



STRATEGIC PLAN FOR RETURN TO PLAY

Updated: February, 2021

DISCLAIMER: *Players, coaches, spectators, and any other individuals participating in slo-pitch and slo-pitch related activities do so with the knowledge of the risk and potential exposure involved, and agree to accept any and all inherent risks to their personal health.*

NOTE TO ALL PARTICIPANTS: *Slo-Pitch Ontario does not dictate when local municipalities decide to open their fields and facilities for use by leagues, teams and players during the COVID-19 pandemic. The date on which slo-pitch activities will be allowed to commence may vary depending on the municipality, thus, League Directors and Executives and Tournament Directors will need to work closely with local government and their Parks and Recreation departments to establish a date when it is safe to return to play. Teams and players should be aware of, and respect, their local restrictions in relation to recreation participation.*

*The purpose of this document is to outline plans, guidelines and procedures in contemplation of a Return to Play, addressing **FIVE (5)** major areas of concern with respect to physical distancing and to provide a certain level of comfort to participants by outlining steps to be taken to help maximize their safety and well-being. These areas are: (1) **ENTRY**; (2) **OFF-FIELD**; (3) **ON-FIELD**; (4) **SPECTATORS**; (5) **UMPIRES**.*

PLEASE NOTE: *This document is comprised of suggested **RECOMMENDATIONS** that have been developed for use by all members to help ensure the health and safety of our players, coaches, and spectators as we return to play. This document will be revised on a regular basis as more details become available.*

For more information, please contact Slo-Pitch Ontario Association.

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1. ENTRY

Temperature Taking (Within Range, Above Range, Re-Testing/Re-Admittance, Factor Consideration – Heat, Weather, Other, Monitoring)

- May not be feasible for all leagues, for tournament play this would be the responsibility of the Tournament Director(s).
- Individuals that show signs of a fever based on their temperature reading will be turned away before they enter the Park or Facility. There is also an expectation that any individual experiencing symptoms should take the initiative and stay home.
- During this process individuals may also be asked if they are experiencing any other symptoms (new or existing cough) to make a determination to help ensure the safety of all individuals involved.

Entry Ways to Field/Diamond Area(s)

- Considerations in this area will be dependent on the type/location of the complex or playing fields.
- Emphasis should be placed on providing safe travel areas to reduce contact between individuals entering and exiting the Park/Complex.
- Should reduce the use of indoor facilities, and plan for safe use of pathways/trails.
- The use of caution tape may be recommended to safely mark off areas that should not be accessed, as well as helping to provide marked areas for travel to and from diamonds, etc.

Team and Player-Sign In

- Should be avoided as much as possible. Strongly recommended use of electronic registration.

Entry to Concessions, Washrooms, Food Areas

- Entry ways should be properly addressed to ensure 6-foot rule can be followed, or temporary closure of concession/washroom facilities may be required.

Hand Sanitization

- The establishment of hand sanitization stations may be applicable for some complexes/facilities
- Hand sanitizer may be distributed to teams/players upon entry. Teams may be advised of being required to bring their own supply of hand sanitizer to be able to participate.
- Frequent hand sanitization will be stressed for players in all league/tournament play and may be enforced as mandatory.

2. OFF-FIELD

Concession Areas/Washroom Facilities

- Concessions: may only be allowed to open if they can provide pre-packaged options, as well as the ability to provide consistent sanitization and abide by social distancing guidelines.
- Washrooms: Will require consistent attention and sanitization. Leagues may opt to keep washroom facilities closed during play to reduce possible contamination.
- Food areas: Dining room/ seating areas will be recommended to remain closed to prevent gathering of individuals. If open, eating surfaces will require consistent sanitization.

Medic

- Will have their own training, and may be able to provide suggestions on further safety considerations.

Playground Areas

- Guidelines for these areas should be consistent with local guidelines/regulations.

Vendors

- All vendors will be asked to follow outlined guidelines and regulations set out by the event organizer(s).

Hotels

- Hotels will have their own procedures and guidelines in place to ensure the safety of their guests.
- Hotels may not allow previously accepted practices (such as sharing of rooms for X# of individuals).
- Alterations to the length or structure of events may be required if hotel accommodations remain unavailable.

