



# News Release

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## Fall Contact Sports and Associated Activities Restricted in Wyandotte County

*New Local Health Order Provides Guidance for Public, Private Schools K-12, Higher Education, and Club Teams*

A new Local Health Officer Order prohibits certain non-professional fall sports events and activities that pose a significant COVID-19 risk in Wyandotte County. The order was issued today and goes into effect on Friday, August 14 at 12:01 a.m.

Since March of this year, the Unified Government Public Health Department's Medical Officers have relied on COVID-19 data to guide the County's ongoing pandemic response. After a peak in new cases in July, the 7-day rolling averages of new positive cases have begun to decline. This may be due in part to measures like requiring masks/face coverings. However, COVID-19 is still very much a threat to our community. Case numbers are still high compared to earlier this Spring, the positivity rate (percentage of people tested who test positive for COVID-19) has not gone down, and Wyandotte County still has the highest rate of COVID-19 cases in the metro area. It is more important now than ever to take steps to further control the spread of the virus. As community members will recall, the mask and face-coverings order was issued in direct response to a spike in new positive COVID-19 cases following the relaxation of stay-at-home orders.

Specifically, this new Order prohibits football, volleyball, soccer and marching band events. The guidance in the order applies to all public and private schools (K-12), plus higher education and non-professional sports clubs and organizations operating in Wyandotte County.

"We have worked closely with the educational institutions in Wyandotte County, from K-12 to higher education, to safely open schools this fall. It became increasingly clear that allowing contact sports would greatly increase the risk of exposure to student athletes, their classmates, and their families. We recognize the impact of cancelling sports and it is regrettable that the virus has not been contained enough to allow non-professional sports to proceed at this time," said Dr. Erin Corriveau, Deputy Medical Officer with the Unified Government Public Health Department.

The Order is designed to accomplish three objectives:

- Prevent a spike in positive COVID-19 cases due to exposure through certain sports and other activities in which it is difficult to maintain social distancing and/or wear masks the whole time
- Provide consistent guidance for all non-professional sports at all levels, and
- Reduce the possibility of more restrictive future measures

"We needed to provide consistent guidance for fall sports at all levels," explained Dr. Allen Greiner, Chief Medical Officer for the Unified Government Public Health Department. "We've seen how challenging it has been for professional sports such as Major League Baseball (MLB), the National Football League (NFL)

and college football conferences to create and enforce protocols designed to protect players and coaches. If these large, extremely well-funded organizations can't protect their players and coaches, it is unlikely that local school districts and sports clubs will be able to protect student athletes and athletic staff. That's why this guidance covers all nonprofessional sports organizations regardless of their organizational type or status."

Additional details from the new Local Health Order include:

- Competitions for football, volleyball, soccer and marching band are prohibited.
- Practice and conditioning activities in such sports may proceed in the event 6 feet social distancing can always be continuously maintained between individuals .
- Practice and conditioning in the winter sports of boys & girls basketball and wrestling are also limited to activities where 6 feet social distancing can always be continuously maintained between individuals.
- Sports or activities during the 2020 fall sports season such as debate, speech, tennis, gymnastics, golf, cross country, or other non-contact spirit activity are allowed provided they adhere to the guidelines in the KSHSAA Activity Specific Risk Management Considerations manual.
- Frequent sanitizing and cleaning of surfaces and shared equipment is required
- Masks **must** always be worn by athletes and coaches indoors; and outdoors during practice or competition when 6 ft distance cannot be continuously maintained.
- All schools and non-professional sports organizations visiting Wyandotte County for competition must strictly adhere to all Wyandotte County Local Health Officer Orders.
  - It is the responsibility of the host school or non-professional sports organization to inform the visiting team of this and all related Local Health Officer Orders.
- Non-participating individuals attending indoor practices or competitions must adhere to social distance practices and mask wearing mandates for indoor functions.
- Non-participating individuals attending outdoor practices and competition, must wear masks in situations where social distancing cannot be maintained.

"Even though our rolling, seven-day average case numbers seem to be coming down, we need to do everything we can to continue that progress in slowing the spread of COVID-19 in our community. We saw a spike in the number of cases after the Stay At Home order was lifted in May, and we have continued to see more spread of the virus throughout the summer. This new guidance will help protect our students, coaches, teachers, and families, and, we hope, help prevent another spike in case numbers," said Dr. Erin Corriveau, Deputy Medical Officer with the Unified Government Public Health Department.

