

Four-Stage Return to Play Strategy: Covid-19 Pandemic

Nova Scotia Amateur Wrestling Association

During the early part of 2020, a novel corona virus, causing an illness in humans named COVID-19 crossed the species barrier and was rapidly distributed around the world by international travel. As a novel virus, there has not been an opportunity for human populations to develop acquired immunity, and of course there is no vaccine. The global pandemic resulting from this virus has resulted in unprecedented restrictions in travel, and physical distancing measures that has affected all aspects of society. This particular virus, due to the nature of its physiology, is of extra concern to contact sports such as wrestling and brought the 2019/20 season to a close due to the risks to the public health. This virus has a 14-day incubation period, and this fact of its biology is reflected in public health recommendations to self-isolate for 14 days after travel to ensure that COVID-19 symptoms do not develop. Screening programs for COVID-19 have been established in Nova Scotia and are managed through the provincial 8-1-1 program.

The novel corona virus is spread through respiratory droplets from person to person transmission. This can happen when an infected person coughs or sneezes respiratory droplets into the eyes, nose, or mouth of another person. The largest density of expectorated particles from a cough or sneeze is within 2-meters, and so, observing 2-meter physical distancing is one of the best ways to reduce the risk of spreading infection. The corona virus is also known to live on surfaces, so touching infected respiratory droplets from a cough or sneeze on a surface and then touching one's own nose, eyes or mouth is another way to spread the virus. One of the biggest public health concerns regarding the novel corona virus is that humans can spread the virus even before they develop the typical symptoms of fever, cough and shortness of breath. Another concern that has been raised by public health and infectious disease experts is that many people can contract COVID-19 and not contract a severe viral prodrome. This is of particular concern for community transmission, and so physical distancing measures are even more important to control the spread during the global COVID-19 pandemic. The novel corona virus is particularly susceptible to soap, as it is encapsulated in a lipid jacket, so proper and frequent hand washing is one of the best weapons against contracting and spreading the virus.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created significant challenges for all contact sports, but especially for the Olympic styles of wrestling which involve heavy breathing and extremely close personal contact, face to face. The risk of transmitting the corona virus between wrestlers is astronomical. The possibility of cases of asymptomatic positive tests in the community creates a major concern for spreading the virus throughout the community if Nova Scotian wrestlers were to return to play.

Wrestling Nova Scotia (WNS), through collaboration with the Nova Scotia Health Authority, has developed a 4-Stage Return to Play strategy to assist wrestling clubs, teams, coaches, and athletes participate to the fullest extent possible in the sport of wrestling while following the public health recommendations to contain this virus until a vaccine can be developed and distributed widely. This Return to Play strategy also includes cleaning procedures and club procedures all WNS clubs must adhere to ensure the health and safety of our members when resuming wrestling activity.

Sanitary Conditions

The Public Health Agency has made several recommendations in terms of health conditions that must be followed in order to limit the spread of COVID-19. Everyone involved in wrestling shares the responsibility for preventing the spread of the virus. In this context, depending on their phase of “return to wrestling,” clubs are responsible for enforcing the following main health guidelines:

- **If you have symptoms, stay home**
- **Work in pairs and avoid contact with people showing symptoms; if you are unable to, stay home**
- **If you live with someone at risk, stay home**
- **Follow measures for the prevention of Covid-19:**
 - o Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
 - o Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available
 - o Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth
 - o Cough and sneeze into the crook of your arm, not your hands
 - o Use a disposable tissue to blow your nose and throw it in the trash after use; remember to wash your hands afterwards
 - o Avoid close contact with sick people and stay at home as much as possible
 - o Avoid non-essential community and cultural gatherings and keep a distance of at least two metres from other people
- **Wear a mask**
- **Physical distancing (2-meters)**
- **Limit the number of participants (depending on current provincial restrictions and the area of the wrestling mat)**

As a reminder, it is also important to comply at all times with the usual hygiene rules required for wrestlers.

