

IHSA Releases Return To Play Guidelines For Member Schools, Focuses On General Workouts, Social Distancing

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EDWARDSVILLE - The Illinois High School Association announced on Friday afternoon Return To Play Guidelines to their member schools as a part of Governor J.B. Pritzker's Restore Illinois Plan as the state continues to reopen from the COVID-19

pandemic. Member schools can begin workouts for their athletes as early as June 6, and are designed to keep athletes safe while observing social distancing guidelines and other safety requirements.

The guidelines were developed with the assistance of the IHSA's Sports Medicine Advisory Committee, and were approved by the Illinois Department of Public Health.

"I commend the IHSA SMAC for crafting a plan that fits within the framework provided by state leadership, and refuses to compromise safety," said IHSA Executive Director Craig Anderson in a press release. "The IHSA Return to Play guidelines offer some important first steps in allowing student-athletes to re-acclimate both physically and mentally to athletics, but more importantly, they allow each school to assess their own individual situation, and determine if and when they want to proceed."

Edwardsville High School athletic director Alex Fox sees the guidelines as an important first step in getting the Tiger athletes and teams back on the field.

"I think that anything we can do to get our kids back on the field is great," Fox said. "It doesn't matter how much or how little, anything is a step in the right direction."

According to the guidelines, IHSA member schools can't conduct workouts without local school district approval and located in a region that has reached at least Phase Three or better in the Restore Illinois plan. During workouts, which will be recommended be held outdoors instead of indoors to prevent the possibility of transmission of the COVID-19 virus, the regular social distancing rules of at least six feet, with masks or other face coverings mandatory if social distancing can't be followed. Groups are limited to not more than 10 people, including coaches, trainers and other medical personnel, but once groups are formed, athletes can't switch back-and-forth between groups. Athletes that play multiple sports are being encouraged to be in groups that correspond to their fall sport.

Interactions between groups are being discouraged, while sessions are limited to only weightlifting, running and general exercises. Sport-specific drills and equipment won't be allowed to be used, and all equipment used will be cleaned and sanitized to both CDC and IDPH standards.

Free-weight workouts and exercises will be prohibited, all safety measures in the school's weight room will be strictly enforced, and athletes will be required to bring their own water bottles, shoes, towels and other personal equipment. Locker rooms will be closed, and both shared water coolers and water fountains won't be allowed to be used. IHSA school-sponsored camps, clinics and open gyms are still prohibited during this time.

It's also encouraged that trainers and other medical personnel be available during workouts, properly masked and observe social distancing whenever possible. Temperatures will be monitored before workouts, and anyone displaying the COVID-19 symptoms won't be allowed to participate, but be sent to a doctor for evaluation and testing. Monitoring forms and record-keeping will be made available to coaches, which will be filled out after every workout.

Fox will evaluate the guidelines and make recommendations to the school's administration and coaching staffs, then will make recommendations on how to proceed.

"What we'll do is look this thing over," Fox said, "and draw up some recommendations, then the administration and coaching staffs will look them over, and we'll come up with our course of action."

The Return To Play guidelines will help bring a sense of normalcy to the Tiger community, but as Fox also said, safety first will always be of paramount importance.

"I really think that people want things to normalize," Fox said, "but we want to make sure that our athletes are safe first and foremost."

Fox is looking forward to getting the Tiger athletes back on the field.

"We're definitely looking forward to it," Fox said. "We just want to get to the business of working with the kids and moving forward."