



COVID-19 PROTOCOL FOR INTER-SCHOOL SPORTS, ACTIVITIES AND CLUBS

Version 5 – November 4, 2021

INTRODUCTION

The four district school boards in northeastern Ontario recognize the importance of extracurricular activities in supporting students' mental health, well-being, and academic development. There is a shared commitment among the four district school boards to gradually resume inter-school competitions and clubs, in accordance with the minimum requirements set out by the Ministry of Education and following the guidance of local health units. It must be noted that extracurricular activities and clubs may be suspended or cancelled during the 2021-2022 school year based on the changing landscape of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

This protocol follows the recommendations provided by the Porcupine Health Unit and the Timiskaming Health Unit.

All decisions of the Directors of Education and local public health officials are based on the health and safety of students, staff, supervisors, and service providers. The four district school boards remain committed to keeping our schools open for student learning. As such, there is a shared commitment to have a conservative and safe approach for inter-school sports, activities and clubs to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

It is important to note that there are no set thresholds for implementing specific control measures; however, taking a conservative approach and cancelling these activities in specific circumstances may be required to preserve in-class learning which is essential to overall well-being of children and youth.

The single best way to avoid outbreaks, cases, cohort dismissal, and the need for restrictions and cancellations is vaccination of eligible students and staff.

This protocol details the public health guidelines and measures that must be followed for extracurricular activities, sports, performances, and competitions. At this time, this protocol applies to all students in grades 7-12.

As much as possible, inter-school competitions will be organized in three regions: North (Hearst-Cochrane); Central (Timmins/Iroquois Falls); South (Kirkland to Temagami). **Some exceptions may be permitted at the discretion of the Directors of Education.** Inter-board / inter-regional competitions are permitted for outdoor activities, providing that no overnight stay is required.

PROTECTIVE STRATEGIES

The public health guidelines announced by the Government of Ontario and those announced by the Porcupine Health Unit, Timiskaming Health Unit and/or Public Health Ontario must be followed at all times, regardless of the activity.

It is imperative that all participants adhere to the full scope of protective strategies. There is not one specific measure that will prevent transmission from occurring. Instead, participants must practice multiple structural and individual elements to contribute to reduced risk of infection. Each of the control measures below provide some benefit in reducing the spread of COVID-19. However, it is the combination and consistent application of these layered controls that will be most effective to help protect students and staff participating in inter-school sports, activities, and clubs.

VACCINATION DISCLOSURE FOR OFFICIALS, COACHES, FREQUENT VOLUNTEERS AND STUDENTS (FOR ALL SPORTS, CLUBS, AND ACTIVITIES)

All regular game officials, coaches, frequent volunteers, and students will be required to:

- Provide proof of full vaccination against COVID-19; or
- Anyone who is not immunized, including anyone with medical reasons, will be required to complete regular COVID-19 testing **three times each week**, as directed by provincial guidance. Negative test results must be provided in order to participate. Test results will be collected in a confidential manner by the lead staff member of the team or club.

The rapid antigen testing requirements will be implemented gradually, as a result of the shortage of rapid antigen test kits available in our district.

There is strong encouragement for all participants in athletics, activities, and clubs to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

VERIFICATION OF SCREENING

All participants and activity leaders, including Board personnel and community/parent volunteers must successfully complete the COVID-19 self-screen and be symptom-free prior to attending any try-outs, team or club meetings, workouts, practices, or competitions. Screening will be confirmed upon arrival and will be noted on an attendance log.

All game officials and student volunteers (score keepers) will successfully complete the COVID-19 self-screen and be symptom-free prior to attending any inter-school athletic event. Screening will be confirmed upon arrival and will be documented.

All student participants, team officials, club leaders, game officials and student volunteers must follow direction provided after completing the COVID-19 self-screen.

Student participants and activity leaders will immediately notify a Head Coach or the lead staff member responsible for the activity/team/club if COVID-19 symptoms arise during an activity.

Any participant in athletics or clubs must not participate in any team or club activities, including games, practices, or meetings if they have any symptoms upon screening.

Any participant who does not comply with current and updated screening requirements will be subject to removal from the team or the club.