Measures to be Taken by Clubs

In the context of the reopening of wrestling clubs and the resumption of associated activities, NSAWA has developed various protocols and hygiene/disinfection measures that **must** be followed by clubs depending on the phase of the return.

The **protocols to be followed** (adjusted accordingly for the relevant phase of the return) are as follows:

- At the entrance of the club:
 - o Masks are required
 - o Athletes are greeted at the door one at a time and verbally reminded of self-isolation rules (travel, illness, etc.)
 - o Clubs will keep a registry of the date, time, and contact information of every participant in addition to their name, for every practice/event hosted by the club
 - o Anyone arriving at the club must sanitize their hands
 - o All athletes must wear wrestling boots in the wrestling room, street shoes must be kept outside the room, separate and neat
 - o The name of each participant and accompanying person entering the club should be recorded
 - o The athletes are greeted on the mat by the instructor(s) and are assigned a clearly

marked personal space where they will stay for the duration of class. Spaces must respect the 2-meter rule. If they leave the wrestling room for any reason, hands must be re-sanitized before going back to their space.

- At the end of class, each athlete will be dismissed one at a time, sanitize their hands, and collect their belongs and leave.
- Each participant must have previously provided emergency contact information.
- Limits to be placed on the number of people (participants, accompanying person, staff) who will be permitted inside the club at the same time.
- Parents cannot stay in the club for the duration of the session.
- Participants must arrive no earlier than 15 minutes before the start of the session. Preferably, participants would arrive at staggered hours agreed upon ahead of time to avoid a potential gathering.
- All doors inside the club must be wide open to avoid contact with door handles/knobs.
- The locker rooms must remain closed. Participants will have to arrive in attire that is for practice as there will be no changing of clothes onsite.
- Participants must bring their own water bottle.
- Provide an emergency protocol (designated area, who to contact) if a person becomes unwell during the session

The **main hygiene and disinfection measures** to be followed according to the phase of return are as follows:

- Plan must be in place with facility owner to prevent cross-contamination with users of other space.
- Anyone arriving at the club must take off their shoes and wear wrestling boots.
- Permanent availability of hand sanitizer at the entrance of the club and next to the wrestling mat.
- Participants should come to the club with a sports bag or equivalent to store their personal belongings.
- Except in exceptional cases, it will be forbidden to go to the toilet during the session.
- Back at home and after each session:
 - Participants will need to take a shower.
 - Participants will have to clean their clothing and equipment.
- Cleaning/disinfection of the wrestling mat and the equipment used must be carried out before and after each session.
- At the end of each day, the entire club will be disinfected (all surfaces, chairs, toilets, door handles, etc.).
- Sanitizer must be available at the door and mat side.
- Classes must be kept very light during the mask requirement.
- Clearly marked personal spaces must be in accordance to spacing requirement, 8 square meters.
- Clubs must space classes far enough apart to allow sanitization to take place before the next class

As a reminder, this section lists all the protocols/measures that can be applied. Their application will depend on the phase of return initiated and any regulations set forth by the government. The corresponding details are presented later in this Return to Play plan.

Return to Wrestling Stages

STAGE 1:

- No wrestling practices or competitions due to active community cases of COVID-19.
- Training between athletes in the same isolation bubble is allowed for WNS members provided that they are sanctioned through WNS and are supervised by a WNS coach.
- All citizens must practice 2-meter spacing with anyone from outside their isolation bubble and must stay home whenever possible. All citizens are asked to cough or sneeze into a mask and wear a mask if they have to break the 2-meter physical distancing rule, as well as washing hands frequently with soap and water, especially after touching surfaces that others may have touched and never putting one's hands on their own face.
- WNS members may participate in online training modules, if available, provided that they are a WNS member and have paid their fees.
- All wrestlers participating in the return to sport strategy must be WNS members and must request sanctioning from WNS in order to participate. All training opportunities must be guided by a certified coach who is a WNS member. For online training modules used for home exercise, the content will always be designed by a certified wrestling coach.

