

# **Frequently Asked Questions**

## **MPSSAA Interscholastic Athletics Participation Options**

The below frequently asked questions have been developed to provide feedback to school communities on the Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association (MPSSAA) competition season options.

### **LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEM GUIDANCE**

#### **What are the options for Local School Systems regarding Interscholastic Athletics?**

LSS shall compete within defined competition timeframes as well as determined systemwide out-of-season options to make respective LSS decisions regarding interscholastic athletic and extracurricular activities. LSS should utilize the [Covid-19 Guidance for Maryland Schools](#), [Maryland Department of Health metrics](#), and local health department guidance to determine the extent of participation in their respective LSS.

MPSSAA continues to encourage:

1. In-person conditioning engagement once the local health department believes community spread reaches a level acceptable to the local jurisdiction.
2. Utilizing the screening options recommended by MDH and the local health department to set an additional threshold that participants will have to clear in order to enter into conditioning and training sessions.
3. Utilizing all mitigation recommendations found in MPSSAA, CDC, and MDH guidance to lower the risk of in-person engagement.
4. Gradually increasing to skill based practices, within team competitions, and increased geographic area competitions with each LSS Return to Play Committee and the local health department's guidance.

#### **What do the out-of-season options mean?**

The MPSSAA requested State Board of Education regulation waivers to provide LSS the opportunity to create out-of-season plans for all schools within their school system. LSS are expected to be in full compliance with COMAR regulations unless specific LSS plans are created for system wide flexibility in offering out-of-season participation to prepare students for loss of conditioning, weight training, and practice during COVID-19. The regulation does not give the authority for any coach or teams to operate outside of the defined sports season unless authorized by their LSS plan. Each LSS is available to continuously update their system wide plan for their respective school system to implement necessary student engagement.

### **What other mitigation measures are being recommended?**

LSS should utilize daily screening based on their respective educational agency decisions on screening. Guidance on screening can be found in the [Covid-19 Guidance for Maryland Schools](#) and the [MPSSAA Roadmap for the Return of Interscholastic Athletics](#). The [CDC](#) does not recommend universal testing of all students and staff as a prerequisite to school attendance.

Individual team and sport mitigation strategies should be implemented to further reduce the risk of spreading Covid-19. These mitigation strategies can be found in the [MPSSAA Roadmap for the Return of Interscholastic Athletics](#) and in the individual sport bulletins found on the MPSSAA Covid-19 Updates page.

## **OUT-OF-SEASON PARTICIPATION QUESTIONS**

### **What is involved in out-of-season opportunities?**

LSS are able to utilize MPSSAA waivers from the State Board of Education to allow for out-of-season plans by each LSS for the continued engagement of students in all sports. LSS are eligible to create any combination of virtual practices or in-person conditioning, skill building sessions, sport-specific practices, intramurals, and intra-school/inter-school scrimmages. LSS decisions for student engagement must be based on the level of community spread and any other factors as identified by the local health department.

### **Can teams be established prior to the designated sport season? Are coaches able to conduct tryouts based on out-of-season participation and establish the teams that will compete during the redefined sport seasons?**

School teams may not be established for refined sport season when using approved out-of-season waivers. Team selection for the competition season will occur within the confines of the respective preseason as identified for each sport season. Coaches must operate within the defined plans of their respective LSS for the out-of-season timeframe with no implications on student participation in the competition season.

### **What are MPSSAA Waivers?**

The regulations that govern the MPSSAA are found in section 13A.06.03 of the Maryland Code of Regulations (COMAR). These regulations are those of the Maryland State Board of Education and provide the parameters all member schools must comply with for the participation in extracurricular activities.

The MPSSAA requested [administrative waivers](#) of sport seasons, out-of-season practice rules, and required scheduling dates from the State Board of Education at their June 23 meeting in the

event traditional competition seasons would be delayed. These administrative waivers are now being applied to provide options for LSS to engage students in out-of-season participation opportunities.

### **Why are club and travel programs able to have competition and the MPSSAA has postponed the competition season?**

The MPSSAA is the athletic association for public secondary schools in Maryland and does not have jurisdiction over private club and travel programs. The MPSSAA has consulted with the MDH, the MSDE, and the PSSAM and been advised on the postponement of competition for the first semester. Club and travel programs are subject to decisions of local health departments and local governments.

### **Can my public high school team compete in a recreational league?**

Member school teams that participate in non-school leagues or bona fide competitions outside of LSS out-of-season participation plans will lose the ability to play in the competition sport seasons and be in violation of COMAR 13A.06.03. Member schools are reminded as of August 12, 2020, non-school team rosters coached by any paid or volunteer coach at the school may not exceed 80% of the returning players of what would constitute a starting lineup in that sport OR a modified version thereof. I.e., 7-on-7 football, 3-on-3 basketball, indoor soccer, indoor lacrosse, etc. (COMAR 13A.06.03.04E(2)).

Member public high school teams may not compete in a recreational league or other developed league under the auspices of the public high school team. This provision will be strictly interpreted by the MPSSAA to ensure the integrity of the collective interagency public health decision between the MPSSAA, the PSSAM, and the MDH to postpone the MPSSAA competitive season. As used here, “auspices of the public high school team” is broadly interpreted to include any supervision by paid or volunteer coach, school support, sponsorship, funding, use of the high school name, high school mascot, uniforms, equipment and any similar attribute of public high school team involvement. Any leagues contacting and creating teams through high school representatives, or advertise their league and competition utilizing similar wording that would indicate a Maryland public high school participation will violate MPSSAA, State Board of Education, and LSS regulations and subject the school to local and Maryland regulation violations.

