

Officials Considerations for COVID-19 Football Guidelines

Included below are considerations for contest officials within the guidelines for returning to school sports. They have been developed in consultation with health professionals, government officials, the National Federation and officials from around the state of Michigan. They include general expectations for schools in relation to officials, provisions specific to officials in the sport, rules and mechanics modifications and protocols for when a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 is identified.

Officials are not responsible for monitoring activities on the sidelines, such as physical distancing, hand washing, symptoms of illnesses and other such issues. This monitoring remains the responsibility of the coaching staff and school personnel.

General Expectations for Schools

- School athletic directors and officials should communicate with one another well in advance of the contest so that there is a clear understanding as to what is expected from each. Failure to discuss the details may create greater conflicts at the date/time of the contest.
- Officials should be provided a designated parking area apart from the general public.
- An adult host should meet the officials at a single, designated location and time for arrival. They should be escorted all together to a *private open and/or ventilated locker room or meeting area* before the start of the contest, to and from the contest during any intermissions and to the parking areas following the conclusion of the contest.
- Officials should be provided cold beverages either (1) in a sealed, disposable bottle or (2) in a newly washed, reusable bottle. Each shall be designated for a single official and should be marked to indicate to which official the beverage is assigned.
- If offered, snacks or meals provided to officials should be individually packaged separately for each official.
- It is recommended that officials' fees are paid using an electronic payment method.

Protocols for Suspected and Confirmed Cases of COVID-19

Suspected Cases at Contest

- If an official becomes symptomatic at a contest, he or she should be moved to a designated quarantine area with a mask in place until they are transported from the facility. If the symptoms are severe, the official should be picked up by an emergency contact or by ambulance (if clinically unstable) for off-site testing. If an ambulance is called, or someone is being transported to the hospital, there should be an attempt to call the hospital first to alert them that the person may have COVID-19.

Confirmed Cases

- If an official has a laboratory positive or clinically diagnosed case of COVID-19, he or she should immediately contact the local health department for further instructions, and inform the athletic director(s) of any host school he or she visited within the previous two days before displaying COVID-19 symptoms.
- Officials must inform any host school for which they are scheduled to officiate for (at least) 14 days following confirmation that they are unable to work those contests. They will remain ineligible to officiate any MHSAA contests until they are medically cleared by their personal healthcare provider.

- All officials considered close contacts (*i.e., individuals less than six feet apart for more than 15 minutes*) will be informed when a positive case of COVID-19 is identified from a contest they officiated within two days of when the infected individual first displayed symptoms. If identified as a close contact, an official should quarantine and must return assignments scheduled for the next 14 days.
- If an official was at the event, but not in close contact with a positive case, he or she should continue to be closely monitored for any symptoms of COVID-19. At this time, these individuals are not required to receive testing unless they develop COVID-19 symptoms.

Cancellations/Failure-to-Fulfill

- Games that are cancelled because of COVID-19 are considered cancelled as a result of an act of God and are not subject to a 10-day minimum advanced notice by the school.
- Officials are not subject to a failure-to-fulfill penalty if they break a contract for an assignment when (1) they have been diagnosed with, or display symptoms of, COVID-19 or (2) if a confirmed case of COVID-19 has been identified with a team or facility which/where he or she is scheduled to officiate.

Officials' Sport-Specific Provisions

It is incumbent of MHSAA officials to take necessary precautions to ensure a safe working/playing environment. This is especially important for those considered “vulnerable individuals” – people 65 years and older and others with serious underlying health conditions. Individual circumstances, proximity to others while officiating and overall risk level will determine for many the extent of precautions taken.

Provisions are listed in categories described below. As independent contractors, MHSAA officials have the ability to choose or decline assignments as they see fit. Likewise, because officials are hired by the schools, districts and their administrators may require additional precautions be taken by officials that work their contests beyond those mandated in this document. Officials should check with the schools as to any additional precautions or requirements before accepting an assignment and/or arriving to contest.

