

Community Weeklies 2.22.21
School Sports
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As vaccination efforts expand and COVID-19 disease activity decreases in our community, we are getting more and more questions every day about when things can return to “normal.” Questions about school sports are no exception.

Each week I have the pleasure of holding a routine conference call with the superintendents of the school systems located within the Roanoke City & Alleghany Health Districts. We have discussed a wide range of topics affecting public education including community trends, vaccination plans for school staff, and strategies to get children safely back into classrooms.

Recognizing the role youth sports play in our society, we have also spent a significant amount of time discussing how students can safely engage in sports. Physical activity, including youth sports, is essential for physical and mental well-being. While outdoor sports are generally considered a safer setting than indoor sports with respect to disease transmission, with a new season of high school sports getting underway this week, I continue to urge coaches and parents to take measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in all settings. Such measures include:

- To the extent possible: coaches need to ensure that physical distancing is maintained, promote the use of face coverings when players are not on the field, and provide resources for handwashing/ hand sanitizing.
- Coaches, school staff, parents, and players need to understand the risk of transmission of disease and respond accordingly. Outdoor contact sports, such as football, pose a significantly greater risk of transmission than non-contact sports such as tennis or golf.
- Schools need to create and maintain places for spectators in accordance with current Executive Orders.

While we are so pleased to see the overall local infection trends coming down since their peak after the holidays in January, we cannot afford to let down our guard, at home, at work, and in places where people may gather, such as at sporting events. It is clear the positive impact that sports can have in young people’s lives. In order to enjoy these activities safely, we must all remain vigilant by continuing to wear masks, wash hands, and keeping a physical distance from each other. We know these mitigation measures work to keep COVID-19 transmission rates down, and when combined with ongoing vaccination efforts, especially for school staff and our most vulnerable citizens. Together, these tools give us the best chance to provide as safe a setting as possible for sporting events in our community.