

USA Softball of Montana – Playball 2020 – Updated Guidelines

The following are guidelines and recommendations for softball events under the state's phased approach to control the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Each city/county may have different health requirements so these guidelines and recommendations can be tailored to meet those requirements.

These guidelines are meant as precautionary measures to enable us to get back to the ballpark. Teams are advised to play at their own risk. If anyone feels they cannot or will not meet these guidelines, then do not participate in the event until such time as you and your team are able to do so or until after the recommendations and requirements are removed. If someone contracts the virus as a result of participation in any fashion, USA Softball of Montana, softball organizations, USA Softball Umpires, or any facility owner are not to be held liable. There is No Insurance for COVID-19.

Under Phase 1:

Practices in groups of less than 10 are required under the requirements of Phase 1.

No games until Phase 2.

Safeguards:

1. Establish social distancing during the entire practice.
2. Groups are limited to 9 people or less.
3. Anyone with a temperature over 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or any other symptoms should stay home.
4. JO Coaches and team managers should stress the need to check for symptoms and develop procedures to check or self-check .
5. Players should sanitize their hands as often as possible.
6. Recommend that all players wear face coverings to protect other players.
7. Prior to and during practice the softballs should be sanitized with disinfectant.
8. Limit the use of specific softballs to as few players as possible. If machine pitching, use as few people as possible to load and retrieve softballs.
9. Other equipment (bats, helmets, tees, etc...) should be cleaned with disinfectant after use, before another player uses that piece of equipment. If possible, players should bring their own helmets and bats for their personal use.
10. Any surfaces that were contacted should be cleaned and sanitized during or after practice.
11. No huddles or "high fives".
12. Keep a list of players/coaches/others in case tracing is required.

Under Phase 2:

Group sizes are increased to less than 50. Games can be held as long as players/coaches/fans follow established rules and guidelines. Practice guidelines in Phase 1 still apply except for group size.

Safeguards:

1. Establish social distancing.
2. Groups are limited to 50 people or less.
3. Anyone with a temperature over 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or any other symptoms should stay home.
4. JO Coaches and team managers should stress the need to check for symptoms and develop procedures to check or self-check .
5. Players should sanitize their hands as often as possible.
6. Recommend that all players wear face coverings to protect other players. Masks may be homemade or store bought.
7. Prior to the game softballs should be sanitized with disinfectant.
8. Other equipment (bats, helmets, tees, etc...) should be cleaned with disinfectant after use, before another player uses that piece of equipment. If possible, players should bring their own helmets and bats for their personal use.
9. Any surfaces that were contacted should be cleaned and sanitized during and after the game.
10. Keep a list of players/coaches/others incase tracing is required.

Recommendations:

1. Teams are encouraged to provide hand sanitizer for their team for use before, during & after the game.
2. Umpires need to have and use their own hand sanitizer.
3. Wash your hands before and after each game and use hand sanitizer.
4. Do not touch your face or go to your mouth with fingers.

Requirements

1. No team huddles. Communication with team must uphold social distancing.
2. Pre-game coin flip, 1 coach per team w/umpire, all utilizing social distancing. No hand shake
3. At conclusion of games, no handshakes, high-fives, etc.
4. Spectators are expected to follow 6 feet social distancing guidelines. Instead of using bleachers bring own chairs to make distancing easier. Dugout – Teams will be allowed to have 3-5 individuals in the dugout at any given time (depending on the size of the dugout) balance of players behind the fence. Social distancing must be maintained at all times and no physical contact or touching. Team managers should emphasize these guidelines.
5. Catcher (Slow Pitch) – must be at least 6 feet behind batter to maintain social distancing.
6. Teams waiting for games should follow 6 foot social distancing guidelines.
7. Teams should not enter the dugout until the other team exits.

Equipment

1. It is highly recommended that team personnel carry hand sanitizers and disinfectant wipes with you to use before, during and after games, and whenever possible and when you come in contact with shared equipment like a softball and or bat. It is recommended that the player picking up the bat after it is used wipe down the bat after each use.

2. Wear batting gloves as much as possible, especially when handling a bat.
3. Refrain from sharing equipment in general as much as possible.

Coaches:

1. Base coaches must stay 6 feet from a runner they wish to talk to during or after suspension of play.
2. Coaches holding defensive conference must stay outside the pitcher's circle and the player or players must be on the opposite of the pitcher's circle maintaining the 6 feet distance. No more than 2 players along with the pitcher allowed.

Umpires

1. Fast Pitch – Umpire will officiate the game from behind the catcher deeper than normal, while practicing social distancing with all fielders. Umpires should not routinely handle softballs.
2. Slow Pitch –Umpire will take a position not within (6) feet from any player near the plate and remain in foul territory. We recommend near the backstop, not near either dugout, but off to the side of batter/catcher.
3. Umpires allowed to wear gloves and mask if they desire.

Concessions

1. Markers will be placed on the ground to ensure 6 feet social distancing between customers.
2. All concessionaire workers recommended to wear masks and gloves and be sure to utilize correctly to ensure there is no cross contamination.
3. Concessionaire workers should be instructed that if they are exhibiting symptoms of possible exposure to COVID-19, such as fever, that they should not come to events or work until such time as the participant has been tested and/or cleared.

Water Fountains

1. Drinking fountains will be inoperable.

Bathrooms

1. Recommend speaking to public health officials on local guidelines/recommendations for bathroom cleaning.

The Game:

The slow pitch and fast pitch games are different. The slow pitch game lends itself to physical distancing better than fast pitch, and softball is a contact sport as noted by the USA Softball National Office.

There are two factors that need to be addressed during the game to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus through contact: distance and duration. Distancing between players and officials on the field during the game can be maintained to adhere to personal distancing. The umpire and catcher positioning and “no huddle” requirements are examples of such guidelines.

Duration is another factor. The longer the duration between individuals and the contact with objects increases the probability of spread. Rules of the game can be adapted to address the duration, if necessary. A force play at any base is a very short duration and the probability of spread would be low. Contact with equipment and a surface is covered in the general requirements listed earlier. Touch plays on the infield result in contact that is longer than force plays.

Additional Game Rules:

1. Slow pitch: with the umpire and catcher positioned away from home plate use a strike zone mat to indicate a ball or strike. Umpire can see height of pitch from the side. Since ball has to strike mat and may deflect – no stealing.
2. Fast pitch: allow batter to have both feet out of the batter's box to take signals to increase distance and shorten duration from catcher. Catcher is encouraged to wear mask and sanitize equipment between innings.
3. Leagues can decide to have a force out at home plate in slow pitch by using a second home plate or line to reduce collisions.
4. No infield warmups or sanitize warm-up ball before and after each half inning.
5. If used balls to be used as a backup game ball, a wipe down before going into gameplay would be appropriate.
6. Players involved in any contact should sanitize hands, arms, face, etc. as soon as possible.
7. Players not allowed to leave dugout area to congratulate players when scoring or after home runs.
8. No licking of fingers and wiping them off.

Under Phase 3:

Group size requirements are lifted. Practicing proper sanitation and distancing guidelines is still recommended when possible within the rules of the game.

USA Softball of Montana reserves the right to update or amend guidelines at any time necessary.