

ISD 196 Nordic Ski Team COVID-19 Safety Protocol

As coaches, we are aware that there are a wide variety of attitudes in our community with respect to the seriousness of the current pandemic and the degree to which individuals, for their own safety and the sake of the community, should be required to abide by NIH, CDC, and Minnesota Department of Health guidelines to minimize transmission of the virus. ***By choosing to participate in the MSHSL sanctioned sport, however, we (Athletes and Coaches) are all obligated to follow the guidance set forth by the High School League and ISD 196 both for Nordic skiing as an athletic activity and to minimize the transmission of Covid-19 virus.***

The ISD 196 Nordic Ski Program will follow the protocols outlined below to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission within the team during 2020-2021 ski season. This protocol includes the steps that will be taken at practices to minimize transmission risk, behavior that is expected of athletes at practice and competitions, and steps that must be followed if student athletes test positive, are experiencing symptoms consistent with a COVID-19 diagnosis, or have had exposure to (close contact with) an individual who has been diagnosed with COVID-19. Failure to abide by the protocol will be handled in the same manner as other athlete behavioral violations consistent with school district policies.

In order to ensure a safe and successful season we will need all coaches, athletes, and families to do the best they can to follow the guidelines and procedures reviewed out in this document. We are asking you to make a big commitment. This is a commitment that is intended to protect to the maximum extent possible you are individual athletes, members of your families, and your teammates and coaches. We understand that limiting social interactions, maintaining physical distancing, and reducing the time you spend in the community is not easy. We are asking you, however, to make this commitment because it maximizes the likelihood that our teams and you as individual skiers are able to enjoy a successful season.

Please carefully read through the Safety Protocols that we will be using this season which are laid out in this document. While I (Coach Abery) am more than willing to communicate with athletes and parents to clarify expectations and answer questions, the protocol we will be using is not open to debate as it is based on CDC, Minnesota Department of Health, MSHSL, and ISD 196 *requirements* for implementing safe co-curricular activities during the pandemic.

I. Prior to Practice

- 1) Student-athletes and coaches must confirm that they are symptom free checking themselves in a manner consistent with the CDC's "Coronavirus Self-Checker" or current recommendations on a daily basis prior to attending practices or competitions.
- 2) Any athlete who has had a fever or cold symptoms in the previous 24 hours should not take part in workouts and will be requested to contact his or her primary care provider or other appropriate healthcare professional prior to retuning to practice.
- 3) If an athlete is not symptom free or is going to miss practice for any reason, they (or their parents) should contact Head Coach Abery via e-mail to explain the situation. Please do not count on friends/teammates to relay this information to Coach Abery.
- 4) All coaches and athletes should check to make sure that they have in their gear bag the necessary tools that they will need for safe practice and competition as ***none of these items will be allowed to be shared***. This includes:
 - Basic Ski Equipment: Skis, poles, boots
 - Clothing: Jacket, warmup pants, gloves/mittens, hat, buff

- Water bottle
 - Waxes and waxing gear (for classic technique days)
 - Appropriate mask(s)
- 5) Prior to leaving for practice student-athletes and coaches must wash hands thoroughly or use a hand sanitizer. This process should also be completed at the end of practice.
- 6) *Confirmation of a ride to and from practice.* Because we practice off campus, we understand that ride sharing is sometimes more convenient than having a family member drop off and pick up an athlete. We want to discourage car-pooling this season as riding in a car with someone other than your family members greatly increases the risk of COVID transmission. If ride sharing is the only option, athletes should follow the guideline below:
- Everyone in the car should be using their mask which should be kept on for the entire duration of the ride
 - Riders should spread out as much as possible in the car/van
 - Athletes should not cross into other pods or subpods to get rides to and from practice
- 7) Prior to coming to practices, athletes are asked to think about where they have recently been in the community and with whom they have had contact. If an athlete has been exposed to someone with COVID-19 or who is suspected to have Covid-19, whether that is a family member or friend they need to:
- Avoid coming to practice on that day
 - Report this exposure to their school nurse
 - Report to coach Abery that there will be an extended absence
 - Abide by the district's 14-day quarantine policy before returning to practice

II. Practices

A. Masks/Face Coverings

- 1) All student athletes (as well as coaches) will be required to appropriately wear approved face coverings **at all times during practices and meets**. Appropriate face coverings as defined by the team and school district include:
- A commercially available face mask that completely covers the nose and mouth, meets CDC guidelines, and has no breathing valves, or
 - A **double layer** buff that completely covers the nose and mouth and is kept in place at all times

Athletes who arrive at practice or competitions without appropriate face coverings will be sent home.

