

Good Afternoon President Hucker and members of the County Council.

My name is Debby Orsak and my son is a freshman on the Walter Johnson High School football team, and we ask that you please allow all of our student athletes to play competitive games.

I am writing in response to the proposed Action for "The County Council for Montgomery County, Maryland, sitting as the County Board of Health, finds that this is an emergency and approves the following regulation amending the regulation adopted by Resolution No. 19-760:" There are inaccurate statements in Section 6.e. "Businesses that May Open. Sports." of the proposed Action that reference sports being categorized by level of risk. The Maryland Sports Commission specifically states that the report being used to determine levels of risk for sports is "no longer a preferred resource" and the Council should not be using it as a basis for actions when sitting as the Board of Health. As directed by the Maryland Sports Commission, the Council "should adhere to the latest updates for a return to safe sports activities by referencing the most up-to-date recommendations from the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)". The NFHS states, "No individual or team sport can be determined to be solely HIGH, MODERATE or LOW risk based upon current available research." The NFHS also provides guidelines regarding high school athletics as follows:

"The following factors should be strongly considered by stakeholders in assessing the potential for COVID-19 transmission related to high school athletics:

1. COVID-19 rates of participants in any given sport are directly proportional to prevailing community disease rates.
2. Participants in non-contact sports show lower rates of COVID-19 than contact sports.
3. **Participants in outdoor sports show lower rates of COVID-19 than indoor sports.**
4. Face mask use while participating in indoor sports results in COVID-19 rates comparable to the rates found in outdoor sports.
5. **The great majority of sports-related spread of COVID-19 does not appear to occur during sports participation, but from social contact.** Maximizing efforts to prevent this type of spread remains paramount. Social distancing, mask use, staying home while ill and proper hygiene must continue to be emphasized in the locker room, on the sidelines, and while traveling, dining and interacting in the community."

Looking at those factors with regard to the planned high school football schedule, the practices and games all take place outdoors, and with the last games scheduled to be played on Friday, April 16th, the only students that will be back in the buildings for any in-person learning, that could possibly lead to in-school transmission, will be the seniors, if they elected to return, and any students who receive special education services, if they elected to return. Most 9th, 10th and 11th graders that elected to return to in-person learning will not be in the buildings yet until after the last football games have been played.

Please look on page 7 of the Action, where it states, "Sports are categorized by level of risk pursuant to the Maryland Sports Commission Return to Play Report". When you click on the hyperlink in the Action to the Maryland Sports Commission Return to Play Report, you are taken to a page on the Maryland Sports Commission web site that states the following:

*****UPDATED** Return to Play: Youth & Amateur Sports Resource Center**

Effective immediately, The Maryland Sports Commission *Return to Play Report and Guideline Recommendation* is no longer a preferred resource and or reference tool, due to the ongoing relaxation of restrictions related to COVID-19, and the continually changing environment and recommendations set forth by the C.D.C., W.H.O., as well as, federal, state, and local governments. At no time was The Maryland Sports Commission *Return to Play Report and Guidelines Recommendation* a legally binding document, a regulatory statute, or to be used/ cited in any

manner so as to suggest that this report was an authoritative source for determining or classifying the ability for sports activities to be allowed or executed.

It is the position of The Maryland Sports Commission that local governing institutions should make decisions on sports activities based on the information they receive as it relates to minimizing the spread of COVID-19, and that local governing bodies should adhere to the **latest** updates for a return to safe sports activities by referencing the most up-to-date recommendations from the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)* as well as the National Governing Bodies on a sport-by-sport basis, respectively.

Background:

In May 2020, The Maryland Sports Commission developed the Return to Play Task Force - consisting of medical professionals, local sports directors, coaches, events rights holders, and members of National Governing Bodies. In June 2020, the Task Force released the Return to Play Report and Guideline Recommendation. This document was created with the sole purpose of being a resource to jurisdictions across Maryland as they considered implementing less rigid regulations for hosting safe sporting events in their respective communities, as it related to the COVID-19 pandemic response.

*** Hyperlink to (NFHS):**

<https://www.nfhs.org/media/4295118/nfhs-smac-statement-on-risk-of-covid-19-during-high-school-sports-january-27-2021-final.pdf>

If you follow the hyperlink to NFHS, you will find the following:

STATEMENT ON RISK OF COVID-19 DURING HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

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

In May of 2020, the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC) distributed GUIDANCE FOR OPENING UP HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETICS AND ACTIVITIES to state high school associations. A key component of that document was an outline of high-, moderate- and low-risk sports under the heading “Potential Infection Risk by Sport.” The NFHS SMAC determined “potential infection risk” based upon its knowledge of the coronavirus at that time. Thus, an emphasis was placed upon avoiding close contact (for even brief periods of time) and sharing equipment. As our knowledge of how the virus that causes COVID-19 has evolved, we have increasingly recognized that transmission depends upon multiple factors that cannot be easily accounted for by simply dividing sports into three distinct categories of risk.

No individual or team sport can be determined to be solely HIGH, MODERATE or LOW risk based upon current available research. Coronavirus transmission rates in all sports vary based upon multiple factors and exist on a continuum. Prevailing community infection rates appear to be the strongest predictor for high school athletes being infected, and proven cases of direct transmission of coronavirus in the athletic setting remain relatively rare. Differences in incidence rates between sports are also relative as a “4 times greater infection rate” for one sport over the other may mean 13 per 100,000 player-days versus 52 per 100,000 player-days – both very small numbers.

Based upon a review of current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations, the shared experiences of dozens of states participating in high school athletics, and emerging published and unpublished data, the NFHS SMAC no longer endorses the use of the tiered “Potential Infection Risk

by Sport” that was included in the GUIDANCE FOR OPENING UP HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETICS AND ACTIVITIES.

The following factors should be strongly considered by stakeholders in assessing the potential for COVID-19 transmission related to high school athletics:

1. COVID-19 rates of participants in any given sport are directly proportional to prevailing community disease rates.
2. Participants in non-contact sports show lower rates of COVID-19 than contact sports.
3. Participants in outdoor sports show lower rates of COVID-19 than indoor sports.
4. Face mask use while participating in indoor sports results in COVID-19 rates comparable to the rates found in outdoor sports.
5. The great majority of sports-related spread of COVID-19 does not appear to occur during sports participation, but from social contact. Maximizing efforts to prevent this type of spread remains paramount. Social distancing, mask use, staying home while ill and proper hygiene must continue to be emphasized in the locker room, on the sidelines, and while traveling, dining and interacting in the community.

References

Watson AM. Et al. The Association of COVID-19 Incidence with Sport and Face Mask Use in United States High School Athletes. MedRxiv.org. <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2021.01.19.21250116v1>

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

Accessed January 21, 2021.

https://www.amssm.org/Content/pdf-files/COVID19/UnderstandingRisks_Youth.pdf

Accessed January 22, 2021.

<https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-interim-guidance-return-to-sports/>

Accessed January 24, 2021.

Approved January 27, 2021

DISCLAIMER – NFHS Position Statements and Guidelines

The NFHS regularly distributes position statements and guidelines to promote public awareness of certain health and safety-related issues. Such information is neither exhaustive nor necessarily applicable to all circumstances or individuals and is no substitute for consultation with appropriate health-care professionals. Statutes, codes or environmental conditions may be relevant. NFHS position statements or guidelines should be considered in conjunction with other pertinent materials when taking action or planning care. The NFHS reserves the right to rescind or modify any such document at any time.

Friday afternoon, when you all meet as the Board of Health, please pass an amendment to the policy passed last Friday, and allow all of our student athletes to play competitive games.