

USA Softball of North Dakota – 2020 Back to the Ballpark Guidelines

The following are guidelines & recommendations we will follow at softball events until time comes when we can resume normal activities.

DISCLAIMER: Participants, parents, family, and spectators engaging in softball and activities related to softball do so with knowledge of the risk and potential exposure involved and agree to accept any and all inherent risks to their personal health.

NOTE TO ALL PARTICIPANTS: USA Softball of North Dakota does not dictate when local leagues can start playing softball during the COVID-19 pandemic. Starting play will be determined by local governmental agencies and field owners. Teams coming from other areas should respect and follow their local governmental agency restrictions (where they reside) before signing up for tournaments.

The items listed in this document are suggestions of recommended practices for restarting USA Softball events , Recreational Leagues, Tournament Hosts, Staff, Athletes, Coaches, Parents, and Spectators should continue to follow CDC, Federal, State and Local governmental guidelines. Feel free to make your guidelines more stringent if you deem necessary. Remember that information and recommendations during the pandemic are very fluid and are subject to change.

The risk levels referenced in these guidelines align with those implemented within the [North Dakota Smart Restart Plan](#) available at [NDResponse.gov](#). They are as follows:

Critical
High Risk
Moderate Risk
Low Risk
New Normal



North Dakota Smart Restart Risk Level Summary

- Red** means critical risk and severe threat to public health.
- Orange** means high risk for everyone as well as high-risk individuals.
- Yellow** means moderate risk for everyone but high-risk individuals and is the level of guidance North Dakota is in at time of publication.
- Green** means low risk for everyone, but high-risk individuals
- Blue** means a new normal baseline for everyone but high-risk individuals.

Phased Approach For Return To Play

Risk Level: Critical

- No softball activities are permitted.

Risk Level: High Risk

- Groups of 10 will need to follow appropriate physical distancing. Softball is an outdoor sport with our participants occupying natural positions that are greater than social distancing standards.

High Risk level will allow for GFP and Adult Softball Teams to begin practicing.

Risk Level: Moderate Risk

- The cap on the number of people at gatherings rises to 250, which would be enough for games, likely with minimum fans, parents of GFP allowed. Vulnerable populations should continue to follow stay at home guidance.

Moderate Risk Level will allow for softball teams to begin conducting games.

Risk Level: Low Risk

- The cap on the number of people at gatherings rises to 500. Vulnerable populations can resume public interactions, but should practice physical distancing and continue to take precautionary measures.

Risk Level: New Normal

- There are no limits on group sizes. The sports go back to normal participation and operation, though vulnerable populations should still take every day health & hygiene precautions and stay home when sick.

Games Played at **Moderate Risk** or **Low Risk** levels

1. If possible, all players, coaches, and umpires will enter through one entrance and exit through another, observing state guidelines for social distancing. In the event there is only one entrance to the park, teams will need to be cautious and courteous at the point of entry, observing all social distancing rules.
2. **League/Tournament Host Recommendations**
 - **Event Hosts/Tournament Directors/Event Staff**
 - Tournament Directors should follow the lead of their local USA Softball Association and guidelines set in place by the CDC, Federal, State and local government.
 - League/Tournament Directors should be aware of the local restrictions of other states, counties, or associations before allowing teams from other associations/areas in the tournament.
 - There may be restrictions that cause problems for other participants.
 - Predetermine appropriate emergency contacts should anything arise during your event.
 - All communication leading up to tournament should include information on COVID-19, preventive measures and any/all procedures that the host has established for requirements for participants and spectators.
 - Information on COVID-19 status in their area, local information (website where they can find the latest updates for their area), physical distancing measures, mask requirements, limits on spectators and what the plan of action will be for suspected cases.
 - Also, basic information such as if you are not feeling well, stay home, etc...
 - Participants should be instructed that if they are exhibiting symptoms of possible exposure to COVID-19, such as fever, that they should not come to events or participate in the events until such time as the participant has been tested and/or cleared.
 - Easy access to handwashing stations, hand sanitizers for all participants and spectators.
 - Might consider having spectators bring their own chairs and not use bleachers. Also designating areas that spectators might be prohibited from being in to avoid large numbers in any given space.
 - Event staff should be recommended to wear mask and gloves when they are in contact with spectators, participants, or coaches.
 - Recommended to have gloves and hand sanitizer on hand and available.

