

Baseball Nova Scotia

Return to Play 2020



June 3rd/2020

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Our Mandate

Baseball Nova Scotia serves close to 9000 members annually across the province. Per our Mission Statement, *‘Baseball Nova Scotia strives to promote and deliver services and programs in an equitable manner across the province. Our focus is to lead by example in governance support, athlete focused participation opportunities, coaching and officiating development, and excellence programming’.*

Baseball plays an important role in promoting physical activity during the summer months and brings communities together. During these unprecedented times, our local associations are motivated to do whatever it takes to ensure a safe environment. As the governing body, we want to make sure our stakeholders are provided with clear guidelines to support these efforts.

Our Process

During the early days of April, Baseball Nova Scotia staff contacted representatives from every club across the province. This includes close to 50 clubs from Clarks Harbour to New Waterford. Given the impact of COVID-19, BNS felt it is important to gain an understanding of what the desires of our community associations are as we navigate the “new normal”. The response we received was consistent: **“Whatever we need to do to make baseball safe, we’ll do it to get on the field this summer”.**

Understanding the motivation was present across the province provided us with the information we needed to create a Return to Play (RTP) plan.

While continuous communication is still being provided to membership, and a Contingency Plan (with updates to programming) has already been released, a formal RTP plan is necessary to address and mitigate the potential risks in our sport.

On May 19th, an RTP Committee conducted a virtual meeting to discuss all aspects of our game. The committee featured representation from the BNS office, the BNS Board, Association Boards, community coaches, high performance coaches, and the BNS Umpires division. The ten-person committee formed the recommendations in this document.

We respectfully submit this Return to Play document in hopes that we are providing clear guidelines and solutions to the risk factors at play in baseball.

Plan Considerations

Our plan was guided by the following:

- Adherence to the core personal public health measures from the government:
 - Physical Distancing
 - Practising good hygiene
 - Staying informed and being prepared to follow and promote public health advice
- Alterations to programs and services according to Sport Nova Scotia parameters in the following areas:
 - Environment
 - Equipment
 - Physical Distancing
 - Education (individual precautions)
- Identification of moderate to high risk factors present in our baseball and creating three distinct, yet complimentary, sets of guidelines for:
 - General
 - Practice/Training
 - Competition
- Phased approach that allows for flexibility to adapt to public health guidelines as they change

General Messaging

****Disclaimer:** The guidelines and recommendations in this document are not legal or medical advice. Given the extremely fluid environment of COVID-19, all guidelines and recommendations are subject to change.*

Keep in mind the following core principles when conducting baseball activities.

- 1) Ask members (athlete, coach, official, or other volunteer) to stay home if they have any symptoms of COVID-19 or have been in contact with someone who has or had the virus in the previous 14 days. Proof of testing will be required to return to play.
- 2) Even for members who appear to be healthy and have had no contact with someone who is at-risk, it is still important to follow physical distancing and sanitation practices

3) Use sanitary practices recommended by the public health authorities.

a) Practice proper hygiene as it can help reduce the risk of infection or spreading infection to others.

b) Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after using the washroom– or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available (have these readily available or ask members to bring their own).

c) Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

4) The Coronavirus that causes COVID-19 spreads through droplets that people produce as they breathe, talk, cough and sneeze.

When coughing or sneezing:

a) Cough or sneeze into a tissue or the bend of your arm, not your hand.

b) Use a tissue and dispose of any used tissues as soon as possible in a lined waste basket and wash your hands afterwards.

c) Keep Physical Distancing of 2 m or 6 feet:

5) Wear a mask if in close contact with others (surgical procedure or cloth mask is sufficient, N-95 mask not required). Masks don't replace proper physical distancing. Masks are not mandated at this time.

6) Avoid large groups where social distancing is not feasible.

Phase 1: Return to Training

Setting	Adaptations
General	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Environment/Facility</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indoor training is permissible as long as it follows provincial public health measures. • Dugouts are off limits to athletes (coaches/organizers can utilize, assuming physical distancing is possible) • Field bookings should be done with 15 minute grace times between to allow for limited interaction between groups using the field • No sharing of water bottles. • No sharing of food of any kind. • No spitting. • No chewing gum. • No sunflower seeds. • All participants to shower at first opportunity after each event. • Associations will work with facility owners to adopt Baseball NS Return to Play plan. Associations will be also be beholden to any additional health precautions put in place by facility owners. • Coaches should sanitize any high touch surface areas prior to vacating the facility (as dugouts are not being used, there should be minimal high touch areas)
	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Equipment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No sharing of personal helmets, gloves, hats, or training devices. • No sharing of bats (unless cleaned with a certified disinfectant after every use) • No sharing of catcher’s gear. Catchers gear can only be used if the following conditions are met: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Personal gear is used ➤ ‘Association gear’ is used by one person per day, and disinfected after each session • No sharing of any other equipment unless disinfected between personal uses.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All participants to disinfect their equipment after each event. • All uniforms or clothing to be washed after each event. • The following precautions are recommended to minimize the risks of multiple people handling the same baseballs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Balls should be sanitized after use <u>or</u> not used for four days to reduce likely hood of transmission ➤ Two different training groups should not be using the same baseballs (unless sanitized between use). ➤ Athletes should be provided with the opportunity to sanitize their hands between drills/activities.
	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Physical Distancing</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ride sharing to be discouraged whenever possible. • It is encouraged that spectators be limited to one family member, <u>or</u> no more than one acquaintance of the athlete. All spectators will be expected to maintain physical distancing • All First Aid kits are to be updated to include PPE (as deemed appropriate by public health) should physical contact may be necessary due to injury • One designated person to handle injury situations to avoid physical contact between the injured person and multiple people • Teams should have a communal hand sanitizer available, but athletes will be encouraged to bring a personal bottle for use.
Practice/Training	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Environment</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">General Adaptation apply</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Equipment</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">General Adaptions apply</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Physical Distancing</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 people permitted on the field of play. Must include a minimum of two coaches. • Coaches must maintain physical distancing while working with athletes • Athletes to use bring personal gear onto the field.

