



Return to Sport

COVID-19 Guidelines

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Introduction

Baseball Ontario remains committed to the safety of the baseball community in Ontario. While we are anxious for the return of our game, reopening baseball must take place within the context of the general reopening from COVID-19 closures occurring within the province. While we love baseball, the health and welfare of our participants must not be compromised. This document, as it may be updated from time to time, provides guidance on how baseball can return when it is deemed safe to do so by the Province of Ontario, municipal governments and public health authorities.

The principal purpose of this document is to provide a required framework and general recommendations to the Baseball Ontario community, during the global COVID-19 pandemic, for the safe return to baseball. The framework in this document is subject to all provincial emergency orders, advice and recommendations of public health authorities, municipal by-laws or other requirements, and requirements of facility owners. To the extent of any conflict between this framework and these other requirements, these other requirements prevail over the framework.

This document will be periodically updated as the provincial situation, recommendations and guidelines continue to evolve. As revisions are made, the most current version of the document will be located on the Baseball Ontario website and membership will be advised through Baseball Ontario's weekly Inside Pitch, its OnDeck app and through its social media channels.

As updated from time to time, this document shall remain in full force and effect until such time as Baseball Ontario's Board of Management rescinds its provisions.

Who should read this document?

All participants (players, coaches, umpires, officials, volunteers) and their parents/guardians in the case of minors should familiarize themselves with the requirements and recommendations contained in this document prior to their return to baseball (training and competition) activities.

Local Associations, Affiliated Associations, Select Loops and Select Associations, their respective teams and any other group or teams insured through Baseball Ontario ("Member Organizations") must use and follow this framework to establish minimum standards and protocols for return to baseball (training and competition) within their own jurisdiction.

Member Organizations are strongly recommended to develop their own specific written policies and operating protocols and have them approved by their own board of directors. Such policies and protocols must be compliant with Baseball Ontario's guidelines together with municipal and provincial legislation and COVID-19 specific policies issued by government and local public health authorities. Changes to such legislation and policies should be monitored closely and the Member Organization's policies updated as required, ensuring that the Member Organization is applying the required standard of care and complying with local requirements. Member Organizations can supplement this framework with additional requirements for their own specific context, but cannot lessen the requirements of this framework.

Any Member Organization can, in its absolute discretion, determine that it is suspending or continuing to suspend its in-person baseball activities without sanction or penalty from Baseball Ontario.

Players' Return to Activity

Players should not return to their baseball activities without considering the harmful effects of detraining. In fact, players may be exposed to situations of early fatigue due to reduced aerobic capacity or to injuries due to impaired muscle function, which can result in being counterproductive for his/her health.

When designing and carrying out physical exercise sessions, it will, therefore, be important to consider intensity, frequency, volume and method of exercise. A gradual increase is very important: after a period of reduced training, it is essential to understand the importance of following a period of gradual re-training. A resumption of physical activity by increasing both volume and intensity, but without modulating recovery periods, could lead to excessive fatigue or, in some cases, cause muscle injury or health problems.

The physical reconditioning should include a training program containing postural, stretching, core-stability and balance exercises to increase muscle tone and, at the same time, a program of endurance activities to improve aerobic capacity. Later, it would be appropriate to gradually introduce the sport's specific movements, and in particular throwing and arm care.

Until it is possible to return to full squad practices, outdoors and/or at the gym, the suggestion is to maintain an active lifestyle, by dedicating at least 45-60 minutes every day practicing activities that allow the maintenance of a good state of health combining aerobic activities with muscle strengthening and flexibility exercises. The workout intensity must vary according to individual physical and training conditions, as well as climatic conditions, possibly gradually increasing over time.

Recommended Standards

The list of protocols below set out the minimum standards for the organization of baseball events. While these guidelines will help mitigate the risk of COVID-19 infections - they cannot eliminate it completely. Persons, who do not feel safe in returning to baseball activities, are encouraged to refrain from doing so and will not be subject to any penalties or sanctions from Baseball Ontario and/or Member Organizations.

