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## As College Sports Return, What Should Schools Be Doing Now?

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**With the fall semester approaching, the NCAA released updated guidance on the resocialization of collegiate sports to help institutions plan and prepare for operating under pandemic conditions. This guidance is non-binding, however, and many important issues remain to be addressed at the campus level. This alert describes the current status of collegiate athletics and discusses some of the key issues schools should be considering now.**

Many higher education institutions began welcoming Division I football, men's basketball, and women's basketball student athletes back to campus for voluntary workouts on June 1. On June 17, the NCAA Division I Council approved a six-week practice plan for football programs that allows schools to transition from voluntary workouts to more typical off-season programs. Coaches can become involved in practices, and teams can hold mandatory meetings and camps by the second week in July, all with an eye toward starting the football season on time. The NCAA lengthened the Division III fall preseason, and programs may hold their first practices on August 10 or the first day of class, whichever is earlier. As of now, the Division II Administrative Committee has not affirmed any changes to the first permissible practice date. Undoubtedly, the Division I football programs opting to return players to campus now will be test cases that impact other NCAA sports and divisions.

Despite enthusiasm surrounding the return of college sports, the first few weeks of on-campus, voluntary workouts have already raised concerns. Numerous schools have reported athletes testing positive for COVID-19, with some schools reporting over 20 athletes testing positive for the virus. At least two institutions suspended voluntary workouts amid positive test results.

So much remains unknown: What will the pandemic look like in the fall? Which institutions will have a "green light" from state and local authorities and which will be under lockdown? What will institutions' safety policies require of coaches, students, and administrators? (*The Washington Post* has reported that the "Power Five" conferences have described safety policies that "vary widely from school to school."<sup>[1]</sup>) All of this uncertainty invites the question of how schools can best position themselves for the return of college sports—whatever may happen between now and the start of the 2020-2021 academic year.

Although guidance from the NCAA and conferences has been kept to a relatively high-level so far, the NCAA's recently updated Core Principles of Resocialization of Collegiate Sport,<sup>[2]</sup> and reviewing the approaches of some Division I schools that have already welcomed athletes back to campus, do provide a template of the questions to be asked and the important steps that institutions should begin taking now.

### Preparation

- Acquire sufficient testing, personal protective equipment, and hygienic supplies.

## HIGHER EDUCATION PRACTICE

- Although the NCAA has not yet discussed the matter, consider housing alternatives like short-term leases at hotels or apartment complexes.
- Some institutions, without NCAA guidance or recommendation, have utilized an acknowledgement or waiver form for athletes and/or their parents to sign.

Planning

- What will your institution do when an athlete inevitably tests positive—self isolation, contact tracing, quarantine of all individuals with whom that athlete was in contact?
- Will you test all athletes or only those with symptoms? What about coaches, trainers, and other staff? How often will you test?
- How often will you disinfect high-risk areas like locker rooms and workout spaces?

Flexibility

- Be prepared for stops and starts within the season.
- Scheduled games could be canceled with only short notice after positive tests.
- Without specific NCAA-created requirements, opposing schools will likely have differing containment and testing policies, which means on-field interactions could call for deviation from your own isolation and distancing policies.

Addressing these issues now—consistent, of course, with state and local guidelines—will help guide campus-level decision-making and allow institutions to effectively respond to new developments as they arise.

1. Will Hobson, *The Washington Post*, "Testing troubles: Varying policies jeopardize college football season, experts say," <https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2020/06/19/testing-troubles-varying-policies-jeopardize-college-football-season-experts-say/>.
2. The Core Principles are available here: <http://www.ncaa.org/sport-science-institute/core-principles-resocialization-collegiate-sport> and the NCAA's Action Plan Considerations are available here: <http://www.ncaa.org/sport-science-institute/resocialization-collegiate-sport-action-plan-considerations>.

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