



## NWAC Fall 2020 COVID-19 Guidelines for Return to Play

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## INTRODUCTION

When the COVID-19 epidemic first hit in March 2020, and NWAC was right in the eye of the storm hosting our basketball tournament in Everett, WA. Seemingly we went from an athletic conference to a de-facto triage unit. We have been discussing and determining our future by identifying concerns, priorities, and trying to sort out what we do know from what we do not know.

From day one of probably the biggest challenge in NWAC history, member colleges, executive board members, NWAC athletic trainers, and office staff, has worked to do our part to slow the spread of COVID-19, address eligibility issues, and among other things, worked on a return to play plan.

To address the wide variety of issues known and trying to anticipate unknown issues, NWAC reviewed a vast amount of literature, solicited input and engaged in multiple discussions with sports chairs and their committee members, commissioners, our peer conferences (California Community College Athletic Association, National Junior College Athletic Association), four-year conferences (Great Northwest Athletic Conference, Pacific Northwest Conference, Cascade Collegiate Conference), and consulted with our NCAA two-year liaison, Academic Affairs and Membership Associate Director, Greg Dana.

From the outset it was clear that we would have to think differently about how the NWAC was to accomplish our mission while trying to prepare for a multitude of situations. **The ultimate goal is to provide a restart surrounded in as much normalcy as possible while continuing to protect the safety of our student-athletes, staff, and slow the spread of COVID-19. We have been transparent providing weekly updates which included among other things, our timeline and thoughts about returning to competition.**

**We also knew** that with 36 member colleges in three states and British Columbia, 36 community college presidents, 72 commissioners, and 36 vice presidents of student services, hundreds of coaches, and a few thousand student-athletes and parents, **decisions made to please everyone was not possible. What we could do and what we chose from the outset was to be thoughtful in our decision making and Respond to the situation at hand and not React.**

Our fall 2020 return to play guidelines integrates the work of a lot of people within the NWAC. This plan is also the first step to the overall return to play plan for the entire year and for all NWAC sports. **It is important to note that as part of this plan the sports committees and sports regions will work alongside the NWAC office to develop the details.**

**We have said from the beginning that flexibility, creativity, adaptability, and patience are essential to the success of our return to play. NWAC will continue to follow the guidance and direction of the Center for Disease Control, local and state health agencies, and member college presidents. Should conditions dictate a change from these guidelines, we have contingencies (two scenarios) that will help us address NWAC sports. Be advised that as additional information becomes available we will look to update our plans and strategies.**

As like never before, our belief in the principles of Character, Competition, and Community is and will be tested. It is the hope that the fruits of those characteristics will be evident and strong as we work through this together. **It is imperative that as athletic administrators/leaders that you do not allow these difficult times to ruin the experience for the student-athlete. This is a year when the focus of what we do most likely changes and remember, NWAC is much more than just games.**

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In working to provide options for NWAC sports, the Executive Board kept at its foundation the following core principles:

### 1. Health and Safety:

The health and safety of NWAC student-athletes, athletic administrators, support staff members, coaches and fans is paramount. **It is important that we follow health mandates as established by local and state health authorities.** State and local health authorities, and individual colleges dictate NWAC return to play. Consistent communication and safety protocols need to be in place at our member institutions so they can adequately address the situation. Each member college will provide safety protocols to the NWAC office a month before the start of school.

### 2. Fiscal Responsibility:

It is quite apparent that our member colleges are facing less than ideal futures in regards to school and athletic budgets. **Our conference is not immune from these financial difficulties as well, especially when we do not know how the pandemic will affect our championship events, fundraising, merchandise, etc.** In fact there may be even more budget difficulties after our state governments release their financial forecasts.

### 3. Value and Integrity of League and Championship Play:

The Executive Board believes the importance of league and championship play be the priority when member colleges return to play. **Though travel, formats, and venues may differ from their original intent, what does not differ is the priority and significance of region play and championship events.**

### 4. What We Have Today May Look Different Tomorrow:

Member colleges will need to be flexible, cooperative, and accommodating as schedules, travel, and championships will be affected. **It is the type of cooperation that focuses on selflessness and what is in the best interest of the majority.** Caution needs to be taken that a real possibility exists that not all member colleges will be delivering academic programs, athletic events, and allowing fans on campus in the same manner and at the same time. Realize NWAC may look quite different when competition comes back.

