



# GUIDANCE FOR A RETURN TO HIGH SCHOOL MARCHING BAND

**National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)  
Music Committee  
Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC)**

The COVID-19 pandemic presents state high school associations with a myriad of challenges. The NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC) and the NFHS Music Committee offer this document as guidance on how state associations can consider approaching the many components of returning to high school marching band activities across the United States.

The NFHS SMAC and Music Committee believes it is essential to the physical and mental well-being of high school students across the nation to return to physical activity and activity participation. The NFHS recognizes that it is likely that ALL students will not be able to return to – and sustain – activity at the same time in all schools, regions and states. There will also likely be variation in what activities can be held. While we would typically have reservations regarding such inequities, the NFHS endorses the idea of returning students to school-based athletics and activities in any and all situations where it can be done safely.

Since NFHS member state associations are a well-respected voice for health and safety issues, the NFHS strongly urges that these organizations engage with state and local health departments to develop policy regarding coordinated approaches for return to activity for high school marching bands.

The recommendations presented in this document are intended as ideas for state associations to consider with their respective SMAC, Music Committee and other stakeholders in designing return-to-activity guidelines that will be in accordance with state or local restrictions. Please note that the phases outlined below are based upon the White House document released in April 2020. Consult your state and local health departments to review if they are using a similar approach, or how the phases in this document correspond to your state or local governments nomenclature.

## **Preliminary Questions for State Associations:**

Some state associations may wish to consider the following four questions before further deliberation on this document:

1. Will your state association conduct an athletics/activities regular season or championship if public schools statewide are closed to in-person learning (apart from regularly scheduled school breaks)?
2. Will your state association conduct an athletics/activities regular season or championship if schools are closed only in COVID-19 “hotspots” in your state? (excluding participants from schools that are closed)?

3. Will your state association conduct an athletics/activities regular season in sports deemed “lower-risk” for COVID-19 transmission while cancelling athletics/activities considered “higher-risk?”
4. Are there recommendations unique to your state – or regions of your state – that you need to take into consideration when developing return-to-activity guidelines?

### **Points of Emphasis:**

1. Decreasing potential exposure to respiratory droplets is the guiding principle behind social distancing and the use of face coverings. The use of cloth face coverings is meant to decrease the spread of respiratory droplets. As state and local COVID-19 prevalence decreases, the need for strict social distancing and the use of face coverings will lessen. Look to guidance from your state and local health departments.
  - a. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is additionally “advising the use of simple cloth face coverings to slow the spread of the virus and help people who may have the virus and do not know it from transmitting it to others.” (“Recommendation Regarding the Use of Cloth Face Coverings, Especially in Areas of Significant Community-Based Transmission”)
  - b. Recognizing the benefits and potential drawbacks of the use of cloth face coverings during conditioning and physical activity, the NFHS SMAC recommends the following:
    - i. State, local or school district guidelines for cloth face coverings should be strictly followed.
    - ii. Cloth face coverings should be considered acceptable. There is no need to require or recommend “medical grade” masks for marching band activity.
    - iii. Any student who prefers to wear a cloth face covering during a practice, performance or contest should be allowed to do so.
    - iv. In the absence of guidelines to the contrary, we recommend that cloth face coverings be worn by students during Phases 1 and 2 as outlined below. Cloth face coverings may continue to be used during Phase 3 when not engaging in vigorous activity.
    - v. Plastic shields covering the entire face shall not be allowed during contests. Their use during practices increases the risk of unintended injury to the person wearing the shield or other band members.
    - vi. Directors, adjudicators and other personnel may wear cloth face coverings at all times during Phases 1 through 3. (Artificial noisemakers such as an air horn or a timer system with an alarm can be used to signal in place of a traditional whistle.)
2. Testing regimens, specific guidelines regarding mass gatherings, and response to a student or team member testing positive for COVID-19 (including contact tracing) are all currently under review, and guidance will come from CDC and state and local health departments. Limited testing availability, lack of resources for contact tracing, and expanding knowledge of the characteristics of COVID-19

transmission could all result in significant changes to the recommendations below. The NFHS SMAC and state association SMACs expect to disseminate this information as it becomes available.