- **Concessions**
 - Markers will be placed on the ground to ensure 6 feet social distancing between customers.
 - All concessionaire workers recommended to wear masks and gloves and be sure to utilize correctly to ensure there is no cross contamination.
 - Concessionaire workers should be instructed that if they are exhibiting symptoms of possible exposure to COVID-19, such as fever, that they should not come to events or work until such time as the participant has been tested and/or cleared.
- 3. **Complex Recommendations**
 - **Water Fountains**
 - Drinking fountains will be inoperable.
 - **Bathrooms**
 - Recommend speaking to public health officials on local guidelines/recommendations for bathroom cleaning.
 - Disinfecting wipe containers are installed for personal cleaning.
 - Complex/COVID-19 recommendations and rules should be posted throughout the complex.
 - Workers and others should be instructed that if they are exhibiting symptoms of possible exposure to COVID-19, such as fever, that they should not come to events or work until such time as the participant has been tested and/or cleared.
- 4. **Coaches Meeting Recommendations**
 - Coaches meeting will be done via Google, Zoom or another form of webinar meeting platform.
- 5. **Team Check-in Recommendations (if required)**
 - Teams should be designated with a time and location to show up for check-in.
 - Encouraged to follow 6 feet social distancing guidelines.
- 6. **Bat Testing Recommendations (if required)**
 - **Bat Testing Area**
 - Should be big enough to allow at least two bat testers to be set up. They should be able to be set up at least 10 – 12 feet apart.
 - Needs to be in an enclosed area so players and/or parents cannot encroach and violate 6 feet social distancing.
 - One umpire and one person conducting bat testing allowed at each station.
 - All bats from a team should be brought into the testing area by one coach from the team.
 - Hand sanitizer, where available, should be available in the bat testing area.

- **Bat Testing Personnel**

- Umpires reviewing the bat for Rule 3 Section 1 should wear protective gloves, possibly latex, when handling the team's bats.
- Personnel testing the bat should also wear gloves for protection.
- Both the umpire reviewing bats and the person testing bats should remove their pair of gloves after each team's bats are tested. They then should put on a new pair of gloves prior to conducting another team's bat test.
- Once a clean pair of gloves has been put on, clean the areas touched during testing with disinfectant (wipes or spray onto a disposable towel) between teams. At a minimum, the lever, outer surface of the gauge and the hole the bat fits in should be cleaned.
- All personnel participating in the bat testing area should be reminded not to touch their face while testing bats.

NOTE: Check with all personnel assigned to test bats if they are allergic to latex before assigning persons.

- **Bat Testing Procedures**

- When possible, teams should have an appointment for testing bats. Preferable that bats should be tested the day before play begins, however if they cannot and are tested the day play begins, they
 - Must be tested prior to the team's first game.
 - Must be tested in an area where 6 feet social distancing can be maintained.
- All bats should be wiped down with a disinfecting wipe and/or liquid before reviewing the bat for Rule 3, Section 1. This can be done by the umpire checking bats and/or the coach from the team that owns the bats.
- The bat should be handed to the person performing the compression test to be tested.
- Once complete and a bat passes, then a hologram should be adhered to the bat. A bat that does not pass does not get a hologram.
- The bats should be returned to the team representative.
- The next team's representative would then bring in their bats for testing

7. **Team Recommendations**

- **Field Recommendations**

As to all applicable persons, people should be instructed that if they are exhibiting symptoms of possible exposure to COVID-19, such as fever, that they should not come to events or work until such time as the participant has been tested and/or cleared.

