

Return to Baseball: COVID-19 Umpiring Protocols

Baseball Ontario is committed to the safety of its umpires, and also recognizes the critical role that umpires play in ensuring the safety of all other participants. Consistent with this understanding, umpires are required to follow the protocols listed below, which align with and complement the protocols outlined in the Baseball Ontario Return to Play document.

1. Prior to umpiring any games this season, an umpire must complete the following steps. All documents/waivers are available at <https://ondeck.baseballontario.com/page/2308/return-to-sport> or by downloading the Baseball Ontario On Deck app for iOS or Android
 - a. Complete 2020 Baseball Ontario certifications requirements (online clinic and/or exam)
 - b. Complete Rowan's Law Concussion Education Acknowledgement
 - c. Complete Participation Waiver (either Adult Participant or Child Participant-Parent Waiver version)
 - d. Complete COVID-19 Declaration
 - e. Read Umpire Code of Conduct (acceptance embedded in Rowan's Law Acknowledgement)

2. Prior to every game, umpires must self-screen at <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment> and shall not attend the game if they fail the screening protocol. An umpire, who is identified as part of an at-risk group, but otherwise passes the screening questions is discouraged from umpiring, but they are not considered to have failed the screening protocol. Any umpire diagnosed with COVID-19 or who has been in contact with any person having COVID-19 in the previous 14 days MUST not umpire and MUST notify their local public health authority. Any umpire diagnosed with COVID-19 must be cleared by appropriate medical authorities prior to umpiring.

3. No umpire will be positioned behind the catcher at any time.

Rationale: Over the course of a game, an umpire in the traditional position behind the catcher would be in close physical distance to at least 18 other people (the batters of both teams), exposing both themselves and others to risk.

4. The ball/strike umpire will work in the regular P3 or P4 infield positions normally occupied by base umpires.
 - a. With bases empty, the ball/strike umpire may select either P3 or P4
 - b. With a runner on 1st base only, or 1st and 3rd base, the ball/strike umpire will work from P3
 - c. With other combinations of runners, the ball/strike umpire will work from P4

Rationale: Moving the umpire to a position 6' or more behind the catcher would put the umpire at much greater risk of being hit forcefully with foul balls. Placing the umpire directly behind the pitcher's mound would leave the umpire in danger of being hit by line drives up the middle (without a glove for self defence) and would also be potentially distracting to batters or pitchers. Although the traditional P3/P4 position used by base umpires may not be ideal for calling balls and strikes, it is deep enough, far enough away from the centre of the field, and far enough removed from other participants to be the safest location for the ball/strike umpire.

5. From the position described in (3) above, the ball/strike umpire will call balls and strikes, all plays or calls at home, all plays at any bases that do not have an additional umpire assigned, and all catch/no-catch calls where an additional umpire does not go out to the outfield. For plays at bases, the ball/strike umpire should use the "working area" and move as close to the play as possible while not over-committing for the possibility of plays at other bases.

Plays at home plate will be especially difficult for the ball/strike umpire. When required to cover home, the ball/strike umpire is recommended to move around the mound on the opposite side (the open side) from the throw to the plate, and make the call from fair territory on the open side in front of home plate.

6. Games may be umpired by one umpire, working from the P3/P4 position as described in (3) above. If one umpire only is assigned to a game, that umpire must have previous umpiring certification with Baseball Ontario prior to 2020, and will make all calls anywhere on the field.

Rationale: Assigning one umpire only may be desirable for several reasons:

- *The need for umpires is reduced by 50% at a time when availability of umpires may be reduced.*
- *There is one less person on the field, which means social distancing on the field is that much more possible*
- *All games will be exhibition, and as a result may be more "scrimmage-like" than normal.*
- *There is no umpire in the 1st and 3rd base vicinities, reducing the number of participants in those areas.*
- *The possibility of double calls from two umpires working an unfamiliar system is eliminated.*