### 5. Opportunities:

The guidelines provides opportunities for NWAC student-athletes to get back to competition in a safe manner. The scenarios also provide opportunities that if our counties and states are recovering at a high rate and normalcy is coming back sooner or later, **the Executive Board will look to make adjustments to the scenarios.**

### 6. Decisions:

We will respond and not react. Throughout this whole process NWAC has received input from NWAC commissioners, regions, sports committees, coaches, Washington and Oregon presidents, and vice presidents of student-services, as well as input from those outside of the NWAC. Our decisions have been and will continue to thoughtful.

## NWAC RETURN TO PLAY GUIDELINES FALL SPORTS 2020 (STEP 1)

As prescribed by the NWAC Sports Medicine Committee, NWAC student-athletes/teams will follow the “color phase” protocol when returning to play (see information below). Before entering the “color phase protocol,” each NWAC member college will provide the NWAC with their respective return to campus protocol. Information to include: Identification of Covid-19 team and the Covid-19 liaison; Authority from local health authority and are following state and local health authority guidelines; Plan for sanitization, acquiring PPE’s, handling a positive/symptomatic individual, monitoring symptoms, contact tracing, and education plan for student-athletes, staff, and coaches, and game management.

As member colleges and the conference are facing financial difficulties the reductions for all sports has been put in place for the 2020-2021 year. For the purpose of fall sports contests are reduced by 20% and strong consideration should be taken when considering to allow overnight travel.

- Soccer-total matches excluding championship tournament is 20.
- Volleyball- total matches excluding championship tournament is 27; championship tournament consists of 8 teams, 2 from each region.
- Golf-matches have been moved to spring and reduction of 1 match.

### NWAC FALL SPORT SEASON 2020-2021 SCENARIO MODIFIED TRADITIONAL START

| Fall Sport    | Red Phase | Yellow Phase | Green Phase | Championships | Notes  |
|---------------|-----------|--------------|-------------|---------------|--|
| Cross Country | 8/8       | 8/22         | 9/5         | 11/14         | Cross Country Sport Committee will work to address scheduling as many NWAC member colleges participate at 4-year meets; determine the minimum number of teams to participate;                |
| Soccer        | 8/8       | 8/22         | 9/5         | 11/13 & 15    | Soccer Sport Committee to work with regions on scheduling; work on qualifying process for championship tournament. 2 scrimmages allowed in green phase. 20 matches maximum.                  |
| Volleyball    | 8/8       | 8/22         | 9/5         | 11/20-22      | Schedules done via region. Work with sports committees and NWAC office on qualifying process for championship tournament. Two Scrimmages may be held during Green Phase. 27 maximum matches. |
| Golf          |           |              |             |               | For fall 2020 golf will hold all of their matches in Spring 2021 and reduce total matches.   |
| Baseball      | 9/5       | 9/12         | 9/26        |               | 3 scrimmages to be held in yellow and/or green phase. Fall season ends 10/31.  |
| Softball      | 9/5       | 9/12         | 9/26        |               | 3 scrimmages to be held in yellow and/or green phase. Fall season ends 10/31.  |

**Health and Safety:** The different phases addresses safety protocols. A reduction in contests hopefully reduces contact with a variety of member colleges and other institutions and can eliminate overnight travel. Helps ATC’s and AD’s in administering and managing safety protocols.

**Fiscal Responsibility:** A 20% reduction in contests at a minimum saves member colleges on travel, meals, lodging, and officials. Reducing the size of championships saves Member College’s travel, meals, lodging costs, and conference expenses. Soccer, softball, and volleyball championships may be moved to member college facilities.

**Value of League and Championship Play:** By focusing on league and championship play it shows the importance and value of each as Member College’s look to manage issues. athletes and others when it comes to safety, health, and maintains the importance of league rivals. Depending on the growth or decline of the pandemic, the NWAC will be constantly reviewing the above dates and guidelines and make any adjustments deemed necessary.

## COLOR PHASE APPROACH TO RETURN TO PLAY

### GREY PHASE: Re-entry plan

- NWAC student-athletes/teams will follow the “color phase” protocol when returning to play (see information below on dates and phases. Before entering the “color phase protocol,” each NWAC member college will provide the NWAC with their respective return to campus protocol.
- Information to include: Identification of Covid-19 team and the Covid-19 liaison; Authority from local health authority and are following state and local health authority guidelines;
- Plan for sanitization, acquiring PPE’s, handling a positive/symptomatic individual, monitoring symptoms, contact tracing, and education plan for student-athletes, staff, and coaches, and game management.
- NWAC highly recommends in accordance with national guidelines (CDC) that all athletes shelter in place and/or quarantine at home before arriving to campus and complete the COVID-19 Addendum.