FACE MASKING

Students and staff must wear masks throughout the duration of the exercise when indoors except in instances indicated in government guidelines. Masks must be worn during all activities except when it is unsafe to do so.

Student participants should have access to more than one mask for the duration of the activity. This allows for frequent mask changes, as required.

Staff and other activity leaders must wear a medical grade mask (provided by the school). In addition, when indoors, coaches, team officials, activity leaders will wear eye protection if they are within 2m of an unmasked participant.

When outdoors, all participants on the sidelines during a competition will wear a mask. *NOTE: while risk of transmission is lower outdoors, the risk is not eliminated and wearing a mask reduces chances of being a high-risk contact.*

PHYSICAL DISTANCING

It is important to always promote the greatest possible distancing between students, between students and staff, and between staff members. Indeed, a physical distance of two meters (2m) must be maintained between students and staff inside and outside the school whenever possible. Physical distancing must be maintained indoors when students are required to remove their masks to complete the activity. For example, during a physical activity where wearing a mask is not safe or when delivering a dialogue in a play.

When entering and exiting activity areas and while performing the activity:

- physical distancing measures should be layered with other public health measures such as screening, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, enhanced cleaning, and mask wearing.
- student travel times should be staggered, if possible, to limit student congregation.

Students may not congregate before or after an interscholastic sports activity.

Hand shaking between teams at the end of a sports activity is not permitted at this time.

HAND CLEANING AND DISINFECTION

Students and staff must wash or sanitize their hands at the beginning of the activity, before/after breaks, and at the end of the activity. This is also required before using shared objects.

PROTOCOL REVIEW AND EXPECTATIONS

Activity leaders must review the protocols and expectations with all participants regularly. This includes a meeting at the start of the season/club, with regular review as the season unfolds. Health and safety measures should be reviewed often, and include but are not limited to:

- refrain from touching eyes, nose, mouth and face during the activity;
- personal hand hygiene practices before, during and after training, practice, competition, and performance;
- respiratory etiquette during physical activity (sneezing/coughing into the crook of the elbow, not spitting, not clearing nasal passage);
- eliminate the use of perfumes to reduce sneezing and coughing.

All current guidelines must be shared with all student participants, team officials, game officials, and parents/guardians prior to the commencement of an activity season. Updates will be shared as needed.

COHORT MANAGEMENT

Mixing of cohorts in extracurricular activities, including athletics, is permitted. Schools must ensure the implementation of measures essential to the follow-up of contacts in the event of a positive case.

A record must be kept of all student participants, activity leaders, team officials, game officials, student volunteers, and community and/or parent volunteers who are in attendance at any try-outs, team or club meetings, workouts, practices, competitions or any other inter-school activity. This record must be readily available to the Principal at all times and be available to local public health officials as needed. Records shall be kept for at least 30 days for contact tracing purposes. The record will include, at a minimum: name and phone number, location visited including time in and time out.

If students and staff use school transportation to travel to another location, a seating plan must be made, followed, and provided to the Principal for contact tracing purposes. In the interest of risk management with the possibility of a positive case, the number of activities in which students may participate should be limited (a maximum of two, at any given time).

In a game between two schools, the head coach of each team must verify that the players have successfully completed the COVID-19 self-screen. The players' certification shall be noted on the attendance log which shall be submitted to the Principal as soon as possible.

A log book / attendance log must be available within 24 hours, upon request by the local public health officials, as noted above.

COVID-19 immunization is strongly recommended. Unvaccinated students may experience longer periods out of school activities, including practices, games and performances if there is a case or outbreak.

PERMITTED ACTIVITIES

Definition of Activity Types:

- High contact activities/sports are defined as those activities/sports where physical contact and/or close proximity is required between individuals.
- Low contact activities/sports are those that involve intermittent proximity or limited, incidental physical contact between participants and allow for physical distancing, most of the time.

Elementary (K-6): Since students are not yet immunized, only low-contact activities and those that allow for safe masking are permitted. Inter-school competitions are not permitted for this age group at this time.

Intermediate/Secondary (7-12): High-contact indoor activities will be permitted, providing that students are vaccinated or engaging in rapid antigen testing 2 times a week.

