

# SOFTBALL ALBERTA RETURN TO PLAY 2021



The Softball Alberta Return to Play (RTP) Committee is based on an overriding objective of providing an opportunity for as many participants to engage in softball activities as possible in 2021. The protocols are designed to permit TimBits activity, through to adult fastpitch and slo-pitch. Softball Alberta's goal with the Return to Play protocol is to focus on returning safely to a normal softball season. Our requirements are based on provincial health guidelines pertaining to COVID-19, for a minimized risk of transmission while engaged in softball activities.

The return to sport may, again, be a graduated process, with a plan to ensure participants are able to comply with each phase before being sanctioned to move to the next step. As well, Government of Alberta requirements will take precedence over Softball Alberta requirements at all times.

Our protocols go beyond the playing rules to ensure we are doing all we can to minimize risk, to include pre activity set up, spectator management and post activity cleanup. Plans have been designed to consider what needs to be done, and wherever possible minimizing costs to participants.

Our guiding principles include the following:

1. physical distancing in place wherever possible
2. when physical distancing is not possible, alternative safety measures are in place
3. minimal shared use of equipment
4. when shared use of equipment cannot be avoided, sanitary measures are in place
5. plans in place to record and report community transmissions of the virus

**Please note, this Return to Play plan is subject to change.**

# CONTROLLED PRACTICES, SKILL DEVELOPMENT, TRAINING

## 1. Pre activity preparation

- Venue or facility space outdoors is scheduled to ensure that a staggered arrival time is used to minimize overlap with previous time slot
- Ensure players, parents and coaches are aware of safety protocols before arriving.
- Teams are responsible for having an Emergency Action Plan and ensuring equipment is sanitized and dugouts are clean. Once that has been completed, ensure all participants self-sanitize.
- Participants arrive by household only, no carpooling. Each athlete and coach will report to a designated volunteer. This designated person will guide the players to designated areas where they are ensuring physical distancing and each maintains their own equipment bag and water bottle.
- Each participant is required to have with them, their own water bottle, equipment bag, including their glove, batting glove, batting helmet, bat, shoes and catcher's gear. Participants must come to the field dressed and ready to take part. This includes coaches and players. All equipment should be sanitized regularly. Each participant is also required to have their own hand sanitizer unless a sanitizing station has been set up beside each team's dugout.
- Every athlete and coach will report first to a designated volunteer to be registered and pre-screened before they are permitted on the softball diamond. The designated volunteer records the first and last names of all participants, including coaches, and keeps the pre-screening information with the attendance record in case of the need for contact tracing. (Pre-screen apps such as Team Snap & RAMP may also be used)
- Spectators are directed to the outfield where they are advised to maintain physical distancing by household. Spectators must stay out of designated areas for players and coaches.

## 2. Field of Play / Bench / Bleachers Area

- Dugout/bench area should be disinfected prior to anyone stepping into the area.
- Bench, bleachers & dugouts are considered part of the field of play.
- Players and coaches are permitted to be in close proximity while on the field of play. Team members may use the dugout during games/practices, but are expected to follow physical distancing when off the field of play,
- All players and coaches must have their own water bottles/sports drink. Community water jugs or shared cups should not be allowed.
- Sunflower seeds, gum, chewing tobacco, candy or spitting of any kind are not allowed.
- Each bench area is recommended to have a first aid kit with a supply of materials including masks and gloves to address any medical concerns or injuries. Teams should have a designated medical person to attend to injuries or issues.

## 3. Practice

- Frequent hand sanitizing or washing should occur between each drill or activity and water breaks.
- Shared equipment is to be sanitized between drills/stations and any softball activities,
- Controlled practices and skill development will take into account minimizing shared use of equipment and maintaining physical distance wherever possible.
- Practice Plans should consider a minimal number of participants handling the same ball. For example, when possible, catching and throwing drills should be done in pairs only and the balls sanitized frequently.
- Players should not wear masks when engaging in intense physical activities. Coaches and spectators may wear a mask if they wish as cheering and yelling are a higher risk of spreading respiratory droplets.
- Coach(es) should have a current EAP (Emergency Action Plan) outlining, in the event of a minor or major injury, what the medical treatment process will be. The safety of all participants is top priority, but whenever possible, must be done with the requirements of COVID-19 transmission being minimized,
- Each team should have an Injury Attendant, and if an injury occurs to a player only the coach and Injury Attendant, both wearing protective gloves and face coverings, may attend to the injured player. Everyone else must maintain physical distancing.