General

(applies to all practice, competition, team meetings or other in-person team activities)

Numbers

- At no point will a baseball event exceed the number of attendees (including players, coaches, umpires, association officials, volunteers, parents and other family members) noted as the maximum number by the Province of Ontario, or any relevant municipality or public health authority.
- The number of participants involved should be reviewed and kept down to the absolute essential (e.g. Team members, Officials, Umpires, Event staff, Volunteers, etc.)

- If the Province of Ontario and/or municipalities or public health authorities establish different Stages (or zones) of reopening in different areas of the province, the Stage established for the municipality where the team is located (i.e. home diamond) applies to that team. Travel by a team to another area of the province does not mean that the team can rely on the Stage of reopening of that other area.
- Coaching staff will keep an attendance tracker (written or electronic through the Baseball Ontario OnDeck app) for all practices, games and in-person activities including all players, coaches, umpires, parents and others in attendance, including name and contact information (e-mail or phone).
 - If the attendance tracker is done in written form, within 24 hours of the event, the coaching staff will provide their Local Association or Select Association with a copy of the attendance tracker for each event. Local Associations and/or Select Associations will produce the attendance tracker to Baseball Ontario, their Affiliated Association, Select Loop or Public Health upon request.
 - If the attendance tracker is done through the Baseball Ontario OnDeck app, Baseball Ontario will provide the information to the relevant Member Organization(s) and Public Health upon request.

Screening/Diagnosed with COVID-19/Return from COVID-19

- Self-screening through <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/> is required by all participants, volunteers and spectators prior to attending any game, practice, meeting or other in-person team activity and any individual shall not attend if they fail the screening protocol.
- A person, who is identified as part of an at-risk group, but otherwise passes the screening questions is discouraged from participating in in-person baseball activities, but they are not considered to have failed the screening protocol.
- Any participant, volunteer or spectator diagnosed with COVID-19 or who has been in contact with any person having COVID-19 in the previous 14 days MUST not attend any game, practice, meeting or other in-person team activity and MUST notify their local public health authority.
- Any participant, volunteer or spectator diagnosed with COVID-19 must be cleared by appropriate medical authorities prior to attending any in-person baseball activity. Evidence of the clearance needs to be provided to the Member Organization.

Cleaning/Sanitization

(The following apply whereof the guidelines refer to cleaning, sanitizing, disinfecting, wiping or similar terms):

- Teams are to have soap and water or 70% (or higher) alcohol hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes (or acceptable option) readily available at all times, and especially in any medical treatment areas. A list of recommended disinfectants is available on the Health Canada website: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>
- General cleaning shall be done with microfiber cloths and appropriate cleaning products from the previous bullet.
- General cleaning shall take place several times a day using different cleaning cloths for each type of object/surface (i.e. doors, tables, chairs, control panels such as those for scoreboards, remote controls, etc.)
- All cleaning personnel (not including those individuals who work for the municipality or facility owner, who shall follow whatever guidelines are established by their employer) shall be protected appropriately with face mask and protective gloves at a minimum.

- This applies to the cleaning of facilities and/or equipment in accordance with the requirements of this document.
- At 15U and below, only adults shall perform cleaning/sanitization functions. At 16U and above, players and adults may perform cleaning/sanitization functions.
- Those not involved in the cleaning/sanitization shall stay a minimum of 2 metres away from the cleaning/sanitization activities.
- Cleaning/sanitization products will not be used by or stored within access of young children.
- Where this document requires the use of protective gloves, this shall mean PPE gloves and not batting gloves or baseball mitts.

Implementation of Safe Physical Distance

- Maintain minimum of 2 metres distancing during physical activity, including warm ups, pre-game and post-game activities, wherever possible.
- Use of dugouts should be avoided where safe physical distance cannot be maintained
- Use as much space as required outside the dugout (but in safe areas outside of the field of play) to maintain adequate physical distance
- Avoid congestion at points of entry to the diamond (i.e. gates, dugout doors, etc.) to allow maintenance of 2 metres distancing among participants
- If spectators are in attendance, specific spectator measures for physical distancing shall be set as required/recommended by the local public health authorities.