- **Teams**

- Should not enter dugout until the other team exits and complex staff has sanitized.
- Recommended to provide their own water. (None will be provided)
- Recommended to provide hand sanitizer to their athletes. (None will be provided)
- Bats must be outside dugout prior to the game for inspection.
- It is recommended that a designated adult be assigned by the offensive team, to be responsible for picking up the bat after it is used. This person should wear disposable gloves and wipe down the bats after each use.
- Prohibited from pre-game & post-game handshakes/high fives.
 - Teams may line up on their respective foul lines and wave.
- **Athletes**
 - Allowed to wear masks during game, but not required..
 - Recommended to wear masks in between games.
 - No huddles. Player that gather at the circle should stay outside the circle and maintaining social distancing.
 - No sharing of equipment (bat, helmet, etc.)
- **Coaches**
 - Always recommended to wear masks, but not required.
 - Coaches should stay outside the width of the batter's box at the Home plate conference.
 - Only one coach allowed during the conference.
 - If coaches visit the pitcher, all other players should stay outside the pitching circle.
- **Coaches meeting**
 - One coach from each team and must stay 6 feet apart. Suggested to be the top outside corner of each batter's box when available.
 - Hand lineups to the umpire, and umpire verbally approve or asks any questions about the lineup.
 - No athletes allowed.
 - Recommended for lineup cards exchanged team to team and teams to scorekeeper to be shared via photo or text
- Multiple softballs will be in use during games and should be switched out every inning for sanitizing.
 - Balls should be supplied still in wrappers or box and use new balls each game.
 - If used balls to be used as a backup, a wipe down before going into game play would be appropriate.

- Schedule format should change to not keep teams at the ballpark all day. (If possible)

8. Warm-up Recommendations

- Warm-ups should only take place beyond the fence while the field crew is preparing the field for play.
- Teams waiting for games in the stands or bleachers are encouraged to follow 6 feet social distancing guidelines.
- Teams should not enter the dugout until the other team exits and complex staff has sanitized.

9. Dugout Recommendations.

- The number of participants in the dugout is dependent on the size of dugout but must maintain 6 feet social distance.
- Allow for players to be out of the dugout.
 - Fast Pitch & JO Slow Pitch: Those out of the dugout should be behind the out of play fence.
 - Adult Slow Pitch: Along fence line with front of dugout. Draw a line to establish out of play.

10. Off-Field Recommendations

- Employees, vendors, fans and vendors are recommended to screen themselves at home prior to coming to the ballpark. If they have a temperature exceeding 100.4, they should be asked to stay home. They should also not come to the ballpark if they are known to have been recently exposed to someone with COVID-19.
- **Spectators**
 - Always recommended to wear masks.
 - Encouraged to follow 6 feet social distancing guidelines.
 - Recommended to use hand sanitizer upon entering the facility (provided by host).
 - Encouraged to bring their own sanitizing wipes for restroom/personal cleanliness.
- **Parents**
 - Proactively monitor their own and anyone in their household's health status. If anyone is not feeling well in family or has a temperature exceeding 100.4, they should reconsider attending the event.
 - Parents should consider limiting the number of family members who attend an event.
 - Responsible for water/sports drinks for their athletes in bottled format and making sure they are clearly marked/identified.

- Maintain 6 feet social distancing measures when entering, during games and leaving the venue.
- Recommend that all parents bring sanitizing wipes, sanitizer, and face masks.
- **Athletes/Coaches**
 - Always recommended to wear masks in between games.
 - Encouraged to follow 6 feet social distancing guidelines.

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11. Umpires/Rules/Mechanic Recommendations

- **Field Recommendations**
 - **Umpires**
 - Should be allowed to wear gloves if they wish.
 - Should be allowed to wear a mask if they wish.
 - Masks, if worn, should be neutral in color.
 - Masks, if worn, should not have designs on them.
 - Recommended to provide their own hand sanitizer.
 - Will still check equipment before a game.
 - Bats must be outside dugout.
 - Umpire may wear disposable gloves if they wish.
 - **Rules**
 - **Rule 4, Section C:** Base coaches must stay 6 feet from a runner they wish to talk to during or after suspension of play.
 - **Rule 5 Section 7:** Coaches holding defensive conference must stay on the home plate side of the pitcher's circle and the player or players must be on the opposite of the pitcher's circle maintaining the 6 feet distance. No more than 2 players along with the pitcher allowed.
 - **Rule 5, Section 12A:** Dugout Conduct: Allow for players to be out of the dugout. Fast Pitch and JO Slow Pitch, those out of the dugout behind the out of play fence. Adult Slow Pitch: Along fence line in front of the dugout. Draw a line to establish out of play. Number in the dugout dependent on the size of dugout, maintain 6 feet social distance.
 - **Rule 5, Section 12A:** Players not allowed to leave dugout area to congratulate players when scoring or after home runs.
 - **Rule 6A, Section 6:** No licking of fingers and wiping them off.
 - **Rule 8, Section 6G:** Slow Pitch: No stealing; GFP: No stealing.
- **Mechanics**
 - **Slow Pitch**

