

IHSA To Defer To Governor's Office, IDPH, ISBE On All Future Return To Play Guidelines

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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BLOOMINGTON - The Illinois High School Association announced Tuesday that the organization will defer to the office of Governor J.B. Pritzker, along with both the Illinois Department of Public Health and Illinois State Board of Education in

establishing all future Return To Play Guidelines after reports of COVID-19 cases involving both Lake Zurich and Quincy Notre Dame high schools.

The IHSA last week went into Phase Four (formerly Section Two) of its return to play guidelines, with large groups of not more than 50 people, temperature monitoring and other safety precautions. The guidelines were modified on July 9 after the reports of the positive tests surfaced.

"There is an unprecedented level of planning for this school year, due to COVID-19," said IHSA Executive Director Craig Anderson in a press release on the IHSA's website, "and we have come to understand that there needs to be a greater consistency between the returning to learn, and returning to interscholastic athletics. Some of the recommendations by the IHSA Sports Medicine Advisory Committee and directives from the IDPH have come into direct conflict with each other, especially as it relates to the use of masks by student-athletes. As a result, we feel it is important to let the IDPH and ISBE provide a consistent direction for our membership moving forward. We will wait on direction from these organizations for further guidance on Return to Play plans for the 2020-21 school year."

Under the revised Phase Four guidelines, masks are required for all athletes who are practicing indoors, and eliminate all scrimmages in sports such as basketball, football, lacrosse, soccer, volleyball, water polo and wrestling. The IHSA's SMAC developed the original Phase Four guidelines which went into effect July 5, then revised the guidelines four days later. Final approval of the revised guidelines are expected soon.

Anderson still believes that there's a chance that the fall sports season will be played as scheduled, but will need cooperation between all parties involved,

"We still believe there is a path to conducting high school athletics in the fall, like the majority of states surrounding Illinois plan to do," Anderson said. "To make that happen, it's important that we allow the IDPH, ISBE and the Governor's Office to take the lead on ensuring the safest and most consistent protocols."

Full fall practices are set to begin in mid-August, with the fall sports season scheduled to begin later in the month. The IHSA football season is also scheduled to begin on Aug. 28.