- 2) Because we will be competing with masks, it is to an athlete's advantage to get used to skiing in one even when they ski alone. Athletes are encouraged to try out several face coverings (see our recommendations below) to find those that are comfortable to wear for up to 2-hours, adjustable, provide a tight seal around the nose so sunglasses/eye covering can be used when needed, and are effective in snowy/rainy conditions. **Most cloth masks and buffs quickly get saturated with water when it is snowing/raining and are then ineffective.** You need to use a mask that is relatively waterproof.

There several masks that appear to meet all of the criteria noted above that have worked for me when I tested them out. They include:

- ***Germless SP1 & N360.*** These masks are more rigid than the typical cloth mask which keeps the inside of the mask off the face. Their rigidity, however, means that they may not fit all faces. Both models appear waterproof (Coach Abery wore one when grooming in the latest snowstorm), are washable, and can be molded around your nose. Although the company makes the claim that they can be machine washed, hand-washing would be recommended. Both models noted above have been worn skiing and when fitted properly allow for the wearing of eyeglasses & sunglasses. The downside of these masks are straps that can only be described as flimsy. I have replaced mine with straps that are more adjustable and make for a tighter fit.
- ***Breathe 99 B2 Mask.*** Not cheap at \$59 for a starter kit but provides a tight fit, doesn't fog glasses, and has replaceable filters with a claim of being able to filter out 99.6% of contaminants .1 micron or larger with the more stringent but somewhat less breathable filters. The "lite" filters are not recommended. Fastens via velcro straps that go around the neck and a second strap that sits high on the back of the head avoiding "ear burn/irritation." Easily washable and additional filters can be purchased though they are relatively expensive. The claim is made that with medium frequency use, the filters should be changed twice a month and at approximately \$8.50/set of filters that's \$17/month. The biggest shortcoming of this mask is that there is currently only one size and it's meant for small to medium size faces (no larger than 3.6 " from tip of nose to point of chin).
- ***Additional information on masks will be forthcoming***

Please Note: We all have faces that are different shapes and sizes. A mask that fits one person and works well for them may not fit you so some experimentation will be needed.

- 3) Per the MSHSL, student-athlete Nordic Skiers/Coaches are not permitted to remove their face coverings during practices or meets even when activities involve a high level of exertion. Masks should be worn from the time an athlete steps out of their car and not removed until after they enter their car (if driving alone) at the end of practice.
- 4) Per MSHSL rules, face coverings at meets are limited to black, white, or beige or school colors. They may include only the school names and/or mascot. The manufacturer's logo, if present, may not exceed 2.25 inches in any dimension.

B. General Practice Procedures

- 1) Throughout practices and competitions appropriate physical distancing between athletes and between coaches and athletes will be enforced. This entails a ***minimum*** of 6 feet of separation though we will attempt whenever possible to exceed this requirement.
- 2) Per MSHSL and district requirements, a record must be kept of all student-athletes and team personnel at each practice session to allow for contact tracing if necessary. Skiers and parents are therefore responsible for e-mailing Coach Abery if a practice is going to be missed ***providing a clear explanation of why an athlete will not be present.***
- 3) Coaches will take attendance each day after we break into subpods. It is critical that everyone at practice is present and is counted when this takes place.

- 4) We **do not have access to the clubhouse at Valleywood G.C.** during practices so take care of personal hygiene needs, bring a water bottle, and come ready to ski
- 5) Restroom facilities will be available via Porta Potties that have been requested from the district
- 6) On classic technique days, skiers will need to bring their own waxes and corks. No sharing of waxes and waxing tools will be allowed though coaches (physically distanced) will be available to demonstrate to new skiers appropriate application techniques. Coach Abery has ordered kick wax kits from Finn Sisu Ski Shop that should be in soon and can be purchased from the Booster Club for approximately \$30-35. The kit will provide 4 kick waxes for various conditions, a scraper, and cork.

C. Pod and Subpod Assignment

- 1) All student athletes will be assigned to a **home pod** prior to the start of the season. This will be posted on the team website no later than Saturday evening January 2nd. Assignment to pods will be based upon: (a) school of attendance and skier team (we have two co-op teams); (b) the level at which the athlete skis (Varsity/JV); and (c) the athletes grade level. (Exceptions will be made for siblings traveling together).

Please note: MSHSL and district policy mandates that we keep pods as homogeneous as possible at practices and minimize the crossing of school lines. Because we have some co-op teams that include skiers from different schools this will not always be possible but we will adhere to these guidelines as much as we are able.

