



# COVID-19 RETURN TO PLAY Guidance on Safe Return to Play

USA Pickleball Association (USAPA)

*In addition to its own research and sourcing, USA Pickleball acknowledges several sport organizations including the Association of Chief Executives for Sport, United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee, US National Strength and Conditioning Association, US Tennis Association and United States Golf Association for their information and best practices.*

## **COVID-19: PARTICIPATION LANDSCAPE AND CHALLENGES**

The world is currently experiencing a global pandemic known as COVID-19. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), COVID-19 is a viral illness that can spread from person to person with close physical contact, coming into contact with surfaces with the virus on it, and from respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. Most sports organizations in the U.S. have suspended play and structured training, resulting in an uncertain future landscape.

Aside from the risk of being infected by the coronavirus, possible return outcomes for players include:

- Modified and/or condensed playing schedules
- Mixed levels of preparation among teammates following extended time off
- Increased risks of injury and overtraining
- Adverse weight gain, weight loss, and changes to body composition
- Slowed or interrupted progress with individual rehabilitation programs
- Facility and program challenges related to ongoing fears and social distancing

The purpose of this document is to compile and summarize pertinent information to support safe and appropriate recreational play practices for players during the expected transition period back to regular pickleball activity. **The information included is to be applied in accordance with facility mandated rules and recommendations as well as the latest local, state, and federal guidelines related to the containment and prevention of COVID-19.** It is also important to note that the overall risks for players following periods of inactivity extend beyond the scope of preventive measures against the spread of COVID-19. This document includes both COVID-19 prevention and inactivity-related guidelines and resources for players upon returning to partial or full activity.

## **MINIMIZING RISK: MANAGING SCHEDULES AND PLAY SESSIONS**

The following information does not apply for everyone as stay-at-home restrictions and mandates vary state to state. However, if you live in an area where local stay-at-home or shelter-in-place mandates have been relaxed or modified, and courts are available for play, we encourage you to take every precaution and follow these safety recommendations as well as those implemented and required by your facility or club and local, state and federal government authority.

In response to COVID-19, facility managers and players should adjust normal court schedules to help control the number of players playing with large groups. Due to the possibility of players returning from high-risk areas, or who have been infected and are contagious, extra precautions are necessary to prevent the asymptomatic transmission of the virus. Group size counts for play sessions must include all players and staff, and players must strictly adhere to social gathering and distancing policies, according to local, state, and federal authorities. Special considerations should be made for transitional periods between playing groups when overlap and crowding is more likely to occur. Dependent upon the specific timing and withdrawal of local COVID-19 restrictions, players should be prepared to adhere to a minimum of a six-foot social distancing measure, as defined by the CDC.

### **IF YOU DECIDE TO PLAY:**

- Make sure that your state, regional and local authorities satisfy federal criteria.
- If your courts are open and available for play, adhere to safety precautions established by the CDC and the facility.
- Consider playing with only family members or others who reside in your household.

## ***IF YOU DECIDE TO PLAY (cont'd):***

- Wash your hands with soap and water and bring personal use hand sanitizer to the courts.
- Clean and wipe down your paddles and water bottles. Do not share paddles or any other equipment or clothing.
- Bring a full personal use water bottle(s) and avoid touching or using public water fountains.
- Bring tissues or a handkerchief for contained sneezing and coughing or consider wearing a mask.
- Consider wearing gloves to the courts and avoid touching court gates, fences, benches, etc.
- Also consider wearing gloves during play to avoid picking up pickleballs with your hands.
- Use new pickleballs and a new grip or fresh tape on your paddle handle if possible.
- Coordinate with your play group so that each person serves with a different color ball. If multiple colors are not an option, use a sharpie and prominently mark personal pickleballs with your initials.

## ***DO NOT PLAY IF YOU:***

- Are exhibiting any symptoms of the coronavirus: mild to severe respiratory illness with fever, coughing, difficulty breathing, or other symptoms identified by the CDC.
- Have been in contact with someone with COVID-19 in the last 14 days.
- Are a vulnerable individual with serious underlying health conditions, including high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, or whose immune system is compromised such as by chemotherapy for cancer and other conditions requiring such therapy.

## ***MANAGING PLAY SESSIONS:***

- Adhere to social gathering and distancing policies according to local, state, and federal authorities. Limit your distance to six feet or more to other players.
- Avoid contact with others, such as hand shaking and high fives.
- Group size counts should include players and staff, and account for transition periods between sessions.
- Limit or stagger playing groups throughout open play schedule and consider alternate days for various groups.
- Use outdoor courts/spaces whenever possible.
- Consider playing singles only and avoid doubles play as doubles is not conducive for six-foot social distancing and leads to incidental contact with playing partners.
- If you do elect to play doubles, consider playing with only those who reside within your household.
- Adhere to CDC guidelines by not touching your face (after handling a ball or paddle).
- Consider using hand sanitizer between games.
- Wash your hands after each match.
- Use your paddle and foot to pick up pickleballs and transfer them to your opponent. If utilizing a raised net, hit the ball under the net to your opponent.
- Avoid changing ends of the court.
- Maintain proper social distancing from other players in between games and during time outs.

## ***WHEN PLAY HAS ENDED:***

- Leave the court as soon as reasonably possible.
- Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer immediately after your match is over.
- Avoid post play socializing.
- Avoid locker rooms and changing area – proceed home.
- Thoroughly wash your paddles, grips, pickleballs, towels, clothes, bags, water bottles, and other items you have used or touched.