



STATEMENT ON PPE AND ATHLETIC PARTICIPATION: RAMIFICATIONS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

**National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)
Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC)**

While the COVID-19 pandemic has presented myriad challenges to school athletic administrators, one area of increasing concern is the ability of students to access primary care providers and obtain the required preparticipation physical evaluation (PPE) to participate in sports during the upcoming 2020-21 academic year. Currently, many primary care clinics are seeing patients for only acute illness and other urgent or emergent health issues. Well child care and PPEs have come to a halt in much of the country due to social distancing and “stay at home” policies.

The duration of the pandemic and social distancing restrictions are obviously unknown at this time. When primary care providers do start seeing patients for non-urgent conditions there is likely to be a significant delay in routine care appointments as those providers prioritize patients with chronic or subacute medical problems. Thus, there will likely be significant delays in students being able to obtain PPEs in their medical home.

The purpose of the PPE or “sports physical” is to maximize the health of athletes and their safe participation in sports. The PPE is required for high school sports participation in every state and the District of Columbia. There is great variation in the required interval time between exams, ranging from annually to every three years.

We believe that this unprecedented event allows for state associations to be flexible in their current requirements, while maintaining a balance between student safety, the benefits of athletic participation, and easing the burden on local primary care providers. Therefore, we suggest that you consider the following:

1. Follow the laws for your state. We recommend discussion with state health department and state medical associations prior to making a final decision on how best to approach this issue. Some states may not be able to make any changes without approval of their state legislature.
2. If needed, and absent indications to the contrary, we recommend a one-year extension for any student who has a PPE that “expires” before or during the 2020-21 academic year.
3. Parents and guardians should be informed that extending the duration between PPEs is a deviation from standard of care, but given the already existing variation among states when there isn’t evidence to the contrary, we believe this change in practice on balance, would permit the greatest overall health benefit from the allocation of scarce medical resources.

4. Students who have not had a PPE, such as incoming freshmen and students who are first time participants in athletics, should still be required to have a PPE prior to athletic participation. Therefore, parents and guardians should be informed of the need to obtain a PPE now, in order to get this accomplished in the coming months.
5. We encourage allowing schools to accept documented PPEs from out of state transfer students. While there is variation among forms, there is not enough evidence that this variation significantly impacts the effectiveness of the PPE.

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