- 2) Pods will consist of no more than 25 athletes and begin and end practice at different times as follows:

Weekdays (For most practices. Practices at Hyland are on a different schedule)

- 2:45 - 4:30: Eagan Boys Varsity & Rosemount Girls Varsity (BLUE PODS)
- 3:00 - 4:45: ISD 196 Girls Varsity (EV, Eagan) and ISD 196 Boys Varsity (RHS, EVHS, AVHS) (GOLD PODS)
- 3:15 - 5:00: EHS, RHS, AVHS, & EVHS Junior Varsity (All students grade 9-12 who are not currently varsity skiers) (RED PODS)
- 3:30 - 5:10: 6th - 8th grade Junior Varsity (GREEN PODS)

Saturday (Varsity only) 9:15-11:30 (or as scheduled due to weather-related delays)

- 9:15-11:15 ISD 196 Girls Varsity (EV, Eagan) and ISD 196 Boys Varsity (RHS, EVHS, AVHS) (GOLD PODS)
- 9:30-11:30 Eagan Boys Varsity & Rosemount Girls Varsity (BLUE PODS)

- 3) Upon arriving at practice, athletes will be further divided into **subpods**. These subpods will consist of 5-8 skiers and consist of the group with which athletes will be training. Subpods will be assigned by school/team and skier ability levels. The RHS Varsity Girls Team (10 skiers) , for example, will be assigned to 1 of 2 groups each of which will consist of approximately 5 skiers and a coach to supervise their workout.
- 4) Athletes are expected to **remain within their assigned subpods throughout practice**. We understand that some athletes within a subpod will ski at a faster pace than others. This does not mean that faster athletes need to slow down but that they *should not attempt to join*

another subpod during a practice. If coaches see a need to move an athlete to another subpod, they will do so after consulting with the athlete.

PLEASE NOTE: This does not mean you all need to ski together as a group. Skier workouts, whether interval, recovery, or long slow distance are intended to be undertaken at a skier's own pace based on their conditioning and ability level. They are not intended to be socializing time. You may pass skiers from another pod or skiers from another pod may pass you. The intent of pods is to avoid large groups from different teams socializing at the beginning and end as well as during practice.

- 5) Following practice, athletes within each pod will be asked to immediately proceed to their transportation and leave the practice venue. Face-coverings are required to be worn until an athlete enters their vehicle.

III. Competitions

A. Competition Schedule

- 1) Our current season will run from January 4th through March 20th
- 2) At this point, Nordic Ski competitions are allowed by the MSHSL league to begin on January 14th, 2021. We are currently in the process on making final decisions about when and where we will be competing based on those dates for which we were awarded race slots at Hyland Recreation Area with the potential for racing at other sites including Valleywood G.C. when nature snow permits.

Please Note: In previous years we were typically allocated race slots at Hyland Hill Rec. Area on Tuesdays and most of our races were held on that day. That is not the case this year. Depending on natural snow availability races this year may take place on any weekday.

- 3) MSHSL regulations limit competitions to meets that have no more than three teams in attendance. This means that our races will look different this year as follows:
 - a) Different teams will rotate in and out of various A and B race groupings with Varsity and JV meets taking place on the same day but over an extended period of time.
 - Varsity Group A meets will begin at 1:30 PM
 - Varsity Group B meets will begin at 2:30 PM
 - JV group A meets will begin at 3:50 PM
 - JV Group B meets will begin at 4:50 PM
- 4) Athletes should note that at this time the MSHSL has not made any decisions with respect to holding either section meets or a state meet. Time is, however, allocated for these competitions on the calendar.

B. Competition Procedures

- 1) Once arriving at a competition venue, each team will have a separate area coned off for its use. Skiers will be expected to stay within their own team area when they are not warming up or racing.
- 2) Both prior to and following the competition, athletes are not to socialize with members of other teams and need to maintain appropriate 6-foot plus physical distancing.
- 3) ***All team members and coaches are expected to be appropriately masked throughout competitions even when warming up and competing.***

- 4) Access to restrooms is likely to be highly restricted at most race venues. If athletes do have access to facilities hands should be sanitized and/or washed thoroughly before returning to team areas.
- 5) **Start Procedures:** The start order for this year's races will be different than in the past with random start order not used. Instead, each team will bring its skis up to the line as a group and based upon the start order assigned by coaches, skiers will be released two at a time at 15 second intervals.
- 6) **Finish Procedures:** Following completion of a race, skiers will need to immediately return to their designated team area to retrieve warm-ups and complete a quick 15-minute cool down.
- 7) **Leaving the Venue:** Given the multiple meets we will be running, and the fact that the following meet cannot occur until athletes from the preceding meet have exited the venue athletes must immediately return to their vehicles following their cool-down and leave the competition venue.
- 8) Meet results will be provided for both the group with which one raced and overall

