

Information from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS): School-aged sports testing

Michigan is facing a challenging surge in COVID-19 cases. As of April 1, 2021, local health departments in Michigan had reported 301 new and ongoing outbreaks among K-12 schools, with 53 of those outbreaks reported in the week prior. In the four weeks prior to April 1, 2021, case rates among children in the 0-9 and 10-19 age groups have quadrupled to an all-time high in the state. Since January, more than 1,000 positive cases occurred across 15 types of sports in the school and club setting.

Given how quickly the COVID-19 pandemic evolved recently in Michigan, swift action was necessary to reduce transmission. COVID-19 testing is one additional mitigation measure that can be used to decrease the spread of disease in our communities. The testing regimen prescribed in the [Interim Guidance for Athletics](#) was implemented to increase the identification and isolation of COVID-19 cases in the age group with the highest increase in cases. Along with other mitigation practices, like wearing a mask whenever possible, screening for symptoms before practice or play, and frequent cleaning, the [Interim Guidance for Athletics](#) outlines how testing for SARS-COV-2 can and must be used as part of a comprehensive strategy to allow athletes to compete in a safer way at this time. To promote the continued safe operation of in-person schools, additional testing measures related to all youth sports activities are warranted.

Through our fall sports testing pilot program, schools tested approximately 80 people in one hour with four staff members. As staff became more comfortable with the regimen, the process became more solidified and expedited. Additionally, on March 31, MDHHS released new [reporting guidance](#) that only requires the discrete reporting of positive individuals and reporting an aggregate number of negative tests – greatly reducing the data collection requirement. In addition to the changes in reporting, we also have a [training series](#) that schools can utilize at their convenience. In addition, we have weekly [office hours](#) with MDHHS representatives where school staff can get real-time answers and additional assistance in overcoming logistical barriers. For those that cannot attend these sessions, we have a regularly monitored email box (MDHHS-SportsCOVIDinfo@michigan.gov) that you can reach MDHHS representatives with additional questions or concerns.

To quickly clarify, per the [MI Safer Sports FAQ](#), masks do not need to be worn while in active participation of non-contact athletic activities conducted outdoors and when at least six feet of physical distancing can be consistently maintained. However, this does not include individuals participating in contact sports, meaning sports that involve more than occasional and fleeting contact. Face masks must be worn by all individuals when not engaged in active participation, such as when on the bench, in the dugout, during breaks or intermissions, between races, events, matches, rounds, etc. It is important to note that case increases may not be due to the sports themselves, but the social activities surrounding sports, such as team meals and parties.

Thank you for your continued support in keeping Michigan safe and healthy.