

Considerations for sports federations/sports event organizers when planning mass gatherings in the context of COVID-19

Interim guidance
14 April 2020



Background

This sports addendum should be read in conjunction with the [WHO key planning recommendations for Mass Gatherings in the context of the current COVID-19 outbreak](#) which provides general advice on the public health aspects of such events.

This addendum has been developed to provide additional support to sports event organizers in assessing the specific additional risks, identifying mitigation activities and making an informed evidence-based decision on continuing to host any sporting event. Additional guidance is provided in the specific WHO COVID-19 mass gatherings sports addendum risk assessment tool and mitigation checklist.

Updated [technical guidance on COVID-19](#) should also be consulted. These documents will be reviewed and updated as the pandemic evolves.

Key issues and mitigation options

The key factors for consideration for each sporting event are included in the WHO COVID-19 mass gathering sports addendum risk assessment tool. These key factors address the specific issues that should be taken into consideration when planning a sporting mass gathering event. The table below provides an overview of and background information on some of these additional factors, including mitigation measures that will also be captured during the risk assessment process.

Key considerations	Comments	Risk factors and mitigation checklist
Are there sports that could be considered a lower or higher risk?	Lower risk sports where physical distancing is possible, e.g. archery, shooting and some athletics events. These will be less of a risk if physical distancing advice for athletes, coaches and spectators is followed. Higher risk sports include contact sports. Physical and close contacts among players increases risk of transmission of COVID-19.	See details in the mitigation checklist. Consider: • daily health check of competitors • Physical (at least 1 meter) separating of competitors, officials, spectators and support staff • thorough disinfection and cleaning after/between bouts/competitions • sharing of equipment should be prohibited, in particular ensuring that water bottles and cups are not shared • consider safe utilization of the closed containers for all disposable and reusable hygiene materials (e.g. tissue, towels, etc.).

Size of event	The size of the sporting event affects the risk. Physical distancing of spectators must be maintained if spectators and support staff are to be present during the event. Other factors must also be considered across the different target groups: • participants (includes officials) • spectators • host country (international events) • other participating countries (international events). The numbers of participants relative to spectators in sporting events are usually low. Participants are also a known group so easier to advise, support and follow up if needed so it could be possible to consider holding events in closed stadia.	See details in the mitigation checklist Conducting sporting events with designated seats in arenas with widely spaced spectators for at least 1-metre physical distancing, numbered seats for contact tracing, temperature monitoring at entrances and provision of visual reminders such as stickers or wrist stamps may reduce the possibility of incidental contact.
Indoor or outdoor locations	Outdoor events will be better ventilated than indoor events. It may be easier to ensure physical distancing advice is followed in outdoor events with non-designated seating such as horse racing, golf, etc.	See details in the risk assessment WHO advice on physical distancing must be maintained during sporting events
Venue facilities	Requires liaison with the venue owners to ensure the facilities do or can comply with WHO and national recommendations during the COVID-19 pandemic.	See details in the mitigation checklist An isolation room/space identified to hold any symptomatic person found at the venue while awaiting patient transport to a medical facility is necessary. Additionally, having a medical post and designated personnel on site is advisable to help assess cases and potential other illness..
Demographics (age and health)	Competitors of sporting events tend to be younger and healthier than spectators. However, some competitors, coaches and support staff may have underlying health conditions. The age and health of spectators and other staff will vary.	See details in the mitigation checklist Pre-travel and pre-event health checks are highly encouraged/mandatory to ensure exclusion of those with potential additional risks (co-morbidities, medications, allergies) Spectators can include vulnerable groups so consider advising some at-risk groups not to attend.
Risk communication	Ensure public health advice is available before and during the event to all participants, staff, and personnel of all relevant stakeholders	See details in the mitigation checklist and the event organizers recommendations below Display signs to inform spectators and support staff about ways in which they can prevent themselves from getting infected with COVID-19 and passing the virus to others.

More information in [Q&A on mass gatherings and COVID-19](#).

A checklist of recommended actions is included below for:

- Event organizers
- Participants

Recommendations to event organizers

These measures may help obtain exceptions from authorities to allow athletes to train and participate in other events such as qualifications considered crucial by the organizers. Elite sport is a very controlled environment and organizers should be able to achieve this in a comprehensive way.

Consider the opportunity of using sports ambassadors to promote messaging. It is everyone's responsibility to keep themselves and others healthy and contribute to a successful event.