On July 28, the Kansas State High School Activities Association (KSHSAA) Executive Board elected to not postpone fall 2020 activities. On August 6, Dr. Lee Norman, secretary of the Kansas Department of Health & Environment (KDHE) made a statement saying the move was "unlikely to be successful." At that time, Dr. Lee said his department was monitoring nine clusters and 63 COVID-19 cases all linked to sports.

In addition, there have been numerous outbreaks of COVID-19 linked to sports activities around the country:

- On July 3, the University of Kansas suspended voluntary workouts because of a spike of COVID-19 cases in athletes returning to campus
- On August 5, the University of Louisville suspended all fall sports activities after 29 athletes tested positive for COVID-19
- In late July, only days into the shortened Major League baseball season, the Miami Marlins announced an outbreak involving 18 players, causing several games to be suspended, and team members to be quarantined in a Philadelphia hotel.

- As of August 11, the St. Louis Cardinals have had 10 players and seven staff members test positive for COVID-19, causing a two-week suspension in their games and major disruption to the already-shortened Major League baseball season.

During the week of August 9, both the Big Ten and PAC-12 conferences postponed their college football seasons due to the ongoing threat of COVID-19. The decision to restrict competitive contact sports in Wyandotte County is based both on the fact that COVID-19 remains a threat and the pragmatic understanding that many local organizations do not have the financial resources necessary to ensure the safety of children and adults.

“Turner USD 202 has reviewed the Order related to student sports and activities. Creating an environment where students are safe and protected is our top priority. While disappointed about the prospect of not competing in contact sports and marching band, we respect the leadership of the Wyandotte County Public Health Department and their data-based approach to community safety,” said Dr. Jason Dandoy, Superintendent. “Turner USD 202 will continue to offer practices and conditioning sessions for students that comply with the Order. We look forward to returning to competition as soon as safely possible.”

On August 11, the Kansas City, Kansas School Board voted to “suspend all involvement in KSHSAA fall sports,” including “football, volleyball, cross country, girls tennis, boys soccer, marching band, and spirit squad.”

“The decision to suspend sports is not easy because we all understand the emotional impact this decision may have on so many of our students, their families and the range of professionals who work with them,” said Randy Lopez, President of the KCKPS Board of Education. “Because the health and welfare of our staff, students and their families are paramount, erring on the side of caution is essential. The school district is committed to doing our part to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in our city, county and particularly within our district. KCKPS will continue to work collaboratively with the Wyandotte County Public Health Department as we review our options in the fall based on the status of the pandemic. We believe this conscious effort to help reduce the spread of the virus is an important safeguard to ensure a safe return to sports.”

“Ensuring the continued safety of our entire community, including students and school staff, has been and remains our top priority,” said Mayor David Alvey. “Today’s decision by public health officials, in coordination with local school districts, is intended to provide consistent guidance at all levels to reduce potential exposure and prevent another spike in the number of positive cases in our community. From the beginning, Wyandotte County has followed the advice of its medical experts, and it will continue to do so. As a school administrator for nearly 30 years, I understand the importance of sports and extracurricular activities in the formation and development of young persons. I am disappointed and saddened that our students continue to be impacted by this prolonged pandemic, both in the classroom as well as on the field and the court, and look forward to a return to normalcy not only for our children but the entire community.”

The community is reminded to limit social interaction wherever possible, maintain 6 feet of social distancing, and to wear a mask at all times when in public. By working together we can continue to limit the number of new positive COVID-19 cases in Wyandotte County.

Testing is available for individuals who live or work in Wyandotte County if they are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 or have been in close contact (within six feet for at least 10 minutes) with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. Testing is available at multiple community locations, including the Public Health Department at 619 Ann Avenue, and through weekly “pop-up” sites

coordinated by the Wyandotte County Health Equity Task Force. To find the latest testing sites and schedules, visit [wycokck.org/COVID-19](http://wycokck.org/COVID-19).

For additional data and resources on COVID-19 in Wyandotte County visit [wycokck.org/COVID-19](http://wycokck.org/COVID-19) or by calling 3-1-1.

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