

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Deidre S. Gifford, MD, MPH
Acting Commissioner



Ned Lamont
Governor
Susan Bysiewicz
Lt. Governor

August 23, 2020

Glenn M. Lungarini
Executive Director, CAS-CIAC
30 Realty Dr., Cheshire, CT 06410

Dear Mr. Lungarini and CAS-CIAC Board Members,

The Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) is in receipt of your letter and revised Fall Sports plan of August 21, 2020. We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for facilitating a meeting between DPH, several members of your Board of Control, and members of your Sports Medicine Advisory Committee on the evening of August 20th. We appreciated the collaborative nature of the discussion and the opportunity to hear the perspectives of CAS-CIAC regarding the upcoming fall sports season and to offer our perspective through the lens of public health. All of us share the goal of a safe and rewarding fall sports and academic semester for our student-athletes. The following reflects DPH's recommendations to CIAC in follow-up to that meeting and your letter dated August 21, 2020.

As we have said previously, in contemplating your Fall sports plan it is important to balance the real and significant benefits of high school athletics for student health and well-being, with the competing demands of establishing an optimally safe environment for our school communities. With that in mind, DPH's recommendations do not reflect a need to abandon the idea of having any fall interscholastic athletic activities this year. Based on the available science related to the spread of the novel coronavirus, we believe that certain sports and activities have more potential to be conducive to the spread of COVID-19 infections. This, coupled with recent changes in the data trends for COVID-19 infections, our understanding of the dynamics and the role of asymptomatic drivers of spread in our communities, and our continuing experiences both within our state and nationwide with outbreak events all point to the need for a continued cautious approach to interscholastic and other youth athletic activities.

In our letter dated August 13th, DPH made several recommendations for the upcoming fall interscholastic sports season in our state. Considering our discussion with your Board and medical advisors, we would offer the following modifications to the first recommendation in our previous letter, regarding postponing athletic activities.

We agree with the perspective of your medical advisors that pre-season conditioning is a critical safety component for high school athletes prior to the start of any practice activities, to both reduce the prevalence of sports-related injuries throughout the season and to offer an important period of acclimatization to prevent heat-related illnesses. As such, we would support conditioning activities, limited to those directed at improving athletes' aerobic conditioning, as well as sport-specific non-

contact drills for high school athletes to continue at this time for the fall sports with which CIAC chooses to go forward. We offer the following recommendations for these activities:

- athlete cohort size should be reduced back to the original limit of 10 (from 15 currently)
- cohorting of athletes during conditioning and practices should continue throughout the entire season, when practicable
- to the extent possible, all conditioning and practice activities throughout the entire season should take place outdoors in areas with sufficient space to allow for appropriate distancing. If indoor gym spaces or weight rooms must be used, they should be limited to use by a single cohort at one time and only used in compliance with the DECD sector rules for commercial gyms (i.e., use of masks, adequate spacing of machines, capacity limits, etc.). Schools that do not have the appropriate space or other resources to comply with commercial gym sector rules should limit conditioning and practice activities to outdoor-only.
- sufficient staffing should be available to directly supervise the activities of each cohort of athletes separately and at all times
- face coverings, social distancing, and all other mitigation strategies outlined in the *CIAC Resocialization of Interscholastic Athletics & Activities Guidance* should continue to be strictly enforced, trained, and reinforced

In addition to the recommendations above, we would like to address some additional statements included in your most recent letter and revised plan that were either suggestions for additional changes or statements that need further clarification.

- In your letter, you asked if DPH could support activities for girls' volleyball if they were either moved outdoors or played indoors with masks worn by players. DPH encourages CIAC to work with their coaches, athletic directors, and board members to consider modifications to both girls' volleyball and football that would allow them to be played consistent with the standards that define either "lower risk" or outdoor "moderate risk" sports [as categorized by the National Federation of State High School Associations](#). For example, moving girls' volleyball outdoors or playing a "7v7" style of football that eliminates tackling and line play may be modifications that would allow both of these sports to be considered in the "moderate risk" outdoor sports category. However, considering that the specific rules and training recommendations for high school sports have been developed and fine-tuned over many years in consultation with sports medicine experts, DPH would strongly recommend that CIAC consult with their sports medicine committee, and give them ample time to study and fully vet any proposed changes prior to implementing rapid changes to how any high school sport is played in our state.
- With the exception of girls' volleyball and football, DPH agrees with your most recent proposed schedule for the start of full team practices and competitions. We also recommend coordination and collaboration at the district level given the potential variations in back to school plans across the state.

For all the reasons we have discussed with CIAC previously, DPH does not recommend that full-contact high school football or indoor girls' volleyball be played during the upcoming fall season in our state. In

addition to the recommendations above, DPH would encourage CAS-CIAC to set up and publicize a protected (non-disclosable) mechanism to receive specific complaints and concerns regarding interscholastic athletic activities from students, parents, staff, or the general public in order to quickly identify any situations that may require correction and retraining of athletes, coaches, or other supervisory staff.

Finally, as we move from the summer "club sports" season into the fall sports season, we recognize and appreciate the need to continue to clarify the advisability of youth sports outside of interscholastic competition (e.g., fall club and recreational sports) and we will have further communication on those issues both internally and with you in the coming days.

DPH welcomes the opportunity to continue our collaborative partnership with CAS-CIAC and the Connecticut State Department of Education to support both interscholastic athletics as well as school reopening activities that we believe will minimize the health and safety risks to our children, school staff, and their families while allowing them to regain their identities as teachers, students, classmates, and athletes.

Sincerely,



Deidre S. Gifford, MD, MPH
Acting Commissioner

cc: M. Cardona, Commissioner, CSDE
J. Geballe, COO, State of Connecticut
D. Lehman, Commissioner, DECD



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