Recommendations to event organizers	
Pre-event and during event (including venues)	Ensure availability to handwashing, alcohol-based hand gel and hygiene facilities at multiple locations in the event facility and accommodation.
	Ensure good hygiene signage across all venues, changing rooms, training facilities, etc.
	Provide first aid and medical services, including designated medical providers who are able to triage and refer suspected cases for COVID-19 testing.
	Team medical staff or Local Organizing Committee (LOC) staff at venues should check competitors' temperatures each day, any temperatures above 38°C should be reported to the event medical lead/chief medical officer. Follow advice on the management of ill travelers at points of entry (international airports, seaports, and ground crossings) in the context of COVID-19
	Ensure capacity to isolate suspected cases: - team/officials and event staff - volunteers, support workers.
	Develop and make available risk communication on: - clinical features of COVID-19 and preventive measures, especially respiratory etiquette and hand-hygiene practices - the criteria for asking individuals with symptoms to leave the venue or retreat to a designated area - information on physical distancing - information on the use of face coverings and medical masks - the meaning and practical implications of quarantine, self-isolation and self-monitoring in the context of the event, e.g. not attending.
	Ensure availability of rubber gloves to team staff and volunteers handling laundry, towels, etc.
	Recommend that towels are for single use only.
	Provide each participant with a clean water bottle.
	Make tissues and containers to dispose of used tissues with lids available on all buses and in all facility changing rooms.
	Provide each team with a thermometer (e.g. infrared) and a recording sheet/internet link for athletes' temperatures. If this is not possible, can each team be equipped with a non-contact sensor thermometer?
	Determine where an individual diagnosed with COVID-19 will be cared for and isolated
	Determine where a contact of a confirmed cases will be quarantined
	Determine how athletes and team staff will be notified of a case and COVID-19 situation where they are training.
	Define a place where a large number of people can be quarantined in case of a large number of athletes or event staff being exposed
	Predetermine emergency contacts with local health authorities.
	Medical masks should be ready for use by organizers' medical staff and sick individuals
	Provide disinfectant wipes and advise venue cleaning staff to disinfect door handles, toilet handles, bathroom faucet handles, etc. in all areas several times per day.
	Consideration of provision of individual prevention packages for athletes containing: - small personal packages of disposable tissues and plastic bags for tissue disposal - small laminated prevention card with key reporting information - medical mask to wear if they are ill (any symptoms, including fever, cough, shortness of breath) - small packages of an alcohol-based hand wipes - small package of disposable plastic drinking cups - thermometer - hand sanitizer.

Recommendations to event participants	
Pre-event	Anyone participating in the event (athlete, volunteer, official, food handler etc.) should proactively and regularly check their health status (including taking their temperature, and monitoring for any symptoms).
	Anyone due to participate in the event who is feeling ill should not come to the venue and be advised on the designated contact online or by telephone.
	Team staff and volunteer leads should ensure that their teams and volunteers are briefed on the protocols for a suspect and confirmed patients, on infection prevention and control measures and on where to find more information.
During the event	Participants should be aware of and cooperate with team medical staff or event organizing staff at venues in taking their own/or competitors' temperatures each day, any temperatures above 38°C to be reported to the event medical lead/chief medical officer. Follow the same approach as the management of ill travelers at points of entry (international airports, seaports, and ground, crossings) in the context of COVID-19
	Wash hands often with soap and water . Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water not available. Hand sanitizer stations should be available throughout the event venue, the accommodation, and on team buses.
	Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing. Practise respiratory etiquette (maintain distance: at least 1 m), cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or flexed elbow, wash hands). If coughing persists, isolate and seek medical advice.
	Avoid contact with sick people, including avoiding close contact with those suffering from acute respiratory infections.
	Avoid contact with anyone if you are ill.
	Gloves should be worn by team and event staff handling towels or laundry in the team environment.
	Towels should not be shared.
	Athletes should not share clothing, bar soap or other personal items.
	Recommended protocol for the use of water bottles: • Good team hygiene includes ensuring all players, officials and staff have their own water bottles to prevent the transmission of viruses and bacteria. • Bottles should be labelled and washed (with dishwasher soap) after each practice or game.
	Advise athletes not to touch their own mouths or nose.
	Avoid shaking hands or hugging.
	Avoid steam rooms or saunas.
	Be aware of regular cleaning of frequently touched items (door handles, elevators, gym equipment, etc.)

WHO continues to monitor the situation closely for any changes that may affect this interim guidance. Should any factors change, WHO will issue a further update. Otherwise, this interim guidance document will expire 2 years after the date of publication.

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