STAGE 2:

- May be activated when public health recommendations allow groups of 15 people or greater to meet in public places.
- May be activated when there have been no new community cases in the zone (West, East, or Central) for 14 consecutive days.
- WNS members may participate in dry land training and drills in groups of 15 or greater and 2-meter spacing must be observed at all times during training sessions.
- Athletes at these practices must pledge to abstain from touching their face, especially during the training session, and must pledge to wash their hands with warm soapy water at all opportunities during and after the training session. Water bottles can never be shared.
- Sparring and active wrestling, including groundwork, is prohibited during Stage 2 of return to play.
- Training between athletes in the same isolation bubble is allowed for WNS members provided that they apply for sanctioning through WNS and are guided by a certified coach.
- WNS members may participate in online training modules, if available, provided that they are an active WNS member and have paid their fees. (See Stage 1).
- An increase in community cases or changes in public health recommendations to stricter physical distancing measures would necessitate a return to Stage 1.
- As in Stage 1, all wrestlers participating in the return to sport strategy must be WNS members and must request sanctioning from WNS in order to participate.

STAGE 3:

- May be activated when public health recommendations allow for groups of 30 people or greater to meet in public places.
- May be activated when community disease rates by provincial zone (Western, Eastern or Central) are

reported as zero for 28 consecutive days.

- New community cases or changes in public health recommendations with increased restrictions concerning physical distancing would necessitate a return to Stage 2.
- Wrestlers are permitted to break physical distancing measures in Stage 3. No sparring or matches are permitted during Stage 3. Wrestlers must pledge to wear face coverings consisting of a face mask over the nose and mouth to catch respiratory droplets, and a spandex sleeve (Clava) to hold it in place.
- Strict hygiene and hand washing must be practiced at all opportunities before, during, and after practices.
- Wrestlers who are in the same community isolation bubble, (which may consist of multiple households in Stage 3, depending on public health recommendations), may train without restriction provided that they pledge to maintain physical distancing with anyone outside their isolation bubble and provided that their training is overseen by a certified coach, who is a registered member of WNS.
- As in Stage 1 and 2, all wrestlers participating in the return to sport strategy must be WNS members and must request sanctioning from WNS in order to participate.
- In special circumstances during Stage 3 if a competition were permitted, public health recommendations must be followed. Athletes participating in the 2021 Canada Summer Games for instance, may be asked to self-isolate for 14-days after travel, and may need to test negative for COVID-19 before being able to compete. After negative COVID-19 screening, athletes would be expected to follow physical distancing recommendations as well as infection prevention and control practices at the beginning of this document. On returning from the Canada Games, athletes, coaches, parents and staff may be expected to self-isolate for 14-days after returning from the games and pass screening with a throat swab.

STAGE 4:

- May be activated when COVID-19 has been eliminated in a region, completely eradicated, or when a vaccine is readily available and widely distributed to the Canadian population.
- Wrestlers must still pledge to follow all public health recommendations as it pertains to vaccination, self-isolation surrounding travel, personal infection control practices, and screening.
- Wrestlers who have previously been infected by COVID-19 and have recovered may not require vaccination, depending on public health recommendations.
- In Stage 4, wrestling practices may return to normal, and include sparring, drills of higher intensity, and close personal contact without a mask and a Clava (face and neck sleeve).
- Wrestlers who choose not to vaccinate and have not been infected or have recovered from COVID-19 may be permitted to attend practices or competitions depending on public health recommendations.
- Wrestling Nova Scotia may request proof of immunization status to COVID-19 before sanctioning a wrestler to participate in practices or competition in Stage 4.
- An increase in local disease rates by zone (Western, Central or Eastern) may necessitate a return to a previous Stage.
- As in Stage 1, 2 and 3, all wrestlers participating in the return to sport strategy must be WNS members and must request sanctioning from WNS in order to participate.
- Competitions will not be sanctioned within Nova Scotia by WNS until we have reached Stage 4.