Provision Categories

- Permitted** – Precautions and safety measures which officials are allowed to take during MHSAA contests. This list is not exhaustive and officials should contact the host school for guidance if they wish to take further precautions not listed in this document.
- Suggested** – Best practices for MHSAA officials based on the recommendations of health professionals. Not required, but should be followed if possible.
- Mandated** – Required practice in order to officiate MHSAA contests. If an official is unwilling or unable to follow these requirements, he or she is not permitted to officiate the contest.

NOTE: “Physical distancing” refers to a separation of individuals of at least six feet, except for momentary interactions.

Permitted Provisions:

- Officials may use electronic whistles.
- Officials may wear gloves – including medical latex gloves, work gloves or gloves designed specifically for officiating.



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- Officials may wear plastic face shields which connect to a hat, wrap around the forehead or that hang around the neck.
- The umpire may carry a spray disinfectant to use on the football between downs.
- The umpire may take a position deeper or wider than normal to avoid a position in close proximity to defensive players. It is not permissible for umpires to take a position behind the offensive team.
- Sideline officials (*i.e., head linesman, line judge, side judge and field judge*) may take their starting positions a yard into the field of play as long as this position does not interfere with play.
- Crews have the option to utilize the following mechanics deviation regarding the spotting of the football. If utilized, the Referee **must** discuss with the head coach of each team what will be required of their players in order to ensure play continues in as normal of a manner as possible. **NOTE: This crew mechanic will be mandatory for use in the 2020 MHSAA Postseason Tournament.:**
 - Officials will not be responsible for handling footballs during the course of the game. The responsibility to bring balls onto the field for a free kick or new series, retrieve footballs following an incomplete pass or after a kick and to spot the ball during an offensive possession belongs to the offensive team.
 - The kicker will bring the ball out with him/her for a free kick to start a half or following a score.
 - Receivers will retrieve the ball following an incomplete pass and return it to their snapper.
 - Team K players will retrieve the ball (or have another available) following a successful field goal or try attempt.
 - Receivers or runners will return the ball to their snapper following the completion of the previous play.
 - At the request of the officials, ball handlers from each team's sideline may bring in new footballs while their team is on offense when a ball is overthrown or gets away from the field of play, when necessary due to inclement conditions or at the start of a new series.
 - Forward progress will be marked in the same manner as normal, except that the umpire will mirror the position of the covering official and mark the spot of the next snap with his foot.
 - If the ball is downed at a yard line which may result in a measurement, the covering official will request the ball from a player so that it can be accurately placed on the ground.
 - The ball may be handled by **ONLY** the covering official when a measurement occurs. This includes during the measurement process and if/when the ball is re-spotted inside the hash marks.
 - The snapper is responsible to hold the ball between downs and carry it to the spot of the snap. When the snapper approaches the line of scrimmage, the umpire will instruct him/her to spot the ball at the toe of the umpire's foot. **NOTE: Alternatively, a member of the offensive team may place the ball at the spot of the next snap as he/she returns to the huddle or line of scrimmage.**
 - The Ready-for-Play will still be indicated by the umpire stepping away from the ball back to his position, so the ball cannot be snapped any earlier than normal. **NOTE: Following the**

conclusion of a timeout, when the offensive team does not immediately return to the field, the Referee may sound his whistle and signal ready-for-play without the ball present at the line of scrimmage. The Umpire will remain at the spot and the offensive team may not snap the ball until he backs away to his position. Referees should use the ready-for-play to encourage players to come out of their huddles in a timely manner.

- The mechanics for both the play clock and game play will remain the same as normal. The play clock may be reset to :25 if there is an unusual circumstance that wouldn't allow normal play to occur. This **DOES NOT** include when the offensive team is simply delayed in getting to the line of scrimmage by their own actions.
- There is no change in the mechanics for "hurry-up" or no huddle offenses since it still requires the umpire to step away in order for the ball to be legally snapped.