Vehicles

- For shared vehicles (i.e. golf carts), frequent sanitization will be required. Provision of disinfectant wipes for each vehicle may be useful. Carpooling, in excess, should be avoided.

Headquarters/Registration

- These locations should remain restricted to use by League/Tournament personnel only. Guidelines should be considered to keep players/coaches away from these locations as much as possible. Score reporting/complaints may need to be done electronically.

3. ON-FIELD

Diamond Use

- May possibly be a limit on the number of diamonds in use, depending on the size of the Park or Complex.

Hand Sanitization

- Should be done consistently throughout the game.

Coin Toss/Rules and Exchange of Line-up Cards

- For coin toss/ ground rules procedure, one representative from each team should be allowed at home plate, with 6-foot distance maintained by all parties.

Bats

- Recommend the reduction of bat sharing if possible.
- Guidelines still need to be developed to address proper handling of bats (removal from playing field) with the main objective being to limit the number of times a bat changes hands.

Player's Equipment

- No gloves to be on fence, player's bags to be distanced, no bringing out gloves, batting gloves
- Players should be reminded to reduce the amount of shared equipment and attempt to keep each individual's equipment isolated to reduce coming into contact with the equipment of other players.

Protective Face Masks/Helmets

- There should be no sharing of protective face masks or helmets at any time.

Face Masks

- Face masks for the purpose of reducing potential virus transmission may be a required stipulation for being on the field, or entering the Park/Complex/Facility.

Balls

- Consider having defensive team supply their own balls while in the field to reduce contact with individuals on the opposing team.
- Consideration should be made for safe ball retrieval (homeruns, foul balls).
- Balls may require consistent sanitization (possibly by umpire, possibly by team).

Catcher and Batter

- Will need to maintain 6-foot distance.

Catcher and Umpire

- Will need to maintain 6-foot distance, when possible. May need different conditions dependant on the size of the field/backstop.

Batter

- Should attempt to reduce any unnecessary contact with other players. Should also avoid using their hands to contact the ball at any time.

On-Deck Batter

- Consideration should be made as to whether having an on-deck batter reduces the ability of the batter/umpire/catcher to remain 6-feet apart. If so, on-deck batter may need to be removed.

No Tag Plays, All Force Outs

- This may help to reduce contact between defensive and offensive players by negating the requirement of tagging, as well as removing the necessity of sliding into a base.

No Sunflower Seeds, Gum or Tobacco Chewing, Spitting

- General spitting will be discouraged for all participants, both on and off the field. Difficult to enforce.
- Sunflower seeds/chewing tobacco/gum will be handled with a zero tolerance policy, that may become enforceable through potential ejection from the game and/or removal from events.

Final Game Sheet

- If lineup cards are required to be submitted following the completion of the game, these cards should be submitted electronically by sending a picture of the card to the appropriate party.

Pre-Game/Post-Game Huddles

- Should not be conducted at any time.

Post-Game Handshake

- Will not be allowed or required following games at any level.

Capacity of Players on Bench/Dugout

- Will need to be consistent with government guidelines relating to number of individuals allowed to gather in a given area.
- Players may be required to sit behind the bench/dugout to help maintain safe distances between them.

Exit from Playing Field During Game

- During the game, players entering and exiting the playing field should do so in an orderly fashion that allows a 6-foot distance to be maintained between players as much as possible.
- Any player not required to be on the field should not enter the playing surface (e.g. homerun celebrations).

First and Third Base Coaches

- If Coaches are on the playing field, they should remain a minimum of 6-feet away from the base they are coaching in order to prevent contact with a defensive player. Also, Coaches should not engage an offensive player with high-fives, or other physical contact.
- Depending on the field, Coaches may be asked to coach from outside of the playing field if a safe distance is unable to be maintained.

Injured Player

- If medical personnel are on hand, injured players should be dealt with primarily by these individuals, unless further assistance is requested.
- The number of individuals attending to an injured player should be limited to the number necessary based on the severity of the injury. Sufficient first-aid kits should be provided that include latex gloves and facemasks to help increase the safety of their interaction with the injured player.

Pitching Conferences/On-Field Conferences

- Will need to be reduced to coach-pitcher conferences only, if not entirely removed.

