

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH



Deidre S. Gifford, MD, MPH
Acting Commissioner

Ned Lamont
Governor
Susan Bysiewicz
Lt. Governor

September 14, 2020

Glenn M. Lungarini
Executive Director, CAS-CIAC
30 Realty Drive, Cheshire, CT 06410

Dear Mr. Lungarini and CAS-CIAC Board Members:

Thank you for the constructive dialogue on Friday, September 11, 2020 and for forwarding your updated fall interscholastic athletics guidance document, which included new revisions to the *Individual Sport Mitigating Strategies* for football and volleyball. We thank the CIAC for continuing to look for ways to engage student-athletes in low and moderate risk physical activities this Fall, and we share your concern for their physical, mental and social well-being and development.

In order to reduce the risk of transmission of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, in settings where individuals come together for activities like work, school, athletics, or other public gatherings, DPH has recommended several generally accepted public health strategies including the use of close-fitting face coverings that completely cover the nose and mouth for source control of respiratory droplets, maintaining a distance of at least 6 feet from other people, and frequent cleaning of surfaces and hands. With respect to the changes you propose for indoor volleyball, DPH acknowledges that your proposal for the use of a close-fitting face covering by all participants may reduce the risk of virus transmission during this activity. As we have said in the past, we recommend that any changes CIAC intends to make to how any sport they sanction is traditionally played be vetted through your Sports Medicine Committee to ensure that they are in agreement with the safety of those changes, especially those to be used during competitive play. In this case, we would recommend checking back with that Committee to verify that their previous recommendation against face coverings during vigorous physical activity (as indicated in your most recent document) has changed and that they are now comfortable allowing it.

CIAC has also included in the most recent document shared with DPH several new measures to be implemented for football, and we agree that most of those strategies also align well with the generally accepted public health recommendations for reducing the spread of COVID-19. Additionally, you propose the use of plastic shields that attach to the helmet or a cloth covering



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over the front grill portion of the helmet for football as further strategies designed to reduce the risk categorization for football. In their guidance to their membership, the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Sports Medicine Advisory Committee has indicated that individual sports meeting their definition of “higher risk” could be considered “moderate risk” by having “*protective equipment in place that may reduce the likelihood of respiratory particle transmission between participants*”. To our knowledge, and as affirmed by representatives of the CIAC Sports Medicine Committee on our September 11th call, there is currently no scientific information available to determine: (1) the effectiveness of plastic shields that attach to the helmet or a cloth covering over the front grill portion of the helmet in preventing the spread of respiratory droplets among players and (2) that these specific prevention measures are safe for high school players to use during play. Without any additional data or documentation, DPH could not definitively say whether or not these technologies are safe to use or could be expected to work effectively from an infection control or epidemiologic perspective to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Nor could we assert that they would change the categorization of full contact football from “higher risk” to “moderate risk.”

DPH continues to recommend substituting athletic or any other activities that could be considered “moderate risk” or “lower risk” in place of “higher risk” ones and/or postponing those activities to a later time when other public health strategies may be more available and better studied. However, we would encourage CIAC to continue to work with your existing Sports Medicine Committee, in consultation with NFHS, to determine whether CIAC’s proposed mitigation strategies meet the standards set forth by NFHS to consider a reduced risk categorization for football or any other “higher risk” sport, as categorized by NFHS. Having more complete information, as well as affirmation from the CIAC Sports Medicine Committee and NFHS of their confidence in your proposed strategies, will likely be of great assistance to the CIAC Board of Control, individual school districts, and participant families in their decision-making process as to whether they feel that they can safely and responsibly engage in football and indoor volleyball activities this Fall, as well as other “higher risk” or indoor “moderate risk” sports going forward.

Sincerely,



Deidre S. Gifford, MD, MPH
Acting Commissioner

cc: P. Mounds, Chief of Staff, State of Connecticut
J. Geballe, COO, State of Connecticut
M. Cardona, Commissioner, CSDE