

MAJOR CHANGES IN SCHOOL SPORTS FOR 2020-21 SCHOOL YEAR

On July 29, two major changes were announced for the sporting community due to COVID-19. Governor Pritzker announced a new set of guidance for all youth and adult recreational sports. That [guidance](#) placed different sports into specific categories based on the level of risk attributed to them (high, medium, or low). It also set type of play levels that dictated what kind of activity each risk level was permitted to engage in based on the area's emergency medical services region.

The Type of Play Levels are set as follows:

Level 1: No-contact practices and scrimmages only;

Level 2: Intra-team scrimmages allowed, with parental consent for minors, no competitive play;

Level 3: Intra-conference, Intra-EMS-Region, or intra-league play/meets; state or league championship game/meets permitted for low-risk sports only;

Level 4: Tournaments, out-of-conference/league play, multi-team meets, out-of-state play allowed, championship games allowed.

As of this date, high-risk sports are at Level 1, medium-risk sports are at Level 2, and low-risk sports are at Level 3. It is notable that Level 2 requires parental consent for minors to participate in intra-team scrimmages. Districts should be aware that under Illinois law, a parent is generally unable to waive a child's right to potential recovery or cause of action through signing a waiver form. Thus, Districts should be cautious about permitting any activity merely because a parent has signed a waiver. The new guidance also provides information on how participants and spectators should be spaced out in facilities and requirements for face coverings and social distancing.

Later that same day, the IHSA [announced](#) drastic changes to the sporting calendar for 2020-21. After consulting the risk level assigned to the various sports, the IHSA announced a reconfiguration of the seasons. There are four seasons for the 2020-21 calendar (fall, winter, spring, and summer). Those seasons will run August 10 – October 24 (fall), November 16 – February 13 (winter), February 15 – May 1, (spring), and May 3 – June 26 (summer). The only sports that will take place in the fall season are boys/girls golf, girls tennis, boys/girls cross country, and girls swimming and diving. The winter season will include boys/girls basketball, wrestling, boys swimming and diving, cheerleading, dance, boys/girls bowling, and girls gymnastics. Spring sports will include football, boys soccer, girls volleyball, girls badminton, boys gymnastics, and boys/girls polo. The summer season will include baseball, softball, boys/girls track and field, girls soccer, boys volleyball, boys/girls lacrosse, and boys tennis.

The IHSA announcement presents major changes to schools. The sporting calendar extends far later into the summer than normal, each season is abbreviated, and many sports have been moved to a different season. As part of these changes, IHSA also announced that its Phase 4 Return to Play Guidelines will allow an additional 20 contact days between September 7 and October 31 for those sports scheduled to be played in winter, spring, or summer.

Each sport will make a determination on how to handle the State Series tournament, but no decisions have been made at this time. All schools, regardless of whether they are conducting learning in-person or through remote means, are eligible to participate, but participation will remain a local decision.

Districts need to consider the impact this may have on their student-athletes, coaching staffs, and facilities. There is a very limited break between winter, spring, and summer seasons.

We will continue to follow any updates on these matters and provide information as it becomes available. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact any of our attorneys.