Scorekeepers

- Scores should be reported electronically to reduce congestion at Headquarter locations.

Call Challenges

- Challenges may be made as long as the challenge is made by a recognized coach in a controlled and orderly fashion, and the coach/umpire are able to remain at a safe distance in which neither is put at risk.

Bat Testing

- Bat testing prior to the start of games (when applicable) will be done using a visual check done by the umpire crew to ensure all bats have the appropriate thumbprint and do not show any visible signs of damage.
- Bat testing done by leagues/tournament organizers may be postponed for the season to prevent unnecessary contact with equipment.

Post-Game Bench/Dugout Cleaning

- Emphasis will be placed on mandatory cleaning and sanitization of the bench area following the completion of the game. Access to extra garbage/recycling containers may be a request that can be made to specific Parks/Municipalities.

4. SPECTATORS (*IF PERMITTED)

***PLEASE NOTE: The allowance of spectators will be dependent on the guidelines set out by the Ontario government and local health officials.**

Seating

- Spectators will not be allowed to watch the game from inside the infield baselines. It will be required that any spectators (if allowed) will need to bring their own chairs or blankets and sit down the foul line or outside of the outfield fence. Seating areas including bleachers and picnic areas should be considered off limits to prevent congregation of groups of spectators. Players who are not required to be present for a game should be considered spectators and will be required to follow spectator guidelines.

Hand Sanitization

- Established hand sanitization guidelines will need to be followed by all spectators. Personal supply of hand sanitizer will be recommended if hand sanitizer is not provided.

No Sunflower Seeds, Gum or Tobacco Chewing, Spitting

- As is consistent with guidelines for participants, spectators will not be allowed any seeds, gum or chewing tobacco, and will be asked to remove it from the area.

Restaurant/Bar/Concession/Playground Area

- Spectator use of these areas will be dependent on the operational guidelines of these areas/facilities outlined by facility management.

Pets/Minor Children

- Spectators/participants will be asked to leave small children/pets at home if possible to reduce the number of individuals present at a game or event. If they are present they must be supervised at all times by a parent/guardian.

Crowds

- Crowding will not be tolerated. Individuals will be asked to respect the 6-foot rule at all times when possible and gatherings of individuals will be asked to separate when necessary.

5. UMPIRES

Catcher and Home Plate Umpire

- To ensure a maintenance of safe distance, Umpires will be required to utilize an exaggerated inside/outside slot position as long as the Umpire has the ability to perform their duties as the home plate umpire from these positions.
- In situations where appropriate distance cannot be accommodated (for example, due to field size), Umpires may be required to wear masks.

Live Plate Plays

- All Leagues and Tournaments should adopt a scoring line for the season.

Player Equipment (Removal of Bat, Handing to On-Deck Batter)

- Will not be considered the responsibility of the Umpire. Specifically, the removal of bats from the field will be the responsibility of the offensive team based on guidelines outlined previously in the 'On-Field' section.

2nd Base Umpire/ Other Field Umpires

- Must be able to position themselves in a position at least 6-feet away from any defensive player.

Umpire Conferences

- Umpire conferences may be allowed to take place, as long as they are conducted in a safe manner such that the Umpires can be away from any players, and can maintain a 6-foot distance between one another.

Call Challenges

- As above, challenges can be made by a Coach in a safe and controlled manner. The Umpire will have the authority to eject said Coach if they feel their safe distance is being encroached upon and the Coach has not respected any request to remain at distance.

Water Bottles

- No sharing of water bottles between Umpires, and refillable water bottles will be strongly recommended.

Hand Sanitization

- Umpires will be subject to any hand sanitization guidelines provided by the League or Tournament organizer.
- Umpires may be asked to supply their own personal hand sanitizer.

Umpire Room

- If used, the room should be set up to allow for a minimum of 6-feet between each Umpire at all times.
- Umpires should remain in a closed change room for the minimum amount of time necessary.
- Umpires are recommended to wear masks when using these facilities.
- Umpire gear should not be left in the change rooms overnight.

Responsibility

- Umpires may be responsible for enforcing guidelines relating to the health and safety of the participant's on-field/inside the dugout during the game.

FOR DISCUSSION PURPOSES