel, teachers, administrators, contractors, and visitors must wear masks at all times indoors, regardless of vaccination status.

I recently sought clarification from New York State officials pertaining to student-athlete mask use. I asked, can a student-athlete who is engaged in physical activity (indoors) have the ability to remove their face covering if they are not able to “tolerate” the face covering?

State Officials provided the following response:

“DOH’s guidance does make some accommodation for indoor sports where masking is not possible, but with the caveat that individuals must be distanced 6 feet apart, but otherwise participants must wear masks. Masking is not required for outdoor sports. Unlike some prior guidance, CDC’s most recent masking guidance does not make an exception for school sports/activities where masking may not be “tolerable” to a participant, unless the participant has an ADA recognized disability. In fact, the CDC guidance recommends masking for activities in the same manner as for regular classroom/in school.

Therefore, if individuals are participating in indoor sports and it is not possible for them to wear masks, they must maintain at least 6 feet physical distancing at all times when unmasked. If it is not possible for them to wear masks and not possible to maintain 6 foot distancing at all times, then that individual should not participate in the event. Obviously keep in mind that the CDC currently recommends that high risk-sports in areas with high community spread should not occur unless all participants are fully vaccinated. That is not currently a state requirement, but since CDC recommends canceling these events, taking an abundance of caution so that they can occur is preferred.”



The September 2nd NYSDOH guidance included the following:

“9. Sports and extracurricular activities – Schools must consider the range of mitigation measures available to them and described in the “Sports and Other Extracurricular Activities” section of the CDC guidance to maximize the safety of all people (players, coaches, spectators), including vaccination, screening testing, and, if necessary, canceling all sports and extracurricular activities in counties with high transmission. The Commissioner’s determination for masking in schools issued pursuant to 10 NYCRR 2.60 applies to indoor settings, including for sports and extracurricular activities. For indoor sports and extracurricular activities in which masking is not possible (e.g., swimming), a minimum distance of 6 feet must be maintained to deviate from the above referenced Commissioner’s determination.”

I continue to encourage school districts to work in collaboration with local health officials to address risk minimization efforts associated with interscholastic athletic participation during this public health crisis.