### RED PHASE: Limited Group Practice (ATC’s recommend 14 days, which means we may move the championship dates back)

- Student Athletes and athletics staff have completed the COVID19 Addendum and the recommended quarantine.
- Vulnerable individuals shelter in place and continue individual workouts with precaution.
- Small group training should occur based on local health authority restrictions.
- Gatherings of no more than 10 are allowed.
- Virtual meetings when at all possible.
- Gyms and common areas where student-athletes and staff are likely to congregate and interact, should remain closed **unless** strict distancing and sanitation protocols can be implemented.
- Nonessential travel should be minimized, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines regarding isolation after travel should be implemented.

### YELLOW PHASE: Modified Team Practices

- Vulnerable individuals should continue to shelter in place and continue individual workouts with precaution. Vulnerable individuals may perform workouts with coaches on an individual basis, with social distancing measures.
- Gatherings of more than 50 people should be avoided unless precautionary measures of physical distancing and sanitization are in place.
- Full team practices (*excluding vulnerable individuals*) can take place with social distancing measures in place.
- Nonessential travel should be minimized, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines regarding isolation after travel should be implemented.

### GREEN PHASE: Full Team Practices & Games

- Vulnerable individuals can resume in-person interactions, but should practice physical distancing, minimizing exposure to settings where such distancing is not practical.
- Gyms and common areas where student-athletes and staff are likely to congregate and interact can reopen if appropriate sanitation protocols are implemented, but even low-risk populations should consider minimizing time spent in crowded environments.
- Unrestricted staffing (video, table, game management, etc.) may resume with sanitation protocols in place.
- Consideration of spectator modifications (i.e. no spectators, physical distancing, etc.) to ensure safety of student-athletes, support staff and spectators

BLUE PHASE: All Clear and is dependent on the successful development of widely available treatment including prophylactic immunotherapy, coupled with widespread, effective vaccination.

- Reduction of spectator modifications (i.e. no spectators, physical distancing, etc.).
- Return to normal practice.

**\*It is imperative that member colleges are maintaining and practicing current medical protocol related to COVID-19. NWAC is working with our athletic trainers to finalize consistent and practical health and safety requirements for return to play. The above color phase is a major part of the protocol, but there are still some issues to be determined. More medical information will be forthcoming (educational programs and AAG review)**

**\*Please remember these our guidelines as we attempt to get back to some sense of normalcy. Conferences around the country are making plans for fall sports that are quite similar. We all need to realize that NWAC does not have the final say on whether return to play as outlined here can happen. The final decision rests with the administration of our member colleges.**

**\*Regarding winter and spring sports, the NWAC office will work with the individual sports committees on start dates, league schedules, modify in-season and out season protocol to include fall quarter, modify championships, and other items as needed.**

## CONTINGENCY PLAN

The decision on return to play by the Executive Board has been based on input from constituents, administrators from our member colleges, and people outside of the NWAC. The EB has been quite thorough in its review and decisions and realize that there is no answer that will meet the needs of all involved. Decisions have been based on thoughtful deliberation, robust discussion, and listening to membership thoughts and concerns. **NWAC will continue to monitor the situation and depending on the decline or the spread of the pandemic, will make adjustments as deemed necessary as long as they do not conflict with our principles for return to play. We also know that at any time we could be forced into cancelation of a season as well.**

We also recognize that this situation is ever changing on what seems to be a daily basis. These constant changes which more times than not are out of our control, may necessitate additional contingencies should local, state, or federal guidance change, or if public health officials or your institutions deem it in the best interest of the health of our student-athletes, staff, and supporters. Those contingencies will be derived from the scenarios that were reviewed previously and are below.