C. Transportation to Competitions

- 1) Our team **will not** be using school buses for travel to competition this season. Athletes and/or their families will be responsible for drop out and pick-up. Please note that this is consistent with ISD 196 policy and in the past, we have always been responsible for our own transportation to meets scheduled south of HW 494.
- 2) This decision was made for several reasons:
 - a) Since all of our competition venues require transportation of 30 minutes or greater, a Covid-19 diagnosis of one athlete or coach following a competition would result in the entire bus needing to abide by quarantine procedures for 14-days.
 - b) We can avoid large numbers of athletes having to experience this process and minimize potential exposure if we travel individually or in small groups.
 - c) Traveling individually or in small groups will allow for a faster exiting of the venue so following meets can begin.

D. Spectators

Coach Abery is currently requesting clarification from the SSC Nordic Ski Conference Coordinator as to whether spectators will be allowed for our SSC meets. MSHSL guidelines for Nordic skiing do mention spectators being allowed as long as they are masked and abide by appropriate physical distancing. The SSC, however, may have its own regulations.

IV. Diagnosis of or Exposure to COVID-19

- 1) If an athlete has been diagnosed with or tested positive for COVID-19, the athlete and/or their parents are required to immediately report this to the Head Nurse at the student's home school.
- 2) If an athlete has had an exposure/close contact to someone who has been diagnosed with Covid-19, they must follow the recommended 14-day quarantine procedure and will be unable to take part in practice or competitions during this period. If they do not contract the virus themselves an test free of Covid-19, they will not have to follow the Return to Play Procedures.

Please Note: Given the high likelihood of Covid-19 transmission within families, it is **critical** that athletes who are exposed within their households, complete the full quarantine period and test as Covid-free before returning to practice. This holds even if the athlete is symptom free.

- 3) Medical evaluation by a qualified medical provider (MD/DO/PAC/ARNP) is highly recommended prior to an athlete returning to physical activity and training. **From onset of illness or positive test through the return protocol the recovery and return process requires a minimum of 21-days for an uncomplicated COVID-19 infection.** Complicated infections may require 6 months or more.
- 4) Requirements to begin a Return to Play process which are required if an athlete is diagnosed with or tests positive for Covid-19 regardless of symptom severity are:
- At least 14 days since positive test or onset of symptoms with no symptoms or fever (without fever reducing medications for at least 24 hours)
 - Able to tolerate activities of daily living without cough, shortness of breath, or fatigue
 - Negative cardiac screen through family physician (preferred) or High School Trainer

If a student-athlete had moderate to severe symptoms, was hospitalized, or has positive responses to any cardiac screening question or a new heart murmur, cardiac evaluation is recommended before returning to physical activity.

- 5) **Return to Play (RTP) Procedures.** After a COVID-19 infection, athletes must complete the progression below without developing chest pain, chest tightness, palpitations, lightheadedness, extreme fatigue, presyncope or syncope. If an athlete experiences fatigue or symptoms during or following activity, they will need to stop all activity and return to their physician for additional evaluation.

The following 7-day return protocol is based on the best evidence currently available to provide a gradual increase in cardiac load during return to physical activity. Some athletes may require a longer time at each stage and if unable to progress, may require additional medical evaluation.

Stage 1: (2 Days Minimum) Light Activity (Walking, Jogging, Stationary Bike) for 15 minutes or less at intensity no greater than 70% of maximum heart rate. NO resistance training.

Stage 2: (1 Day Minimum) Add simple movement activities (e.g., skiing drills) for 30 minutes or less at intensity no greater than 80% of maximum heart rate

Stage 3: (1 Day Minimum) Progress to more complex training for 45 minutes or less at intensity no greater than 80% maximum heart rate.

Stage 4: (2 Days Minimum) Normal Training Activity for 60 minutes or less at intensity no greater than 80% maximum heart rate

Stage 5: (1 Day Minimum) Return to Full Training Sessions without restrictions or limitations on intensity or duration.

Stage 6: Medically ready for Full Participation in ALL Sports Activities (Minimum duration 7-days)

Please note that in combination with the quarantine period, the 1-week Return-to-Play Protocol results in an athlete not being able to fully practice or race for a period of 3-weeks. This is approximately 33% of our regular season. It therefore makes a LOT more sense to be cautious, avoid risky behavior and exposure, and stay healthy than expect that you can contract Covid-19 and recover quickly enough to have a competitive season. You owe it both to yourselves and your teammates to proceed with cautions and follow all CDC and Minnesota Department of Health guidelines.