- 2 umpire system, BU will start on the line at 1B.
- Remove being in the slot. They can be in front, behind or to the side of the catcher keeping the 6 ft distance from catcher.
- **Fast Pitch:**
 - Plate umpire deeper than normal to call balls and strikes.
- **All Games**
 - **Prior to start of game:**
 - Umpires allowed to wear gloves and mask if they desire.
 - Umpires will still check equipment before a game.
 - Bats must be outside dugout.
 - Umpire may wear disposable gloves if they wish.
 - Coaches meeting: 1 coach allowed for each team and must stay 6 feet apart. Suggested to be the top outside corner of each batter's box when available. Hand lineups to umpire, and umpire verbally approves or asks any questions about the lineup.
 - **During the Game:**
 - Use of verbal exchange from safe distance when making lineup changes from the Coach to scorer and opposing team.
 - Umpire will maintain 6 feet from any player as a starting position when rotated and/or counter rotated.
 - Umpires do not handle equipment on the field during play.
 - Umpire to umpire and coach to umpire interaction must be 6 feet apart.
 - Make sure catcher is 6 feet from the plate when needing to dust of the plate.
 - Huddles off the field with Coaches and players need to maintain 6 feet social distancing.

12. Off-Field Recommendations

- **Umpires**
 - Always recommended to wear masks in between games.
 - While off the field should follow the guidelines of the tournament and wear a mask if required.
 - Encouraged to follow 6 feet social distancing guidelines.
- **Umpire Room**
 - Should be set up for umpires to be at least 10 feet apart.
 - Only umpires changing for the next game should be in the room and be done dressing and exit prior to the umpires on the field coming in to change out of their gear.

- Umpires should bring a disinfecting spray to spray their uniform and or gear after each game.
- **Evaluation Area**
 - No more than 10 people.
 - Social distancing should be maintained.
 - Area should be inside a room or outside away from others.

13. Umpire Meeting/Clinic Recommendations (Pre-Tournament)

Attendees should be instructed that if they are exhibiting symptoms of possible exposure to COVID-19, such as fever, that they should not come to events or work until such time as the participant has been tested and/or cleared.

- **Prior**
 - Check with Tournament Director/Coordinator to make sure Clinic Room is large enough to set up chairs etc. under 6 feet social distancing guidelines.
- **During**
 - Set up to make sure chairs are separated appropriately.
 - If you have hand outs:
 - Place on table for pick-up OR use gloves to individually hand out.
 - Recommend that “greetings” do not include hugs or handshakes.
 - If handshakes or hugs are preferred, respect those umpires who wish not to participate or use other means (elbow or fist touch).
 - To Umpire-in-Chief’s (UICs) – Recommend ‘wiping down’ items that you may touch such as PowerPoint projector, slide clicker, etc.
 - Recommend to all to wash hands after leaving clinic.
- **Important Note to UIC’s**
 - Anything that is recommended as an adjustment to the ‘norm’, must be contained in the letter/e-mail to all Umpires etc. that is sent prior to the tournament.

These guidelines are meant as precautionary measures to enable us to get back to the ballpark. If you feel you cannot meet these guidelines, then please do not enter any event until such time as you and your team are able to do so or until after the recommendations and requirements are removed.

If someone contracts the virus as a result of participating in the event, USA Softball of North Dakota & the USA Softball Umpires or any Park & Recreation facilities that are used for the events are not to be held liable. There is no Insurance for COVID-19.

USA Softball of ND reserves the right to update or amend guidelines at any time necessary.