All other low-contact extracurricular activities and sports are permitted as long as the health and safety measures of the government, the provincial Chief Medical Officer of Health and the local health units can be met. At this time, these sports include, but are not limited to: volleyball; cross-country running; golf; badminton; soccer; curling; Nordic skiing; swimming; and hockey.

Some considerations for permitted activities:

Type of activity:	<i>Is the activity low or high contact?</i>
Location of the activity:	<i>Will the activity take place indoors or outdoors?</i>
Cohort:	<i>Will students participate within their cohort or between cohorts?</i>
Physical distancing:	<i>Can the activity be conducted while maintaining physical distancing?</i>
Masking:	<i>Will masking be required?</i> <i>Can masks be worn properly and changed as needed?</i>

Please see the following OPHEA document for examples of how to apply these elements in an analysis. [Considerations when Selecting Interschool Athletic Activities.](#)

In all cases, activities must be approved by the Principal prior to the start of the season, meetings, or clubs. The Principal must be prepared to consult with and/or inform the respective Superintendent of such plans.

EQUIPMENT

The use of common equipment is allowed. The risk associated with transmission through shared items is low. Regular hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette should be reinforced to reduce the risk of infection from shared equipment, especially when it is not possible to clean shared items regularly.

Equipment in use must be cleaned and disinfected after each game, practice and/or meet. If equipment is used all day, it should be cleaned **at least** twice during the day. Equipment used on or near the face (i.e. musical instruments, helmets, microphones) must be cleaned and disinfected before use by another person.

Each student is encouraged to bring their own labelled water bottle, keep it with them during the day/activity and never share with other students.

FACILITIES

The following measures must be implemented to ensure safe use of the facility with the presence of different cohorts and guests from other schools.

In the case of athletic games, the host school must communicate to the coaches of the other teams the procedures for entry and exit of visiting students in order to manage traffic flow and minimize contact within the school. Coaches of these teams must ensure that their students follow the procedures established by the host school.

A designated space (i.e. isolation space or outdoor space) will be set-up to ensure that any student or adult who develops symptoms during any team or club related activity is separated from all other attendees, so that they are isolated before they leave and seek testing. For these circumstances, the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) must be available. This includes medical masks, face shield and/or eye protection, gowns, hand sanitizer, and disinfectant.

CHANGE ROOMS

When different cohorts interact in shared indoor spaces, masks will be worn and as much distance as possible maintained between cohorts.

Strategies that can be used include, but are not limited to:

- Where possible, have student participants arrive dressed and ready to start.
- Schedule students to limit the number of people in the change room and/or using showers.
- Ensure physical distancing for those using the change room and/or shower.
- Ensure all students wear a mask when using the change room.
- Block off areas in locker rooms, post signs that remind participants to maintain 2m of physical distance.
- Post capacity limits for the change room.
- Ensure there is time between games to allow for cleaning of high touch surfaces prior to another team utilizing the space.

It is important that change rooms that have been used are cleaned and disinfected, including high contact surfaces, after each use.

When possible and practical (i.e. privacy, safety weather permitting), leave doors and windows open to reduce touch points and improve ventilation.

GYMNASIUM

When more than one game is being played in the same day at one site, each school site or facility will develop entrance and exit plans for the facilities to minimize contact between the outgoing and incoming teams.

Considerations for the movement of participants include, but are not limited to:

- designated routes for students to get to/from the activity/sport
- provide visual cues or physical guides, such as tape on the floor or sidewalks and signs/posters on the walls
- Hand sanitizer must be available at school entrances and exits and in rooms used for the activities (including gyms, weight rooms, auditorium, music room).

HIGH CONTACT SURFACES

These are surfaces that are touched by many people throughout the day (i.e. benches, gym mats, light switches).

A plan must be in place to have high touch/contact surfaces to be cleaned and disinfected **at least** twice daily.

Teams should have access to hand sanitizer, for regular sanitization of hands, throughout the course of the activity. This strategy helps to minimize the risk of transmission.

EXTERNAL COACHES AND ACTIVITY LEADERS

Coaches, activity leaders, or guest instructors who are not school employees must follow the same guidelines as an essential visitor.