### NWAC SPORTS SEASONS 2020-2021 SCENARIO #1

| Fall Sports   | Red Phase | Yellow Phase | Green Phase | Championships | Notes |
|---------------|-----------|--------------|-------------|---------------|-------|
| Cross Country | 8/15      | 8/29         | 9/12        | 11/14         |       |
| Soccer        | 2/6       | 2/20         | 3/6         | 5/14 & 16     |       |
| Volleyball    | 1/2       | 1/16         | 1/30        | 4/9-11        |       |
| Golf          |           |              |             |               |       |
| Baseball      | 9/5       | 9/19         | 10/3        |               |       |
| Softball      | 9/5       | 9/19         | 10/3        |               |       |
| Winter Sports | Red Phase | Yellow Phase | Green Phase | Championships | Notes |
| Basketball    | 1/9       | 1/23         | 2/6         | 4/16-18       |       |
| Spring Sports | Red Phase | Yellow Phase | Green Phase | Championships | Notes |
| Baseball      | 2/13      | 2/27         | 3/13        | 5/29-31       |       |
| Softball      | 2/13      | 2/27         | 3/13        | 5/21-23       |       |
| Golf          | 2/8       | 2/22         | 3/8         | 5/16-17       |       |
| Tennis        | 2/8       | 2/22         | 3/8         | 5/7-8         |       |
| T&F           | 2/15      | 3/1          | 3/15        | 5/24-25       |       |
| T&F ME        |           |              |             | 5/3-4         |       |

#### How Scenario Meets Principles:

**Health and Safety:** The different phases addresses safety protocols. Focusing on league contests reduced contact with a variety of member colleges and other institutions. Focusing on league contest eliminates exposure via travel and overnight stays.

**Fiscal Responsibility:** Focusing on league contests at a minimum saves member colleges on travel, meals, lodging, and officials. Reducing the size of championships saves member college's travel, meals, and lodging costs. Soccer, Volleyball, and Softball championships may be moved to member college facilities.

**Value of League and Championship Play:** By focusing on league and championship play it shows the importance and value of each as Member College's look to manage issues.

**Today May Not Look Like Tomorrow:** This scenario provides some flexibility and allows regions to work on schedules and provides consistency within regions for fans, student-athletes and others when it comes to safety, health, and maintains the importance of league rivals.

NWAC SPORTS SEASONS 2020-2021 SCENARIO #2

| Fall Sport    | Red Phase | Yellow Phase | Green Phase | Championships | Notes |
|---------------|-----------|--------------|-------------|---------------|-------|
| Cross Country | 8/15      | 8/22         | 9/5         | 11/14         |       |
| Soccer        | 8/15      | 8/29         | 9/12        | 11/13 & 15    |       |
| Volleyball    | 8/15      | 8/29         | 9/12        | 11/20-22      |       |
| Golf          |           |              |             |               |       |
| Baseball      | 9/5       | 9/12         | 9/26        |               |       |
| Softball      | 9/5       | 9/12         | 9/26        |               |       |
| Winter Sports | Red Phase | Yellow Phase | Green Phase | Championships |       |
| Basketball    | 12/26     | 1/9          | 1/23        | 4/2-4         |       |
| Spring Sports | Red Phase | Yellow Phase | Green Phase | Championships | Notes |
| Baseball      | 2/13      | 2/27         | 3/13        | 5/29-31       |       |
| Softball      | 2/13      | 2/27         | 3/13        | 5/21-23       |       |
| Golf          | 2/8       | 2/22         | 3/8         | 5/16-17       |       |
| Tennis        | 2/8       | 2/22         | 3/8         | 5/7-8         |       |
| T&F           | 2/15      | 3/1          | 3/15        | 5/24-25       |       |
| T&F ME        |           |              |             | 5/3-4         |       |

**How Schedule Meets Principles:**

**Health and Safety:** The different phases addresses safety protocols. Focusing on league contests reduced contact with a variety of member colleges and other institutions. Focusing on league contest eliminates exposure via travel and overnight stays.

**Fiscal Responsibility:** Focusing on league contests at a minimum saves member colleges on travel, meals, lodging, and officials. Reducing the size of championships saves Member College’s travel, meals, and lodging costs. Soccer, Volleyball, and Softball championships may be moved to member college facilities.

**Value of League and Championship Play:** By focusing on league and championship play it shows the importance and value of each as Member College’s look to manage issues.

**Today May Not Look Like Tomorrow:** This scenario provides some flexibility and allows regions to work on schedules and provides consistency within regions for fans, student-athletes and others when it comes to safety, health, and maintains the importance of league rivals. Not looking for an advantage at the expense of member colleges.