



2021 Return to Play Recommendations

MLB BEST PRACTICES

While we navigate the impact of COVID-19 on our local communities, MLB continues to look for ways to help youth baseball and softball organizations return to the field in 2021. MLB is committed to providing health and safety recommendations to assist your organization in resuming youth sports activities this year.

The following recommendations are designed to assist in the return to play for the youth baseball and softball community, but in no way do they supersede CDC recommendations¹ or your respective state and local government regulations on reopening public gatherings, and the general return to organized sport. The below recommendations, which may be used to provide structure, should be evaluated within the framework of your local community and implemented in accordance with your state and local restrictions.²

SAFETY MEASURES FOR PARTICIPATION

- Prior to actual participation, players, employees, and volunteers should be evaluated to ensure that they do not have a fever of 100.4°F or are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19.³ This may include conducting pre-activity symptom assessments.
- If possible, consider checking temperatures of all players, employees, and volunteers prior to engaging in group activity.
- Any individual who has a temperature of 100.4°F or exhibits any COVID-19 symptom, should not participate in group activity and should be sent home immediately.
- If there is a report of a positive case of COVID-19 from within your organization, notify others who may have been in close contact with the individual of their potential exposure and potential need for quarantine or additional medical attention.
- Along with adhering to state and local ordinances on group gatherings, you should also make every attempt to prevent overcrowding and gatherings with a high density of people and to allow for enhanced physical distancing, where possible.

USE OF PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

- Cloth face coverings and personal protective equipment (“PPE”) should be worn consistent with CDC, state and local guidance.⁴
- Individuals should wear a face mask or a face covering while in non-game situations.
- Non-playing personnel should wear a face mask or a face covering at all times, including in the dugout. All individuals should utilize a face mask or a face covering in areas where social distancing is not possible.
- Players should not be required to wear a face mask or face covering while on the field or engaging in other strenuous activities (e.g., workouts, practices, batting practice, strength and conditioning activities), but may do so if they prefer or it is requested by a medical professional or parent.
- Umpires are encouraged to wear a face mask or face covering while umpiring, particularly if unable to maintain a safe physical distance from the players.
- Consider any additional requirements for face coverings and PPE based on individuals’ roles (i.e., athletic trainers, strength and conditioning coaches).

EQUIPMENT

- If possible, equipment (glove, bat, batter’s helmet, batting gloves, catcher’s equipment) should not be shared between participants.
- To the extent that equipment needs to be shared, establish protocols for when and how equipment will be cleaned and disinfected in between uses. Consider disinfecting communal equipment regularly throughout practices and games (i.e., between innings).
- Request that parents/guardians clean and disinfect any personal equipment before and after group activities.
- Players and other on-field personnel should wash or sanitize their hands throughout practices and games (e.g., every time a player returns to the dugout) and after the handling of equipment or personal effects, like mouthguards.
- Eliminate the touching of the face (eyes, nose and mouth) when handling shared equipment and the ball.
- Consider limiting the continued use of baseball and softballs without cleaning. Balls should be cleaned throughout an activity or rotated out on a regular basis.

¹ See: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/youth-sports.html>

² While this document contains a list of current best practices, the information included within is not a substitute for state and local requirements, nor the advice of a medical professional or public health official.

³ See: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>

⁴ CDC guidance on use cloth face coverings and personal protective equipment is available here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html> and <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/using-ppe.html>.



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MLB BEST PRACTICES (Continued)

FOOD AND DRINK

- Prohibit the use of communal water and sport drink coolers/jugs and use individualized water or sport drink bottles instead.
- Avoid sharing cups, water bottles, food/snacks, and limit all food and drink products to individualized items.
- Like equipment, individual food and drink containers should be sanitized at home after each use.

IN-GAME

- Players, on-field personnel, and umpires should practice physical distancing to the extent possible, with the limitations of competition and the fundamentals of baseball and softball.
- Consider eliminating plate meetings. If the plate meeting does occur, it should be limited to one coach from each team, plus an umpire, who should stand 6 feet apart from one another.
- Where possible, refrain from exchanging documents between coaches and umpires. Encourage digital scorekeeping or the digital exchange of lineup cards.
- Attempt physical distancing in the dugout if space allows, as well as in other in-game or pregame activities, such as the National Anthem. Consider spreading out to seating outside the dugout, to a feasible extent.
- Players from opposite teams should not socialize, fraternize, or come within six feet of each other before and after games, or in-between innings.
- Players and on-field personnel should make all efforts to avoid touching their face with their hands (including to give signs), wiping away sweat with their hand, licking their fingers, whistling with their fingers, etc.
- Avoid physical interactions (i.e., high-fives, fist bumps, hugs, handshakes) with teammates and personnel.
- Sunflower seeds, bubble gum, and spitting are prohibited in the dugout and on the playing surface.

SPECTATORS

- Make efforts to reduce the density of parents, guardians, and spectators on site by setting arrival times prior to games and events. Request departure from the site within a reasonable amount of time at the conclusion of games and events.
- Encourage spectators to utilize a face mask or face covering while on site.
- Consider limiting or spacing seating in stands and around playing sites to promote physical distancing.

ADDITIONAL BEST PRACTICES

- Develop, implement, and enforce written cleaning, hygiene, and safe use protocols for your organization, which may include topics such as: social distancing; collection and use of PPE; disinfecting and sanitation; group travel; symptom monitoring/contract tracing.
- Increase the availability of handwashing and/or hand-sanitizing stations at practice and playing sites and in common areas.
- Consider the option for digital check-in and event registration.
- Make every effort to reduce the density of individuals by establishing designated times and locations for arrivals and departures. Consider staggering arrival and dismissal times for different groups.
- Adjust the playing format and increase the amount of time between games and practices to limit the overlap of groups.
- Consider establishing workout groups, with the same group of players and adults interacting together.
- Limit the number of adult employees/volunteers at practices and games by only using the essential number of coaches and team managers.
- For team/group meetings, limit physical interactions by using virtual meeting services (i.e., Zoom, Google Meet).
- Discourage group excursions and eliminate all unnecessary group travel.