- Any visitor to the school is required to self-screen and wear a medical-grade face mask while on school premises.
- A medical mask will be provided by the school if necessary.
- All visitors must sign the visitor's log and attest that they have completed their daily COVID-19 self-screen and that the result was negative.
- The visitor's movement in the school must be limited to the areas required for the activity.

SUPERVISION

In addition to the levels of supervision normally required to manage various extracurricular and athletic activities, activity leaders must monitor and remind students, as needed, of the following:

- Maintain appropriate physical distance before and after practices, competitions, and performances.
- Follow locker room and facility procedures.
- Sanitize hands before and after using equipment.
- Refrain from group celebrations during activities/sports (hand shake, high fives, fist bumps, etc).

Activity leaders also have the following responsibilities:

- Follow expected procedures for the use of personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Communicate with students and minimize the need to shout/project.
- Verify that all required certifications for activities/sports are current and have not expired (First Aid training, concussion training, etc).
- Share school, school board, or athletic association policies and procedures related to COVID-19 safety for interscholastic athletic activities with the appropriate officials and referee association.
- Review any additional COVID-19 safety requirements of the officials/referee associations.
- Ensure the cleaning and disinfecting of equipment.

SPECTATORS/AUDIENCE

There will be no spectators permitted at this time for any extracurricular activities, performances, sports, or clubs. Efforts may be made by the host school to livestream and/or record games.

SHARED TEAMS BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL BOARDS

Inter-school or inter-board teams are permitted provided that public health measures, and particularly those outlined in this protocol, are followed and there are no local requirements issued by public health officials to cancel the event.

STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

There is currently a driver shortage in Northeastern Ontario, impacting the ability for school buses to transport students to extracurricular activities, games, performance, or clubs. There is no availability to provide student transportation services for extracurricular purposes before school begins or after school hours.

When students are being transported by school bus or school owned vehicle, masks must be worn by students and staff. The driver is exempt from this requirement if the face mask interferes with safe driving of the vehicle. The use of cars or vans should be limited to a very small number of participants. The same public health measures will be applied (wearing a mask).

In the case of a school bus:

- School vehicles may operate at full capacity - vehicles for elementary school students should reduce capacity where possible.

- The seat directly behind the driver is empty to maintain a physical distance between the driver and students.
- When school vehicles are not operating at full capacity, students shall be seated in a manner that maximizes physical distance.
- Windows should be opened whenever possible to increase ventilation.
- Students should be assigned seats and a record of the seating plan should be kept to facilitate contact tracing in the event a student or driver contracts COVID-19. If a car or van is used, it is important to document who traveled in each car. The same seating plan should be adhered to for all trips, when possible.
- Students who live in the same household or are in the same class cohort can be seated together when possible.

In the case of regional or provincial travel, a minimum 15-minute break must be provided for every two hours of travel to allow students, staff and driver to leave the bus to remove their masks while ensuring a physical distance of 2m.

For day trips, everyone on the trip must be screened before boarding the bus/vehicle.

Student arrival and departure must take place in a designated area where screening can be confirmed.

To assist with contact tracing, accurate travel records must be maintained of all student participants and activity leaders.

For regional or provincial events, participating schools will notify their local public health unit of the event, location and participating communities.

OUT OF COMMUNITY TRAVEL FOR EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

At this time, overnight travel is not permitted for inter-school/inter-board competitions.

Student and coach participation at provincial competitions (OFSAA, as an example) will be at the discretion of each individual school board.

MANAGEMENT OF POSITIVE CASES

The Porcupine Health Unit or Timiskaming Health Unit will manage the reporting of a positive case in a school in accordance with the protocols already established.

A student or staff member who is unable to attend school as a result of an order or directive from the local health unit is not permitted to participate in any school activity.

Anyone who has been identified as a high risk contact should not participate in any extra-curricular activities during their self-monitoring period.

RESOURCES

COVID-19: Health, Safety and Operational Guidance for School (2021-2022)
Ministry of Education

COVID-19 Guidance: School Case, Contact, and Outbreak Management
Ministry of Health

OPHEA Website and Resources