

Returning an Athlete/Student to Sports after a COVID-19 Infection

After a COVID-19 infection, it is recommended that all athletes/students go through a gradual and step-wise return to play. This process is very similar to a concussion return to play protocol and should be performed under the supervision of a physician and/or an athletic trainer if possible. This protocol is a recommendation that should be implemented with clinical judgment by a health care professional. Decisions on when to start and complete a return to play program should take into consideration both an athlete's physical and mental health. An athlete is cleared to begin a return to play protocol after he/she:

1. Has contacted their physician, school, athletic trainer, and/or organization and is cleared to begin return to play progression
2. Has completed a quarantine for a minimum of 5 days from symptom onset or positive test[#] AND asymptomatic for at least 24-48 hours
3. Is able to complete activities of daily living without symptoms*

* It is reasonable to begin this protocol despite persistent loss of taste/smell OR mild fatigue consistent with deconditioning.

It is reasonable to begin the return to play protocol with individual activities within the 5-day isolation if the athlete has asymptomatic or mild disease. Up to the first 3 stages of the return to play protocol may, if appropriate, occur during the 5-day isolation.

Each stage should last at least 24-48 hours and should not cause return of symptoms. If the athlete/student experiences return of symptoms or develops unexpected fatigue, dizziness, difficulty breathing, chest pain/pressure, decreased exercise tolerance, or fainting, they should stop their return progression and return to their physician for further evaluation.

Stage	% of Maximum Heart Rate	Duration	Sample Activities	Strength Training Allowed?
1	70%	15-30 minutes	Fast walking, light jogging, and stationary bike	No
2	80%	30-45 minutes	Simple movements such as running drills, footwork drills, and cone drills	No
3	80%	60 minutes	Add sports specific activities and strength training such as one on one and passing drills	Yes
4	80%	60 minutes	Modified intensity practice	Yes
5	Full Practice	Normal training duration	Normal training activities or full intensity practice	Yes
6	Full return to competition without restrictions			

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References:

1. Elliott N, Martin R, Heron N et al. Infographic. Graduated return to play guidance following COVID-19 infection. British Journal of Sports Medicine.
2. Children's Mercy Kansas City: Recommendations for a Safe Return to Sport and Physical Activity After COVID-19