



January 4, 2020

Dear Soccer Associations,

The purpose of this letter is for you to share this message with your coaches, trainers, officials, team managers, safety officers and participants.

Ottawa Public Health (OPH) is actively investigating several situations where transmission of COVID-19 could have occurred in relation to soccer and other organized sports.

The possible transmission occurred as a result of several public health measures not being followed, including use of locker rooms, carpooling with members outside the household, teammates, parents and coaches eating together at a restaurant, individuals coaching more than one team and individuals (including Coaches) not wearing masks.

It is important to remember that even with precautions, participating in sports and recreation activities is still considered a higher risk activity. Carefully consider the risk to yourself and to others when choosing to engage in sport and recreation activities.

Recognizing that the level of risk associated with activities in the community can never be fully or entirely eliminated, measures that are put in place such as self-isolation are not meant to be punitive or lay blame on any individual in particular; it is possible to do everything correctly as best as you can with prevention measures (being COVID Wise), but still be determined to be a high risk contact due to the nature of the exposure to COVID-19 itself.

Our role at OPH is to promote and protect the health of our community. As you know, our public health response to COVID-19 is a graded approach, meaning that self-isolation of individuals who are high risk contacts or those that have confirmed COVID-19 helps us avoid a situation where more comprehensive shutdowns take place that would prevent people from playing certain sports (i.e., soccer, hockey) altogether in our community.

A reminder that COVID-19 transmission may occur in a variety of ways including:

- During team play
- During use of locker rooms
- During carpooling with members outside a player's household
- While congregating together among teammates, parents, coaches and other children in parking lots, eating together
- Due to individuals not wearing masks while on the field (OPH recommends medical masks for coaches, and strongly encourages masking for all players)
- Due to sharing coaches and players between multiple teams

We recognize the important role that staying active plays in our overall health and well-being. Considering the increased transmission risk, it is important to remind everyone involved in organized sports that they have a role to play and should know the risks, choose safer options and remain [COVID Wise](#) when participating in sports and recreation.

When investigating possible COVID-19 transmission in any setting, OPH is responsible for contact tracing and risk assessment. Sports organizations are responsible for timely provision of contact lists, which allows OPH to identify contacts earlier and prevent further spread both within and outside of the league.

Communication with leagues and associations

OPH follows-up with all individuals who test positive for COVID-19, as well as their close contacts. A close contact is someone who has been in close physical proximity to a person who has tested positive for COVID-19. OPH identifies close contacts through a detailed review of the symptoms of the person who tested positive, where they have been and with whom they have interacted.

Safety & Return to Play Plans

[Safety Plans](#) are required in higher risk settings. This is a guide for organizations to develop a plan to play safer for their valued members and their families. It will help you to put controls into place to make the sport of soccer and other organized sports safer for everyone.

The first step to controlling risks is to identify them. For COVID-19, the risks are related to how the virus spreads. Control measures are the steps you take to reduce the risks to your members. With an infectious disease like COVID-19 your control measures can help to break the chain of transmission of the virus. OPH recommends a layered or multi-pronged approach which follows the [COVID-19 response framework: keeping Ontario safe and open](#) along with the recommended public health measures to stay COVID Wise.

It is important to recognize that the strength and success of the plan is reliant on the ability of everyone to be familiar with, understand and consistently adhere to the plan. The plan will need to be frequently revisited to ensure it is relevant to the current state of the pandemic, and systems or mechanisms should be in place to evaluate both the plan's efficacy; as well as the overall adherence within the organization.

Be COVID Wise

Transmission of COVID-19 is possible before, during and after training. Precautions are required to reduce the risk of transmission while enabling training to occur.

- Minimize social gatherings of participants and spectators both before and after the activity. This includes spectator stands, change rooms and the areas outside of recreational facilities.
- Limit carpooling and meals (in homes or at restaurants) to those within your household
- Limit gatherings inside and outside the facilities. Ensure a two-meter physical distance and wearing masks if parents and/or participants are socializing in the facility parking lots.
- Do not coach or play for more than one team
- Wear a face mask at all times unless engaged in strenuous athletic activity
- Maintain physical distance of at least two meters from other people before, during and after the activity
- Clean and disinfect equipment between uses
- Do not share your sports gear with other people
- Practice frequent hand hygiene by using an alcohol-based hand rub or washing your hands with soap and water
- Play outdoors rather than indoors

Remember to **Sport SMART**

- **S**creen all athletes, coaches, trainers, parents, athletes and officials and **S**tay Home if you are feeling unwell.
- **M**asks at all times when possible and safe, even during physical activities.
- **A**dapt your sport and your activities.
- **R**educe contact & exposure.
- **T**hink about the risks and ways to stay safer. **T**rack your activities outside the home.

Visit OttawaPublicHealth.ca for more [Guidance for Return to Sport, Recreations and Fitness](#). We are all in this together, and through our individual and collective actions we can lower the rate of transmission and protect the health and well-being of our community.

Sincerely,

Ottawa Public Health