Use of Face Masks / Face Coverings

- Players and coaches are required to wear non-medical face masks or face coverings while off the field of play including while on the bench during the game.
- Players are encouraged to wear non-medical face masks or face coverings during play.
- Coaches in the field of play must wear non-medical face masks or face coverings when they approach a player, other coach or umpire. Coaches are encouraged to wear non-medical face masks or face coverings in other situations.

Establishment of Hygiene Standards

- Clean hands at least every inning for games or every 30 minutes or after handling shared equipment at practices
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth with your hands
- Sneeze and/or cough in a tissue or the internal crease of the elbow. Avoid contact of hands with personal respiratory points
- All potentially infected waste (i.e. disposable tissues, masks, protective gloves, etc.), hygiene material, rubbish, debris, etc., in all shared spaces (diamonds, dugouts, washrooms, change rooms, etc.) shall be disposed of safely at the end of the in-person baseball activity.

Venues

- Scheduling of diamonds must allow for a minimum of 30 minutes between the conclusion of the prior event and the start of the subsequent event to allow for: (1) the team(s) involved in the prior event to clean/sanitize equipment, dispose of garbage from common areas, and have all team members vacate the facility BEFORE (2) the team(s) involved in the subsequent event enter the facility and clean/sanitize common areas; without crossover between the teams participating in the two events. In the case of games, this may require Member Organizations to establish appropriate "drop dead" or "no new inning" rules to allow for safe crossover between events.
- Participants, volunteers and spectators for a subsequent event shall remain in their motor vehicle in the parking lot until participants, volunteers and spectators from the prior event have returned to their motor vehicles. Member Organizations should designate appropriate waiting areas for any participants, volunteers and spectators not arriving in motor vehicles. For games, both the home team and the visiting team are responsible for cleaning/sanitizing their dugout before and after games.
- It is recommended that change rooms/clubhouses not be used. If it is necessary to use them, physical distancing requirements shall be observed. The team using the change room/clubhouse shall clean/sanitize it before and after use.
- Washrooms are to be open and accessible only at the discretion and direction of the municipality or facility owner where the venue is located.
- Under no circumstances will local acceptable usage limits established by facility owners (i.e. accessing off limits areas of parks or other facilities etc.) be violated.
- Thorough disinfection of common spaces before/after use including:
 - ◆ Frequently touched areas of dugouts, including aluminum benches, bat racks and helmet racks
 - ◆ Maintenance equipment including golf carts, tractors, etc.
 - ◆ Door handles, fence/gate latches
 - ◆ Any other spaces that come into frequent touch
 - ◆ Establishment of sanitation stations with soap and water and/or alcohol-based hand sanitizers at all entrances/exits to diamonds and complexes
 - ◆ Provide disinfectant wipes and advise event staff and volunteers to disinfect door handles, fence or gate latches, and any other spaces that come into frequent touch in all areas several times per day. Where the municipality or facility owner does not provide maintenance staff to complete these duties several times per day, it is the responsibility of the Member Organization to do so.

Spectators

- If/when spectators are allowed, make sure to follow local authorities' guidelines strictly
- Ensure physical distance from participants and between spectators
- Spectators are encouraged to bring their own chairs for personal use or bring disinfectant wipes to clean the area where they sit. Municipalities and/or facility owners may or may not be cleaning bleachers on a regular basis.
- Spectators are encouraged not to wander to other areas of the park in which the diamond is located.

Thunderstorms

- If a baseball event is interrupted by thunder, participants, volunteers and spectators are to return to their motor vehicles until the baseball event is cancelled or able to resume. If someone does not have a motor vehicle, they may shelter in a safe location but must maintain a minimum of 2 metres distancing from others, if possible.