## 4. Post Practice

- A post-practice meeting and cool downs can be held with minimum physical distancing at all times as recommended by AHS.
- Teams are asked to exit the bench area and facility as efficiently as possible.
- Players leave the venue immediately after the practice, and only within their own household. Parents must be present to pick up their child as soon as the game ends.
- Designated volunteers inspect the area to ensure nothing has been left and the area is clean and sanitary.
- Players are encouraged to wash their equipment and shower once they get home.

## ADDITIONAL PROTOCOLS

- When minor first aid (cuts, bruise, scrape) is required, only the household member will administer first aid.
- Major first aid will be administered by the Injury Attendant, practicing usual medical sanitary protocol with the household member only in attendance.
- Parents and athletes will be instructed on the protocols in place for physical distancing and managing their own equipment bag, beverages and food.

# GAMES

## 1. Pre-game

- Home team / league officials to set up the diamond and communicate entry/exit points to visitors, as well as any other facility protocols being observed for that venue. Ensure players, parents and coaches are aware of safety protocols before arriving
- Each team is responsible for having an Emergency Action Plan and ensuring equipment is sanitized and dugouts are clean. Once that has been completed, ensure all participants self-sanitize upon arrival.
- Spectators are directed to the outfield where they are advised to maintain physical distancing by household. At no time should spectators sit in the designated player, coach area, bleachers or the dugout.
- Coaches prepare a controlled pre-game warm-up, minimize shared use of equipment and ensuring physical distancing is observed.
- All players sanitize hands after warming up before entering the bench area.
- Coaches plate meeting: one coach allowed for each team and must maintain physical distancing (suggested to stand at top outside corner of each batter's box when available). No players allowed at the plate meeting. Coaches will hand lineups to umpire and umpire will verbally approve or ask any questions about lineups
- Pre-game team huddles are allowed with physical distancing measures, but no high fives, team cheers, etc.

## 2. Field of Play/Bench Area

- Ensure diamond layout is proper for coaches' box, on deck circle, umpire/catcher area to maintain physical distancing when possible.
- Dugout/bench area should be disinfected prior to anyone stepping into the area.
- Bench, bleachers & dugouts are considered part of the field of play.
- Players and coaches are permitted to be in close proximity while on the field of play. Team members may use the dugout during games, but are expected to follow physical distancing when off the field of play,
- All players and coaches must have their own water bottles/sports drink. Community water jugs or shared cups should not be allowed.
- Sunflower seeds, gum, chewing tobacco, candy or spitting of any kind are not allowed.
- Each bench area is recommended to have a first aid kit with a supply of materials including masks and gloves to address any medical concerns or injuries. Teams should have a designated medical person to attend to injuries or issues.

### 3. Game Protocols

- Prior to each team going on defense, and when they come off the field after being on defense, all team members must use hand sanitizer or soap and water if available.
- Umpires should not handle any equipment (bats, helmets, etc). If an umpire must handle equipment (ex. safety check), the equipment should be sanitized before use by player.
- Game balls should not be shared between teams. Each team, or the home team, should provide sanitized, approved or mutually agreed upon, game balls. Balls should be controlled by the respective benches.
- If a ball goes out of play, the defensive team will put a sanitized ball into play. The out of play ball will be returned to the bench and be sanitized. All balls should be disinfected after each half inning by the appropriate team.
- On field coaches will be permitted to stand outside the coach's box when physical distancing is necessary, but safety of the coach and athletes must be a priority.
- The batter must be responsible to pick up their own bat if an out is made. If the batter reaches a base, the on deck person should retrieve the bat by the barrel side & return it to the bench avoiding contact with the grip.
- Conferences should be allowed at the pitching area only with the coach and pitcher/catcher while maintaining proper physical distancing.
- No high fives, handshakes or intentional contact.
- Cheering & yelling on the bench and by spectators is strongly discouraged as it presents a high risk of spreading droplets.
- Players will acknowledge their teammates, competitors and officials with a wave or a cheer, while maintaining physical distancing among themselves and their opponents.
- No player may lick their fingers during softball activities. Pitchers may use pitching rosin and/or gorilla rags at all levels. If a player does lick their fingers while on the field, the player must leave the game and may only return to the game after they have sanitized or washed their hands with soap and water. Any player on the bench may replace the removed player and not be counted as a substitute leaving/re-entering the game.
- Injuries should be attended to by the team's Injury Attendant or household member. Everyone else must maintain physical distancing. The teams will move away from the injured participant, respecting the physical distancing protocol
- In the event of a serious or major injury, the team emergency preparation protocol will be observed with team officials assuming their roles to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants

### 5. Post-Game

- There should be no post game handshakes or celebrations.
- A post-game meeting & cool downs can be held. However, all social distancing & 2 metre spacing must be enforced.
- Teams are asked to exit the bench area and facility as efficiently as possible.
- Players leave the venue immediately after the game, and only within their own household. Parents must be present to pick up their child as soon as the game ends.
- Designated volunteers inspect the area to ensure nothing has been left and the area is clean and sanitary.
- Players are encouraged to wash their equipment and shower once they get home.

## UMPIRES

### In-Game procedures

- Whenever possible, umpires to maintain minimum physical distancing as recommended by AHS.
- Umpires required to wear a face covering during the game. Type of face covering as per AHS guidelines – must cover mouth and nose.
- Sanitizer – each umpire required to have his/her own sanitizer, and have it with them for each game and use it regularly throughout the game. Umpires are responsible for obtaining his/her own sanitizer.
- Umpires do not handle any team equipment on the field, unless of a safety concern for a play at the plate.
- Umpire/ scorekeeper interactions - Physical distancing required
- Coach/ player / Umpire interactions:
  - If coach or player has a change or question, done verbally at minimum two-metre distancing and face covering required.
  - If a coach/ player refuses to maintain two-metre physical distancing and wear face covering when interacting with an umpire, they will be removed from the game.
- If a participant refuses to adhere to these RTP guidelines on the field of play:
  - Coach/ team rep to be notified and asked to resolve the non-compliance
  - If non-adherence to these RTP guidelines continues on the diamond, participant may be removed from the game.

*Umpires who are not comfortable with an environment may remove themselves at any point without fear of discipline. Umpires should be encouraged to wear gloves and a mask if they wish.*

## TOURNAMENTS

- Participants are to follow the Facility & Diamond Protocols below as well as those included in this document
- Games times are to be staggered to ensure there is an unencumbered pathway to enter and exit the facility,
- Medals/prizes are not to be handed out individually, but a closed box handed to a team representative,
- The hosting club will have diamonds set up under the park/venue and diamond preparation, and it will be the responsibility of the host to communicate with visiting teams about the protocols to be followed at each specific park or Facility.
- Please Note that these guidelines may be updated should circumstances change or should relevant guidelines and AHS orders be revised.

## RAPID RESPONSE PLAN

Facilities and organizers are required to have a rapid response plan in place to manage symptomatic participants, spectators and staff. A rapid response plan sets out a fast-action plan for operators when an attendee shows symptoms of COVID-19.

Details on rapid response can be found in the [General Relaunch Guidance](#).

Plans should include:

- Immediate isolation of the symptomatic participant from others, including arrangement for safe travel home (e.g., no public transit).
- Consideration of suspension or temporary cancellation of the event.
- Cleaning and disinfecting of all equipment and surfaces that may have come into contact with the symptomatic participant.
- Performance of hand hygiene by remaining participants.

## BEST PRACTICES

These are highly recommended, but NOT mandatory:

- Participants should refrain from touching their eyes, nose, mouth and face while participating.
- Participants should exhibit proper respiratory etiquette (sneezing or coughing into crook of elbow, no clearing of nasal passages, etc.)
- Associations/single affiliated teams to confirm with their municipality that adequate signage warning of physical distancing and sanitary requirements is displayed
- Associations/single affiliated teams to ensure their municipality is servicing and monitoring washrooms if applicable). If not, the club/league must either do so themselves to current standards or ensure the facilities remain closed and notify all participants.
- Associations/single affiliated teams should ensure concession stands have been permitted to open and are meeting all local health authority requirements for their sanctioned activities, or they remain closed.
- Youth participants are to follow a rule of two when using the washroom. Either a member of their household accompanies them to the washroom, or if appropriate, a teammate, while respecting physical distancing.

### APPENDIX

- [AHS Daily Checklist](#)
- [AHS posters](#)
- [AHS Public Health Orders](#)
- [AHS Sector Guidance](#)
- [Emergency Action Plan template](#)
- [Facemasks](#)