Competition	No Competition in Phase 1
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Phase 1 Notes

- Given the limited physical contact within our sport, and the spacious outdoor environment, the RTP Committee feels physical distancing will not be an issue.
- Associations should have a participant registry or the ability to trace names, dates, time, and contact info for training activities. Should a COVID-19 case be reported, this will assist in tracing.
- Associations must report potential cases of COVID-19 to Baseball Nova Scotia immediately. Further activities must be suspended until confirmation of a negative test is provided.
- All participants will be required to sign a **Release, Waiver of Liability, and Indemnity** acknowledging the inherent risk in participation, and the release of liability towards Baseball Nova Scotia and the association. BNS will provide the waiver. Associations must have the signed waiver prior to allowing any athlete on the field. BNS will be auditing associations to ensure they have collected the signed waiver.
- The association should communicate all guidelines to its members. BNS does not collect contact information for every member, so the association should communicate the guidelines to its members or their guardians.
- Distribution of three documents will be done prior to any activity:
 - Association Guidelines
 - Coaches Guidelines
 - Participant Guidelines
- Challenger Baseball serves athletes with disabilities. Given the underlying conditions present with many of our athletes, and the need for constant physical interaction, Baseball Nova Scotia has decided to suspend all Challenger programs until September 1st, 2020. General guidelines do not apply to this program.

Phase 2: Return to Competition (UPDATED JULY 27TH/2020)

Setting	Adaptations
General	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Environment</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Phase 1 Adaptations apply with the following changes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indoor training is permissible, assuming it is permitted under the public health guidelines (including group size). • Dugouts can be used during competitions for coaches and no more than 3 athletes at a time. Personal gear is to remain outside of the dugout. Designated space inside or outside the field must be provided for participants and teams to safely physical distance from each other. • Games will see a strict 1 hour and 45 minute time limit. As field bookings are typically done in 2 hour slots, we want to ensure a 15 minutes grace period as one group enters the facility and one leaves • Gates will remain open during competition (unless the gate opens into the field of play). • Coaches boxes to be adjusted to ensure physical distancing from players and officials • Associations must require that spectators be limited to one family member (or guardian), or no more than one acquaintance of the athlete. All spectators will be required to maintain physical distancing. Public health orders stipulate no more than 50 at a gathering. If gathering sizes exceed 50 (including athletes, coaches, and officials), parents may be asked to move to the parking lot or another area of the premises away from the main viewing area (bleachers, etc.) <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Equipment</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Phase 1 Adaptations apply, with one exception re:baseballs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The following precautions are recommended to minimize the risks of multiple people handling the same baseballs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Athletes must be provided with the opportunity to sanitize their hands between drills/activities. Sanitization of baseballs is not necessary

	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Physical Distancing</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Phase 1 Adaptations apply</p>
<p>Practice/Training</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Environment</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Phase 1 Adaptations apply</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Equipment</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Phase 1 Adaptions apply</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Physical Distancing</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teams can have practices as a group (no sharing the field with other teams) • Full team drills are permitted, assuming core public health physical distancing guidelines are met
<p>Competition</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Rally Cap/8U</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No catchers permitted. Bownets or other means of collecting pitched balls to be used. • Use of Rally Cap style 5 on 5 must be used (no catcher or outfielders). • Station based skill development to remain the priority <p style="text-align: center;"><u>11U Only</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreational level and below: No catchers permitted. Catchers permitted at all levels • Catchers are permitted, but must use personal gear, or have designated sets of gear to individuals on each day. No two athletes can use the same set of gear on the same day. Gear must be sanitized after each use. <p style="text-align: center;"><u>11U, 13U, 15U, 18U, 21U, Intermediate, and Senior</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No home plate umpire. Balls and strikes to be called from an official at least 10 feet behind the pitcher. • No pregame home plate meeting. Home team will be responsible for communicating ground rules prior to the game or ensuring they are posted. Pregame plate meetings can occur for ground rules. Only the head coach of each teams and game officials shall participate. Six feet physical distancing should be practiced.