Practice

(applicable to practices and games)

Practice or training is a more controlled environment than the game environment. Practice can also accommodate fewer numbers of participants than games. Accordingly, it is envisioned that return to practice will likely occur prior to return to play. The protocols listed under General also apply to Practice. Below are some practice specific protocols to be implemented by all Member Organizations.

Equipment

- Sharing of equipment such as batting helmets, catchers' masks, or other equipment likely to have been exposed to respiratory droplets should be avoided. Each player should have his/her own bat, helmet, baseball mitt(s), batting gloves, rosin bags, etc. and store these items inside their personal bag when not in use.
 - Equipment that must be shared must be cleaned/sanitized between players' use.
- Avoid personal clothing, equipment or electronics etc. being left in common places. Store inside personal bag always.
- PPE worn in the field of play by choice of the participant recommended not to be white or grey.
- Rules of acceptable behaviour cannot be contravened.
- General equipment (eg. L-screens, field maintenance equipment, bases) must be wiped down between groups if it must be shared

Participants

Participation by those in high-risk demographics (elderly and those with chronic conditions or who are immune compromised) is discouraged.

- No spitting, including tobacco and other products
- No sunflower seeds or chewing gum
- No sharing of water/energy drink bottles or food
- No shared water jugs, coolers or drink dispensers
- No handshakes, fist or chest bumps, high fives, hugs, kisses, etc.

Indoor Practices

Indoor workouts are merely a particular form of practice and all protocols required by these Baseball Ontario Return to Sport COVID-19 Guidelines on the part of a Member Organization with respect to outdoor practices apply with respect to indoor practices. In the case of an indoor practice, the Member Organization will typically have less control over the facility than is the case with an outdoor facility permitted from a municipality. As such, Member Organizations are encouraged to consult with the owner/operator of the facility to ensure that appropriate sanitization protocols and safety precautions are in place with respect to the facility.

Competition

Sports activity and life in general have been significantly affected by COVID-19 prevention measures in place across the globe. Although baseball is moderate in contact, there are several factors that each Member Organization will need to evaluate. Our traditional ways of competing will need to be altered in many instances to allow us to be back on the field of play while minimizing the risk of infection. The protocols listed under General and Practice also apply to Competition. Below are some competition specific protocols to be implemented by all Member Organizations.

Pre-game

- Except as noted in the following bullet point, the two teams may share the field for pre-game warm up provided physical distancing is maintained. Each team shall stay in the outfield area on its side of the field. Hitting whiffle balls in the outfield is not considered BP for purposes of the following bullet point.
- Only one team shall be on the field at a time for BP (on the diamond), and Infield or infield/outfield practice

- Pre-game ceremonies (i.e. anthems, first pitch ceremonies, etc.) are discouraged
- Minimum physical distance of 2 metres at Home Plate meeting wearing non-medical mask or face covering.
- Line up cards must be prepared but will not be physically shared - photos may be taken by scorekeepers etc. and the lineup card must be made available to show the umpire when requested

Baseballs

- Ball prep (mud rubbing) to be done by one appointed personnel with protective gloves. No use of saliva in preparing balls.

Bats

- No bat boys/girls shall be allowed

Other Equipment

- Masks worn by pitchers, when they so choose, will be assessed as per existing rules regarding distracting colours, etc. (recommended that it not be white or grey). Rules of acceptable behaviour cannot be contravened.
- No sharing of catcher's masks in warming up pitchers. If no catcher's mask is readily available, warm up pitches may be thrown to a player/coach who is standing, but not squatting.
- A safety base may be used at first base. It is not mandatory to use it. The home team will determine if it is to be used for a particular game.
- At 8U/9U, the circle to be used around the pitching machine shall be a circle with 12' diameter instead of the 8' diameter circle specified in the 8U/9U rules.
- At 8U/9U, the offensive team coach feeding the pitching machine shall sanitize/clean their hands after every offensive inning.