7. Alternatively, games may be umpired by 2 or 3 umpires. In either case, the ball/strike umpire will be positioned in P3/P4 as described in (3) above.
- a. **2-Umpire System:** If using 2 umpires, the second umpire (U1) shall be stationed behind 1st base in the P2 umpiring position. U1 will make all calls at 1st base, all fair/foul calls anywhere on the 1st base line, and all catch/no-catch calls from CF to the RF line. When a play develops at home plate where U1 has no other responsibilities, crews may elect to have U1 rotate to cover home plate. Otherwise, U1 will not move from the P2 position other than to take a position for plays at 1st or to go out to the outfield for a catch/no-catch call. The ball/strike umpire will make all other calls.
 - b. **3-Umpire System:** If using 3 umpires, the second (U1) and third (U3) umpires shall be stationed behind 1st and 3rd bases respectively in the P2 and P5 umpiring positions. U1 will make all calls at 1st base, all fair/foul calls anywhere on the 1st base line, and all catch/no-catch calls from CF to the RF line. U3 will make all calls at 3rd base (unless having gone out to the outfield for a catch/no-catch call), all fair/foul calls anywhere on the 3rd base line, and all catch/no-catch calls from CF to the LF line. When a play develops at home plate where U1 has no other responsibilities, crews may elect to have U1 rotate to cover home plate. Otherwise, U1 and U3 will not move from their P2 or P5 positions other than to take a position for a play at their base or to go out to the outfield for a catch/no-catch call. The ball/strike umpire will make all other calls.

Rationale: Assigning multiple umpires (2 or 3 umpire system) may be desirable for several reasons:

- *It would provide an opportunity for first-year or less-experienced umpires to gain experience by umpiring as U1 or U3 in a less-competitive environment, with fewer responsibilities than normal*
 - *Sufficient umpiring spots would be available to any umpires who wish to umpire this season.*
 - *Umpires would have colleagues to consult with on difficult plays, particularly at home plate*
 - *Coverage and game management will be enhanced for any games that may potentially have a more normal competitive environment*
8. Umpire(s) will not hold game balls or prepare baseballs prior to the game. Only members of the defensive team shall touch baseballs. If the umpire touches a ball for any reason, the use of hand sanitizer at the end of that half inning is recommended.
9. Lead-offs are prohibited at 18U and below. This means that Base runners cannot leave the base until the ball leaves the pitcher's hand. If an infraction occurs, the ball will be declared dead and runners may not advance. 1 warning will be issued and for any further infractions thereafter, the runner will be called out. (Each team to receive 1 warning). Older leagues may adopt this rule if they choose to do so.
10. Umpires may wear a PPE mask at their discretion.
11. The Pre-Game meeting is limited to 1 coach from each team and 1 umpire, and those three participants must be at least 2m (6') apart. Line up cards must be prepared but will not be physically shared at the pre-game meeting. Photos of line-up cards may be taken by scorekeepers and the lineup card must be made available to show the umpire when requested
12. Umpires must be familiar with the Baseball Ontario Return to Sport Protocols as per the [Baseball Ontario Return to Play document](#), Umpires are not responsible for the enforcement of Return to Sport safety measures (ie: controlling spitting), the coaches are ultimately responsible for their players. Umpires are encouraged however, to work with the coaches to assist in controlling these measures. Umpires may use whatever game management tools they need up to and including removal of the participant from the game. Coaches are permitted to approach umpires to question calls but they must maintain physical distancing of 6 feet (2m), if the coach does not maintain physical distancing, the umpire should remove the coach from the game.

If at any time, umpires feel that the Return to Sport safety measures are not being followed by one or both teams and the umpire feels unsafe, umpires are instructed to suspend the game, go home, and file a report immediately outlining the circumstances. This expectation should be discussed with managers at the physically-distanced pre-game meeting.

Rationale: If the Baseball Ontario COVID-19 protocols are not being followed, the umpire is unsafe (as are all participants). This is why enforcement rests with the managers, and is why umpires are instructed to suspend play and leave the ballpark. In addition, as specific penalties for COVID-19 protocol infractions are not outlined, umpires would be unsure of how to enforce specific infractions.

13. **Questioning Calls:** Without an umpire behind home plate, many calls will be more difficult for umpires (ie: ball/strike, fair/foul, catches near the foul lines in the outfield, plays at home plate). Umpires will work hard to get the best possible look at all plays, but all participants are expected to show restraint in approaching/arguing/complaining about calls that are obviously made more difficult as a result of these COVID-19 Umpiring Protocols. If a coach must approach an umpire, physical distancing of at least 2m (6') is mandatory.