- Payments can still be made to officials prior to the game.
- Line ups to be posted in an area that officials have easy access to if necessary
- No interactions with officials unless necessary (injury, calling time to make a line up change, etc.) Must be done with 2 meters physical distancing.
- Mound visits are permitted between the coach, pitcher, and catcher. 2 meters physical distancing must be adhered to between all three individuals.
- No team 'huddles' pre, post, or during competition. Addressing the entire team must be done with 2 meters spacing between everyone.
- Post game hand shakes are not permitted
- ~~Balls are to be disinfected after each half inning or a when a ball is returned from being put out of play~~
- Each team is responsible for their own baseballs on defence.
- A "Safety line" will be drawn utilising chalk or a marker parallel to home plate (an extension of the 1st base line). Athletes are to cross this line to score and will not touch home plate. All plays at the plate are force plays.
- Should the ball be received by the fielder at the plate before the runner passes the Safety line, the runner is out. Should the runner reach the Safety line before the ball reaches the fielder at the plate, the runner is safe.
- A "Commitment line" will be drawn utilising chalk or a marker at the half-way point between 3rd base and home plate. Should the runner pass this commitment line, they will not be permitted to return to their previous base. Should they stay behind the Commitment line, they can return to the previous base.
- ~~No stealing permitted. Player's may take a secondary lead after the pitch reaches the plate at 11U. Player's may take a secondary lead after the pitcher commits to home plate in 13U and above.~~ Stealing and leading off is permitted. Should a tag play be necessary, athletes are to vacate the immediate area as soon as possible

All Levels

- ~~Travel will be restricted during this time to no overnight trips and no more than 50 km outside of your Region. Exceptions for athletes training on BNS Provincial teams.~~ There are no travel restrictions within Nova Scotia.

Phase 2 Notes

- In considering a Return to Competition, the committee identified the three high risk situations that could most commonly present themselves:
 - Umpire/Catcher proximity
 - Dugouts/Team Huddles
 - ~~Tag Plays/Rundowns~~ Per current Public Health Guidelines:
“In a defined sport setting where participants are physically distancing in one group of 50 or less, incidental contact, (where a participant comes into close contact, less than two metres, with another participant), that is infrequent, brief, and cannot be avoided may occur.” Tag plays, rundowns, and stealing are permitted.
- The committee addressed these issues with the modifications presented above. Risk of face-to-face interaction under 2 meters have been reduced from **high to low** with these modifications.
- ~~Catchers have been eliminated at the younger levels, as they typically use ‘communal gear’. Rather that put the stress on associations to make extensive investment in new equipment, we’ve eliminated the position for 11U Recreation and below.~~
- ~~Competition must take place within the defined proximity.~~

Phase 3: Return to Events

Setting	Adaptations
General	<u>Environment</u> Phase 2 Adaptations apply
	<u>Equipment</u> Phase 2 Adaptations apply
	<u>Physical Distancing</u> Phase 2 Adaptations apply
Practice/Training	<u>Environment</u> Phase 2 Adaptations apply
	<u>Equipment</u> Phase 2 Adaptations apply
	<u>Physical Distancing</u> Phase 2 Adaptation apply
Competition	<u>All Levels</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teams are permitted to travel outside of their Regions for competition (within Nova Scotia) • Provincial Championships to be held, with restrictions • No more than six teams per single site event • No skills competitions, ceremonies, or additional events associated with the tournament • Recreational divisions permitted to hold play offs or weekend events

Phase 3 Notes

- All competition modifications to remain in place. Any competition change recommendations must be reviewed and approved by BNS in consultation with Public Health
- Teams will be permitted to attend competition outside of their Region
- Provincial Championships held (with limits of 6 teams per event)
- Atlantic events TBD based on governmental interprovincial guidelines.

Phase 4: Return to the New Normal

Per lifting or changing of recommended public health measures, guidelines to be reviewed and adjusted as needed.

Final Thoughts and Next Steps

In thoroughly assessing our sport, we feel that baseball can return safely with the above adjustments. The plan presented takes into account the core public health measures and messages, the Sport Nova Scotia guidelines, and our own measures as a sport to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

Upon submitting the Baseball Nova Scotia Return to Play plan, we will await feedback and suggestions from Sport Nova Scotia, the Provincial Government, and Public Health.

Upon approval of our RTP plan, the key to successful implementation will be education. Engaging our key stakeholders will be crucial. This includes:

- BNS Umpires Division developing new training protocols to update officials on adjusted rules
- Association leaders attending online sessions to learn about new guidelines
- Facility and recreational leaders understanding the impacts on facilities and programming
- Sport Nova Scotia Regional Sport Consultants assisting with the transition to the new normal
- Information packages being made available for parents to review when participating in programming.
- Constant communication via web and social media platforms

BNS understands the ‘perfect environment’ is not possible. Our main goal through this plan is to use the science available and the messaging from public health to formulate a new normal for the time being. Our group feels adherence to these guidelines gets our youth back on the field, gets them physically active, and enjoying our game in the safest way possible.