Umpires

- Ball/Strike umpire:
 - May work from behind the catcher as long as he/she is wearing a PPE mask or face covering
 - Must work 2 metres behind the pitcher if not wearing a PPE mask or face covering
- The use of hand sanitizer every half inning is required
- Umpires in the field may wear PPE masks at their discretion

Score Keepers/Pitch Counters

- Should always work from a restricted area and keep safe distance from others and from each other. If using a scorer's booth, it must be cleaned/sanitized before and after use.
- Avoid paper scoring/pitch counting when possible. Prioritize electronic scoring programs as alternative
- Scoring equipment and microphones, if applicable, shall be thoroughly cleaned before and after use

In-Game

- Players shall not lick their fingers, blow on their hands or otherwise go to their mouth. When a pitcher violates this rule the umpire will stop the game, the pitcher will be required to sanitize his/her hands and the game ball will be replaced.
- Tag plays are allowed, but the defensive player should vacate the area as soon as reasonably practicable following the tag.
- When first base is occupied, the defensive player at first base must wear a PPE mask if the runner is being closely guarded / held at the base.

Coaches

- Team meetings, including pitching visits, shall maintain physical distance of minimum 2 metres. A maximum of 1 person (coach or player) and the pitcher may be included in a pitching visit.
- Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) (visor or mask, gloves) must be used by trainers (or persons performing trainer function) when assessing an injury
- If a coach must approach an umpire, physical distancing of at least 2 metres must be maintained. Failure to do so may result in ejection.

- While on offence, base coaches must always stay within their box, except to avoid a play being made in the coach's box. Any discussions between coaches and players (eg. batter visiting 3rd base coach; coach talking to runners, etc.) must maintain physical distancing of at least 2 metres. The coach must wear a non-medical mask or face covering.
- Pitchers, catchers, spotters and bullpen coaches must always maintain a physical distance of 2 metres while pitchers are warming up in the bullpen

Travel

- Local travel within your public health zone is permitted and among public health zones at the same level of Provincial restriction (Orange, Yellow and Green Zones have the same level of restriction for team sports).
- Travel outside of your public health zone is not permitted to an area of lesser restriction.
- Permits for travel out of province will be issued by the OBA Office in accordance with normal operating procedures, but will be withdrawn should restrictions prevent travel at the time of the event

Tournaments

(Including regular season tournaments, local or affiliated association play-offs, select loop play-offs, rep or select provincial play-offs and eliminations):

- Tournaments need to comply with all Competition requirements.

Best Practices

The following, while not mandatory requirements, are suggested best practices or other considerations which Member Organizations and their teams should take into consideration with respect to in-person baseball activities:

- Run drills with players in groups of 3 to 4 (maintain groups intact throughout all practices to minimize number of interactions)
- Consider split squad practices with no physical cross-over between sessions
- Each player to have their own portable chair that is not shared
- Minimize number of coaches in order to maximize players
- Distribute practice plan in advance to reduce the need for huddles / close communication
- Group rotation in one direction (i.e. clockwise around field)
- Use of protective gloves and personal face masks by all event personnel, participants (where feasible), and spectators.
- Use of physical barriers (e.g. Plexiglas) at points of interaction between event personnel and spectators (e.g. entry gate or ticket stand)
- [Encourage good handwashing techniques \(Link\)](#)
- [Encourage proper mask usage: How to wear a mask safely \(Link\)](#)

Enforcement

It is the expectation of Baseball Ontario that all participants, volunteers, spectators and directors will respect these protocols and adhere to them not only for their own safety, but for the safety of all participants. Failure to abide by these rules will come with repercussions. Member Organizations and participants are expected to enforce these protocols for their in-person baseball activities. Except where a protocol identifies a specific sanction or penalty, enforcement should be by way of a warning against the violator and then a request to leave the in-person activity in the case of repeated violation. Member organizations not following these protocols may result in discipline for the Member Organization, up to and including, expulsion from Baseball Ontario. Intentional violations of these protocols by individuals may result in disciplinary action, up to and including, suspensions.