



Rensselaer County
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Press Release:

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Rensselaer County Approves Return of School Sports, County Executive Steve McLaughlin Announces

Rensselaer County Executive Steven McLaughlin and Public Health Director Mary Fran Wachunas have issued a statement of support for the return of scholastic sports next month in the county, following a directive from the state empowering counties to decide the issue.

McLaughlin and Wachunas made the statement of support for the return of what the state has termed "high risk" sports following discussions with school officials across the county, and parents, coaches and local officials along with county officials in the region. The county has also reviewed the Interim Guidance for Sports and Recreation During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency issued by the New York State Department of Health on January 22, 2021.

The sports include football, wrestling, ice hockey, rugby, basketball, contact lacrosse, martial arts and competitive cheer and dance. McLaughlin and Wachunas said consideration should also be given to allow for music, culture, drama and related activities.

"We believe scholastic sports are a necessary component of a child's development and education experience and should be returned next month. We further believe that sports can and should be returned if common-sense and competency are used," said McLaughlin.

"Sports programs at the school level have a long tradition of providing fun and activity to students, with careful guidance and service by generations of coaches and athletic directors. The same level of commitment in our coaches and athletic directors is present today, just as the desire for student-athletes to get back in the game and safely play the sports they love," added McLaughlin.

"The county also believes serious consideration should be given to allow a return to other important school activities including culture, music, drama and other activities that promote the development and education of students," added Wachunas.

The guidance from the county is applied to scholastic and non-scholastic sports activities.

The guidance from Rensselaer County includes:

- Consent from parents or guardian for the participation of a student in scholastic sports during 2021.

- Approval from a school for a sport or activity during 2021.

- Social distancing to a total 50 percent reduced capacity for attendance by spectators and non-team personnel at all scholastic sports contests and activities during 2021.

- Regular sanitizing of all common surfaces, including benches, locker rooms, lockers, equipment, bleachers and surfaces regularly utilized or accessed by players, coaches, spectators and non-term personnel.

- Inspection of premises and sports contests and activities when needed by the county Health Department.

- Continue the weekly review and discussion between the county, county Health Department and school administrators to share information, data, guidance and advice regarding all school functions, including sports contests and activities.

- Contact tracing will continue to be performed by the county in all confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the county. In the event there is a confirmed case involving a coach, player or spectator, a review will be undertaken by the county Department of Health, as has been done throughout the pandemic, to help the school determine an appropriate course of action based on level of exposure.

- Coaches and players must be screened before each athletic event, contest or practice, including temperature checks and questions to determine potential exposure or health risk.

- Spectators are recommended to be screened before each athletic contest or practice, including temperature checks and questions to determine potential exposure or health risk.

- At all times, it is recognized that parents and guardians have the final say in whether a player competes in a contest or activity and a player cannot be compelled or induced to play in a contest or activity if reasonable concern is stated by a parent or guardian regarding exposure or risk.

The county is also urging all counties with shared scholastic sports interests to develop a plan that allows competition in the region between counties. Section 2 of the New York State Public High School Athletic Association, which governs scholastic sports in the region, has previously issued a statement of support for a return of the high risk scholastic sports.

Both McLaughlin and Wachunas noted the role and relationship of the county and school districts during the COVID-19 pandemic. The county has provided information, guidance and advice to school districts. Decisions on the opening or closing of schools have been made by school districts.

The role of parents, teachers, school administrators and coaches is also paramount in the county's decision, McLaughlin and Wachunas said.

"We have full faith and confidence in our coaches as being dedicated and responsive to the needs and priorities of their students. Our county is fortunate to be served by outstanding public servants in our schools and we know they will place the interests of our students foremost at all times," said McLaughlin.

"We have had many positive interactions and conversations with parents and coaches and know they are ready to resume play safely and with common-sense. We will be ready to partner with school districts and provide information as needed and when requested," added Wachunas.