3. Due to the near certainty of recurrent outbreaks this coming fall and winter in some locales, state associations must be prepared for periodic school closures and the possibility of some bands having to isolate for two to three weeks while in-season. Development of policies is recommended regarding practice and/or competition during temporary school closures, the cancellation of contests during the regular season, and parameters for the cancellation or premature ending to post-season events/competitions.
4. With the uncertainty of which phase will be attained at the beginning of the season or maintained during the season, scheduling contests that require less travel when possible should be considered. Such scheduling will reduce time spent in buses or vans. It will also potentially decrease the need for rescheduling contests as “opening up” may occur regionally. If participating bands at the time of a contest are subject to different restrictions, re-scheduling that contest for a later date may be problematic.
5. “Vulnerable individuals” are defined by CDC as people age 65 years and older and others with serious underlying health conditions, including high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and those whose immune systems are compromised such as by chemotherapy for cancer and other conditions requiring such therapy.
6. Until a cure, vaccine or very effective treatment is readily available, or so-called “herd immunity” is confidently reached, social distancing and other preventive measures such as face covering will be a “new normal” if workouts, rehearsals and contests are to continue.

## **Areas to Address:**

### **1. Administrative**

#### *A. Preparticipation Physical Evaluation*

Due to concerns regarding access to primary care providers during the late spring and early summer, the NFHS SMAC released a position statement giving guidance to state associations concerning timing of the Preparticipation Physical Evaluation (PPE). Options vary from a one-year extension to keeping current requirements. State associations and their SMACs can also consider interim history updates by having students complete a form or having a telemedicine visit with their primary care provider.

#### *B. Mandatory Education*

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the cancellation of essentially all “in person” educational events. It is recommended that online education courses take the place of “hands on” or in-person training, whenever possible. This includes accepting online training courses for AED/CPR and First Aid for the 2020-21 academic year.

#### *C. Conduct of Conditioning and Rehearsal Sessions*

Phases are in accordance with guidelines published by the White House and CDC available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/>. Please consult with your local or state health department regarding their plan for “opening up” your state. Not all states are using the same criteria, and what is allowable during specific phases will vary from state to state, or even within a state. Use the following as a resource in designing a plan for your state. Please note that there will be “gating” criteria to establish Phase 1 and the further criteria must be met to advance from one phase to the next. These criteria will be determined by state and/or local governments and must be strictly followed.

## **Phase 1**

### **Pre- rehearsal Screening:**

- All directors and students should be screened for signs/symptoms of COVID-19 prior to a rehearsal. Screening includes a temperature check.
- Responses to screening questions for each person should be recorded and stored so that there is a record of everyone present in case a student develops COVID-19 with appropriate attention being given to privacy and confidentiality, (see Appendix I for sample Monitoring Form).
- Any person with positive symptoms reported should not be allowed to take part in rehearsals and should contact his or her primary care provider or other appropriate health-care professional.
- Vulnerable individuals should not oversee or participate in any rehearsals during Phase 1.

### **Limitations on Gatherings:**

- No gathering of more than 10 people at a time (inside or outside).
- Storage and changing rooms should not be utilized during Phase 1. Students should report to rehearsals in proper gear and immediately return home to shower at end of the rehearsal.
- Rehearsals should be conducted in “pods” of students with the same 5-10 students always rehearsing together. This ensures more limited exposure if someone develops an infection.
- Social distancing should be observed when music is being taught. Students should learn the music standing still, spaced at a minimum of 6-foot intervals. If teachers need to move within the 6-foot area to correct a student’s playing position, embouchure, posture, etc. they should do so briefly and then move back away.
- Students should be spaced at a minimum of 3 step intervals (22.5” per step) for all drill and on field formations.
- Rehearsals may take place only outdoors. If weather prevents outdoor rehearsals, rehearsals should be canceled until the weather cooperates.
- There should be no car-pooling to or from rehearsals.
- Additional guidance will be forthcoming with regard to putting marching drill to music once the NFHS/CBDNA aerosol research study is completed and results have been published.
- Instruments, equipment and sheet music should not be shared without proper cleaning and disinfecting including drumsticks and color guard equipment.
- Each student should have their own area (4’ x 3’ square) designated for their case and other equipment that is their space alone and not touching other students. Students should be encouraged to use the center of that space and then move outward as needed.

**Facilities Cleaning:**

- Adequate cleaning schedules should be created and implemented for all facilities used to mitigate any communicable diseases.
- Prior to an individual or groups of individuals entering a facility, hard surfaces within that facility should be wiped down and sanitized (chairs, furniture, storage rooms, instrumental equipment, bathrooms, etc.).
- Individuals should wash their hands for a minimum of 20 seconds with warm water and soap before touching any surfaces or participating in rehearsals.
- Hand sanitizer should be plentiful and available to individuals as they transfer from place to place.
- Shared musical equipment should be wiped down thoroughly before and after an individual's use of equipment.
- Appropriate clothing/shoes should be worn at all times.
- Students must be encouraged to shower and wash their rehearsal clothing immediately upon returning to home.

