

The St. Louis Metropolitan Area is in the middle of a dramatic increase of COVID-19 cases and there is widespread transmission of the virus occurring in the community, particularly in the younger population. This unfortunately increases the risk of spread to everyone, particularly when people gather in groups. Furthermore, children will further suffer as this increase in activity threatens the ability of children to return safely to school and to sports this fall.

While the risk of transmission during competitive youth sports games is most likely low, all of the activities surrounding the games increase the likelihood of spreading the virus. This includes teams, coaches and parents gathering before, during and after games and practices, carpooling and other activities associated with participating in sports teams, especially if proper mitigation practices are not in place.

For these reasons, the St. Louis Sports Medicine COVID-19 Task Force, the St. Louis County Department of Public Health and the City of St. Louis Department of Health all agree that for now, competitive activities like games and scrimmages should be paused.

Although there have been COVID-19 cases associated with sports participation, it is the significant amount of virus circulating within the community that is the primary reason for having to roll back youth sports activities because they can create conditions for continued spread. The same conditions exist for *any activity* where person-to-person interaction is high, where groups of people get together for proms, graduation ceremonies or in bars, or where mitigation practices are low.

We all agree that participation in sports benefits young people physically, mentally and emotionally. Unfortunately, because of the significant spread of the virus within the community, these actions, as well as others, are needed until our communities are safe again.

Regardless of these constraints, the new recommendations still allow for physical activity -- such as sports skills and conditioning, both of which will allow our athletes to continue to develop as young athletes -- but in a much more controlled environment. Both the [Department of Public Health's guidelines](#) and the [task force's recommendations](#) contain these measures.

Everyone in the community can help bring competitive youth sports back by consistently wearing masks in public, social distancing, practicing good hand hygiene, emphasizing the importance of disclosing exposures with parents and athletes, avoiding congregating in crowds, including informal gatherings, and avoiding traveling with teams to other areas that aren't practicing similar measures to control the virus. These measures will help decrease the virus in the community and allow all of us to get back to doing the things we love, such as youth sports.