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# AMERICAN WATER POLO

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## COVID-19 Guidelines for Water Polo Teams

As regions begin to return to normalcy, our chief concern is maintaining the safety of our members and their families. It is important at this time to follow the guidelines set forth by your local government agency regarding social distancing.

Once your region is allowing athletic groups to begin, coaches need to prepare a written plan of conduct regarding the new way their team will function, taking into consideration the CDC guidelines and the information listed below. This plan should be sent in writing to all parents and directly communicated regularly to team members. Remember, the best plan is worthless unless the parents and athletes understand it and are willing to comply.

### General

Athletes or coaches indicating any type of symptoms (fever, coughing, nausea, or other symptoms outlined by the CDC) should be sent home immediately and not return until two weeks following their return to health.

Athletes with family members exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms should quarantine for 14 days before attending practice, games, or other team functions.

Individuals that have pre-existing conditions should carefully consider the risk of involvement at this time.

Families traveling to regions in Phase I should not be attending any team function for 14 days after arriving home.

Adequate signage in the locker rooms, spectator area, and throughout the facility is critical to remind all involved of the new procedures.

### Facility

While the chlorine and bromine used in pools kills the virus, there are still plenty of surfaces that could potentially transmit the disease. Care should be taken to ensure pool staffs are cleaning surfaces that are commonly touched before, during, and after practices and games.

Athletes should be instructed not to touch fixtures or handles as much as possible and reminded to wash their hands after using the restroom or touching any surfaces.

Athletes should have their own water bottles clearly marked with their name, rather than using the water fountain.

Locker rooms should be monitored by an adult, with limitations on the number of athletes allowed at a given time. Whenever possible, athletes should change and shower at home.

### **Dryland Activity**

Coaches should maintain adequate distances between athletes during any dryland or stretching routines.

Any instruction in front of whiteboards should maintain social distancing guidelines. The easiest way to manage this is to use a classroom prior to practice and have athletes sit apart. If instructional time is necessary during practice, coaches should work with smaller groups to balance the ability to see the whiteboard, while maintaining distance between athletes.

### **Water Activity**

While water polo is a contact sport and social distancing is impossible when scrimmaging or playing games, much of practice should be designed to keep athletes apart. With proper planning, many of the drills normally performed can be modified to make this happen without losing the value of the training.

### **Spectators**

Parents and other spectators watching practice or games will normally fit the age bracket that represents a higher risk than the participants. Seating in the stands should follow CDC guidelines and enforcement of these expectations is the key to maintaining a healthy environment.

### **Captains/Team Leaders**

Spending extra time with key athletes to instruct them on the new guidelines and empowering them to be examples for their peers will not only build character in these individuals, but will encourage their teammates to follow the rules.

### **Incidental Contact**

We all know kids will be kids and controlling their physical contact with their teammates seems almost impossible without constantly yelling and creating a negative atmosphere. To prevent practices from degrading into two hours of telling them to stay apart, coaches need to design a structure that is still fun, while at the same time decreasing the opportunity for unnecessary contact. For example, taking the time to examine normal drills and making adjustments based around movement

rather than congregating in lines. It may also require coaches to stagger entry times to practice and dismiss athletes in smaller groups. This will help reduce group size before and after a practice or a game, rather than standing in a large group, trading snacks and wrestling while they wait for their parents.

The more you can structure these things nonverbally, the less you will be placed in the role of an enforcer and the more your athletes will enjoy the experience.

It will also be important to recognize the need for contact with each other outside of the pool as you shorten the time they socialize before and after practice. Consider replacing it with team Zoom calls to stay connected.

### **Summary**

Implementing these rules may seem inconvenient, frustrating, and unrelated to why you wanted to coach, but it is a small price to pay to ensure families remain healthy during this time. If we all work together, we will be one step closer to eliminating all of these restrictions.