**Hydration:**

- All students shall bring their own water bottle. Water bottles must not be shared.
- Hydration stations (water cows, water trough, water fountains, etc.) should not be utilized.

**Phase 2****Pre-Rehearsal/Contest Screening:**

- All directors and students should be screened for signs/symptoms of COVID-19 prior to a rehearsal. Screening includes a temperature check.
- Responses to screening questions for each person should be recorded and stored so that there is a record of everyone present in case a student develops COVID-19, with appropriate attention being given to privacy and confidentiality, (see Appendix I for sample Monitoring Form).
- Any person with positive symptoms reported should not be allowed to take part in rehearsals and should contact his or her primary care provider or other appropriate health-care professional.
- Vulnerable individuals should not oversee or participate in any rehearsals during Phase 2.

**Limitations on Gatherings:**

- No gathering of more than 10 people at a time inside. Up to 50 individuals may gather outdoors for rehearsal.
- Rehearsals should be conducted in "pods" of students with the same 5-10 students always working together.
- Directors must create a plan for getting instruments from the band room to the practice facility that allows for social distancing and sanitation.
- Social distancing should be observed when music is being taught. Students should learn the music standing still, spaced at a minimum of 6-foot intervals. If teachers need to move within the 6-foot area to correct a student's playing position, embouchure, posture, etc. they should do so briefly and then move back away.
- Students should be spaced at a minimum of 3 step intervals (22.5" per step) for all drill and on field formations.

- Rehearsals should take place outdoors. If weather prevents outdoor rehearsals, rehearsals may be allowed indoors as long as a minimum of 10 feet between each individual can be achieved. Drastically reducing the number of students in an indoor setting will be likely.

#### **Facilities Cleaning:**

- Adequate cleaning schedules should be created and implemented for all facilities used to mitigate any communicable diseases.
- Prior to an individual or groups of individuals entering a facility, hard surfaces within that facility should be wiped down and sanitized (chairs, furniture, storage rooms, instrumental equipment, bathrooms, etc.).
- Individuals should wash their hands for a minimum of 20 seconds with warm water and soap before touching any surfaces or participating in rehearsals.
- Hand sanitizer should be plentiful and available to individuals as they transfer from place to place.
- Shared musical equipment should be wiped down thoroughly before and after an individual's use of equipment.
- Appropriate clothing/shoes should be worn at all times.
- Students must be encouraged to shower and wash their rehearsal clothing immediately upon returning to home.

#### **Hydration:**

- All students shall bring their own water bottle. Water bottles must not be shared.
- Hydration stations (water cows, water trough, water fountains, etc.) should not be utilized.

### **Phase 3**

#### **Pre- Rehearsal/Contest Screening:**

- Any person who has had a fever or cold symptoms in the previous 24 hours should not be allowed to take part in rehearsals and should contact his or her primary care provider or other appropriate health-care professional.
- A record should be kept of all individuals present.
- Vulnerable individuals can resume public interactions, but should practice physical distancing, minimizing exposure to social settings where distancing may not be practical, unless precautionary measures are observed.

#### **Limitations on Gatherings:**

- Gathering sizes of up to 50 individuals, indoors or outdoors.
- When not directly participating in practices or contests, care should be taken to maintain a minimum distance of 3 to 6 feet between each individual. Consider using tape or paint as a guide for students and directors.

#### **Facilities Cleaning:**

- Adequate cleaning schedules should be created and implemented for all facilities used to mitigate any communicable diseases.

- Prior to an individual or groups of individuals entering a facility, hard surfaces within that facility should be wiped down and sanitized (chairs, furniture, storage rooms, instrumental equipment, bathrooms, etc.).
- Individuals should wash their hands for a minimum of 20 seconds with warm water and soap before touching any surfaces or participating in rehearsals.
- Hand sanitizer should be plentiful and available to individuals as they transfer from place to place.
- Shared musical equipment should be wiped down thoroughly before and after an individual's use of equipment.
- Appropriate clothing/shoes should be worn at all times.
- Students must be encouraged to shower and wash their rehearsal clothing immediately upon returning to home.

#### Hydration:

- All students shall bring their own water bottle. Water bottles must not be shared.
- Hydration stations (water cows, water trough, water fountains, etc.) may be utilized but must be cleaned after every practice/contest.