All member schools are expected to be in full compliance with local and Maryland regulations for interscholastic athletics unless operating within waivers as approved by the State Board of Education. These waivers for out-of-season practice require each member school to operate within the system wide out-of-season participation plans developed by each LSS.

### **Can my middle school team compete in a recreational league?**

Athletic participation eligibility under the MPSSAA regulations begins when a student in 9th grade is officially registered and attending an MPSSAA member school. The MPSSAA does not have jurisdiction over middle school teams or programs. LSS implement middle school programs at their discretion and should be contacted regarding the status of middle school teams or programs.

### **What is the definition of a scrimmage?**

Scrimmages are defined as a practice or modified game in which no score is reported, no admission is charged, no public report is made, and is conducted purely for instructional purposes. LSS that implement scrimmages or other authorized events must be in compliance with MDH orders as it relates to spectators at high school sporting events and gatherings.

## **COMPETITION SEASON QUESTIONS**

### **How many games can I play in my sports competition season?**

Member schools will be subject to the MPSSAA defined weekly and seasonal contest limitations per sport within the timeframe. Under this plan all sports will have an opportunity to play between 50 and 100 percent of their typical regular season allotment of contests.

### **What happens if LSS are unable to participate in a defined sport season?**

If LSS are unable to participate in a sport season, the competition season will continue for those LSS that can compete. The LSS unable to compete will cancel the competition season and have the ability to operate under any version of the out-of-season plans. The LSS will have the ability to enter a sport season late, or the next available sport season. The 20-calendar preseason practice timeframe will not be waived for any LSS starting late. All competitions must be within the defined weekly and seasonal limitations.

### **How do the out-of-season waivers apply to school systems when they start a competition season?**

LSS are expected to be in full compliance with COMAR regulations unless specific LSS plans are created for system wide flexibility in offering out-of-season participation to prepare students for loss of conditioning, weight training, and practice during COVID-19. The regulation does not give the authority for any coach or teams to operate outside of the defined sports season unless authorized by their LSS plan. Each LSS will submit a system wide plan for their respective school system to implement student engagement.

### **Will there be state tournaments or championships?**

The MPSSAA recognizes the highest risk, according to the CDC, is increased participation opportunities that includes statewide competitions among different geographic areas. This reality places state championships or culminating events in jeopardy depending on the sport. Each respective sport will be evaluated by the MPSSAA on an individual basis to make calculated and informed decisions dependent on the characteristics of the MPSSAA-administered sport, the number of programs being administered by member schools, and local and state health department guidance on the status quo of statewide participation. The MPSSAA Executive Council has issued guidance regarding culminating events if all competition is scheduled within local jurisdictions.

**In the event state competition is not possible, due to health metrics and participation restrictions, will LSS be able to conduct city/county/conference postseason tournaments or culminating events?**

Yes. If state tournaments or championships are not possible, LSS will have the flexibility to conduct culminating events in their respective city/county/conference or district. To date, all LSS are planning on playing fall and winter sports within local jurisdictions, thus limiting the ability to hold statewide culminating events. The MPSSAA Executive Council has issued guidance regarding culminating events if all competition is scheduled within local jurisdictions.

## **ATHLETIC ELIGIBILITY QUESTIONS**

**What happens if my child graduates prior to the conclusion of the spring sport season?**

MPSSAA regulations allow graduates to participate in the remaining athletic contests of that semester in which they graduated (COMAR 13A.06.03.02K).

**What happens if I play a fall sport in another state or private school and transfer to a school that has the same fall sport in a different sport season?**

The MPSSAA regulations allow for four seasons of eligibility for any one sport beginning in 9th grade regardless of whether the student first played in a private school or in a school in another state and then enrolled in a Maryland MPSSAA member high school. A season of eligibility is determined based on the student's physical entry into a bona fide contest. Students who entered into a bona fide contest in a sport season in another state or private school will have used a season of eligibility in that sport. If the student enrolls in a school in the same school year and participates in a bona fide contest in a separate designated sport season, the student will use a second season of eligibility in the sport in the same academic year. After four seasons of participation in the same sport, the student will have exhausted his or her eligibility.

**What else do I need to know about my student/child's athletic eligibility?**

Pursuant to COMAR 13A.06.03.02, students must be officially registered and attending the member MPSSAA school they are authorized to attend under regulations of the local school system. The student may represent only the school in which they are registered and at which it is anticipated they will complete their graduation requirements. Each local school system shall establish standards of participation which assure that students involved in interscholastic athletics are making satisfactory progress toward graduation. Students who are 19 years old or older as of August 31 are ineligible to participate in interscholastic athletics. Students in grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 may participate in interscholastic athletic contests for a maximum of four seasons in any one sport. Middle, intermediate, or junior high school students are not eligible to compete or practice with high school teams. Students shall maintain amateur status. The LSS may adopt rules governing their athletic programs that are more restrictive than those of the MPSSAA. Less restrictive rules may not be adopted. Schools and parents should consult with their LSS regarding any athletic eligibility questions as LSS can be more restrictive than MPSSAA regulations.