Suggested Provisions:

- Each official should check his/her temperature on game days. Officials displaying COVID-19 symptoms (*e.g., fever, cough or shortness of breath*), or with temperatures of 100.3F or greater, should stay home and consider coronavirus testing if symptoms persist.
- Officials should consider bringing their own marked beverage(s).
- Upon arrival at the site/facility and throughout the contest, officials should wash and sanitize their hands frequently.
- Officials should not share uniforms, towels apparel or equipment.
- Cloth or surgical face coverings, which cover the mouth and nose are recommended for individuals that can wear them without significant impact upon breathing.
- Officials should sanitize their hands after inspecting footballs, casts or braces.
- The officials handling the yard sticks during a measurement should sanitize their hands following the completion of the measurement.
- It is recommended that officials retrieve their own bean bags and penalty flags after they have been dropped.

Mandated Provisions:

- Officials will arrange to arrive to the site/facility at a single location and time. Unless unavoidable, officials will enter the facility as a group, maintaining proper physical distancing.
- Officials' pregame meetings shall be conducted while practicing proper physical distancing.
- Officials shall not engage in pregame/postgame handshakes or fist bumps with players, coaches or administrators.
- The coin toss (including overtime) will be conducted with only the referee, the umpire and a single captain from each team, maintaining physical distancing and without handshakes prior to and following the coin toss.



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- Officials shall not physically contact players during the contest, including players that appear to be injured or ill.
- Officials will maintain physical distancing with each other unless conferencing about a call or ruling. In those cases, the officials should avoid speaking face-to-face.
- Only one official will meet with the timer before the start of the game, while maintaining proper physical distancing.
- When providing an explanation of a ruling to a head coach, the referee will meet the coach between the sideline and the 9-yard marks, away from others located on the sideline. One other official may be present, but physical distancing should be practiced by all involved.

Rules Modifications (Football)

- **TEAM BOX (Rule 1-2-3g)**
 - The team box may be extended on both sides of the field to the 10-yard lines (for both coaches and players) in order for more physical distancing space for the teams. Coaches and players located outside of the traditional team box (*i.e., the area between each 10- and 25-yard lines*) are being granted this latitude based on the special circumstances, and officials must be especially diligent in enforcing conduct and behavior rules in these expanded areas.

- **BALL (Rule 1-3-2)**
 - The ball should be cleaned and sanitized throughout the contest as recommended by the ball manufacturer.

- **FACE MASKS (Rules 1-5-1a, 1-5-3c(4))**
 - Cloth face coverings are permissible by rule. If worn, they must be connected directly to the face, or must be attached to the *inside* of the facemask. **NOTE: Executive Orders 176 and 180 require the use of facial covering by all athletes; however, officials have no role in the enforcement of this mandate. See [Face Coverings and Contest Officials](#) for further information regarding this subject.**
 - Plastic shields covering the entire face (unless integrated into the face mask and attached to the helmet and clear without the presence of any tint) shall not be allowed during the contest. **NOTE: The MHSAA also permits the use of half face shields (top or bottom) under the same conditions (*i.e., attached to the inside of the facemask and 100% clear – no tint*).**
 - If a facial covering is grasped while inside the helmet or facemask, officials should use the same judgment as with the facemask foul rule. If a facial covering is grasped inside the neck area or along the nameplate area, officials should use the same judgment as with the horse collar tackle foul rule.

- **TOOTH AND MOUTH PROTECTORS (Rule 1-5-1d(5))**
 - ****Still being determined at this time on how to best handle the tooth and mouth protector during the contest.****

- **GLOVES (Rule 1-5-2b)**
 - Gloves are permissible but still must comply with Rule 1-5-2b by meeting either the NOCSAE Standard or the SFIA Specification.

- **CHARGED TIMEOUTS AND AUTHORIZED CONFERENCES (Rules 2-6-2, 3-5-3, 3-5-8)**
 - A single charged timeout may be extended to a maximum of two minutes in length.
 - The authorized conference for the charged timeout should take place between the 9-yard marks and not at the sideline for physical distancing purposes. (It would be permissible for more than one coach to be involved in this conference and for technology to be used.)
 - Each game official and player should have their own beverage container brought out to them on the field.

- **INTERMISSION BETWEEN PERIODS AND AFTER SCORING (Rule 3-5-7I)**



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- The intermission may be extended to a maximum of two minutes between the first and second and the third and fourth periods and following a try, successful field goal or safety, and prior to the succeeding free kick