#### D. Contests

##### 1. Transportation to events

Schools must consider social distancing requirements when scheduling contests and events for the fall. Social distancing (as required by state or local health department) will need to be maintained on buses/vans. Thus, multiple buses/vans and/or parental/guardian transportation will likely be needed.

##### 2. Social distancing during Contests/Events/Activities

###### a. Warm up / Clinic Rooms

Appropriate social distancing will need to be maintained on during contests and events. Consider using tape or paint as a guide for students and coaches.

###### b. Who should be allowed at events?

Group people into tiers from essential to non-essential and decide which tiers will be allowed at an event:

1. Tier 1 (Essential): Student participants, directors, adjudicators, event staff, medical staff, security
2. Tier 2 (Preferred): Media
3. Tier 3 (Non-essential): Spectators, vendors

*Only Tier 1 and 2 personnel will be allowed to attend events until state/local health departments lift restrictions on mass gatherings.*

#### E. Athletic Training Services

Given the coming financial crisis at the state and local levels, the NFHS SMAC fears that athletic trainer positions will be seen as a "luxury" and those positions will be at risk during the budgeting process. It is also assumed that athletic trainers supplied to high schools by hospitals

and sports medicine clinics are also at risk as many medical clinics and hospitals have suffered severe revenue loss during the pandemic.

Athletic trainers in high schools are positioned to play a vital role as sports and activities return following this pandemic. As health-care professionals, they can take lead roles in developing and implementing infection control policy throughout the school. Whenever needed, state associations, their SMACs and music committees should promote the importance of athletic trainers in high schools and their role in injury evaluation, treatment and risk minimization as well as being a vital component of any return-to-school and activities plan.

## **2. Return to Physical Activity**

Current pre-season conditioning and acclimatization models assume that participants have deconditioned over the summer months. The current pandemic may result in students being deconditioned for four to five months. The NFHS is currently involved with a number of other organizations in developing consensus guidelines for fall practices. These guidelines will be sent to state associations immediately after they are finalized and approved by all involved organizations.

## **3. Hygienic**

### **A. Illness reporting**

Create notification process for all event participants, directors, event staff, media, spectators and vendors if the organizers/medical personnel learn of suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 at the event.

### **B. Considerations for Adjudicators, Directors, Other Personnel**

1. Vulnerable individuals should not participate in any practices, conditioning activities, contests or events during Phases 1 and 2.
2. Masks may be worn, social distancing enforced and “Hygiene Basics” adhered to in all situations.

### **C. Hygiene Basics**

## **CONTINUE TO PRACTICE GOOD HYGIENE**

- Wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer, especially after touching frequently used items or surfaces.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Sneeze or cough into a tissue, or the inside of your elbow.
- Disinfect frequently used items and surfaces as much as possible.
- Strongly consider using face coverings while in public, and particularly when using mass transit.

## **PEOPLE WHO FEEL SICK SHOULD STAY HOME**

- Do not go to work or school.
- Contact and follow the advice of your medical provider.

## **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

1. Wide availability of hand sanitizer at contests and practices. Participants, coaches and officials should clean hands frequently.
2. Wiping down equipment frequently.

3. No handshakes/high-fives/fist bumps.
4. Adjudicators and volunteers should be given option to wear face coverings (may use artificial noisemaker in place of whistle when needed).

## References

“Opening up America Again.” *The White House*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/>. Accessed: 5/6/2020.

“Protection Concept for Exit from the Corona-Lockwood and Resumption of Sports Activities.” *Swiss Rugby Union*.  
[http://www.suisserugby.com/fileadmin/content/Medical/Coronavirus/Suisserugby\\_Protection\\_Concept\\_EN\\_20200508.pdf](http://www.suisserugby.com/fileadmin/content/Medical/Coronavirus/Suisserugby_Protection_Concept_EN_20200508.pdf), Version 1.0. Accessed: 4/29/2020.

“Recommendation Regarding the Use of Cloth Face Coverings, Especially in Areas of Significant Community-Based Transmission.” *Center for Disease Control and Prevention*. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>. Accessed: 5/6/2020.

“Return to Training Considerations Post-COVID-19.” *United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee - Sports Medicine*, Version 0.12. <https://www.teamusa.org/coronavirus>. Accessed: 4/28/20.



# APPENDIX I



# COVID-19 Participant/Director Monitoring Form

Name	Time	Circle Yes/No below										Temp (if higher than 100.3°F)
		Fever		Cough		Sore Throat		Shortness of Breath		Close contact, or cared for someone with COVID-19		
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	