

# RUTLAND YOUTH SOCCER

AUGUST 27, 2020



Good Afternoon Rutland Youth Soccer Families,

I hope this communication finds you well. It may be a bit lengthy, but there is a lot of important information. Massachusetts state agencies, local governments, and youth soccer governing bodies have issued a variety of guidelines and requirements for youth sports organizations to function during the Covid-19 pandemic. A lot has transpired since we first opened registration at the beginning of July.

At the time, Massachusetts was in Phase 2 of its 4-phase reopening plan, and soccer was classified as a high-risk contact sport. As such, soccer activities were allowed, but limited to no-contact drills and training exercises only. That meant that scrimmages, league games or tournaments could not be held. Since that time, we have moved into Phase 3 Step 1. Soccer was downgraded to a moderate risk activity, but there were still several modifications that we needed to abide by. We have been following these modifications and guidance, which at times, seem to change weekly. The most recent came out last week that face coverings are always now required, even during practice and game activity.

## **In-Town Pre-K, K and Grade ½ (U8) Programs**

From the start, RYS made modifications to our two in-town programs. We felt it was in the best interest and safety of our players to not offer a Pre-K/K program this year as it would be extremely difficult to keep kids that age distanced and would be difficult to have them wear masks if that became the case. We also decided that we were going to run our Grade 1/2 (U8) program, but in a modified format. Grades 1 and 2 would be separated on different nights, and each child would only have one practice a week (vs two in years past). We are still planning to run Friday evening games for this age group.

## **High School Program**

The 5 Wachusett towns decided to form a combined high school aged program (prior to COVID) in order to give them a more pleasurable playing experience. You can check out Holden Youth Soccer's site for more information.

## **Travel Grades 3/4 (U10), 5/6 (U12) and 7/8 (U14) Programs**

Based on the most recent information and guidance that has come out from MA Youth Soccer, RYS has had to make some difficult decisions. This included discussions around cancelling the season altogether, running a modified program this fall or continuing with a normal season. Beside the mandates and guidance from the state and MA Youth Soccer, we also considered what other towns around us and in our league were planning when making our decision.

RYS plays as part of Midland Area Youth Soccer. Midland Area currently has 131 teams registered when they normally have 320 teams. Many towns don't have the number of players

registering that they normally do, many are running modified programs, and at least six have cancelled their season altogether. Closer to home, Princeton has cancelled their season, Paxton hasn't decided, and Sterling is running a modified program like what RYS has decided to do.

The basics of the decision are:

- Grade 3/4 (U10): Switched to In-Town Program
- Grade 5/6 (U12): Switched to In-Town Program
- Grade 7/8: Participating in MAYS (some discussion as to whether to make this in-town only)

These decisions were not made lightly. Based on the requirements that need to be met, to allow kids to play soccer while minimizing contact with each other and to reduce contact with other towns, the RYS Board voted on a modified season. Our number one priority must be, and is, to keep our kids, families and community safe. By changing our U10 and U12 programs to in-town (not travel), RYS is taking steps to reduce the potential exposure of COVID19 for our families. This eliminates at least 28 times our teams travel to other towns, and 28 times towns come to Rutland.

### **Why Are We Not Traveling?**

Any town that is categorized as red, or high risk, by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts will be ineligible to participate in any MAYS matches – home or away – until that town reverts to at least a 'Yellow' categorization. As of yesterday, one of the Midland Area towns is red, or high risk, and multiple towns are in the yellow category.

The Rutland Board of Health has also asked that we do what we can to reduce the risk of spreading the disease. It was agreed upon that a modified program would not only decrease travel to other towns, but also decrease the number of people coming into Rutland, thus greatly reducing the potential for exposure in our community. We have also decided to reduce the number of practices for these age groups to once a week.

### **What Do These Changes Mean?**

Simply stated, there are many changes this year. RYS has historically covered players from PreK through High School, so these changes are going to impact each level differently. There was a lot of careful consideration of all the factors to create the best possible season for each age group.

We understand that kids want more than just practices, so we are working on ways to provide game like scenarios. Our plan is to offer in town games on Saturdays. We don't know exactly what this will look like yet, but it is something we are planning. It may consist of our same aged teams playing against each other, same aged teams mixing week after week, age groups with a one-year difference playing against or mixing with each other, and there is some thought that maybe we can even have games/scrimmages with Sterling and Paxton since they are part of the

Wachusett District and low risk. Our current plan is to start these games/scrimmages mid-September.

Most likely, it will be a combination of these options but is something the Board will have to work out. By offering an in-town program we can open registration again to those families in Rutland that we had to turn away due to team size requirements.

Game and field size may differ from normal based on the total number of registered players. For example, teams that typically play 7v7 or 9v9 may be playing smaller sided games on smaller fields. This will allow more touches on the ball and reduced contact. Depending on the final team configurations, games could be 6v6 or 7v7 (or maybe even something else)

Again, our goal is to allow the kids to get out on the soccer field while doing everything we can to keep them safe.

### **What happens if the rules change again?**

We will adapt and continue to follow the guidance of the State and Mass Youth Soccer. In the end, our goal is to continue to provide a safe, soccer experience to as many kids as we can.

### **MA Youth Soccer Return to Soccer Activities**

Mass Youth Soccer issued updated rule modifications as part of their [return to soccer activities guidelines](#) to comply with the State requirements. If interested, you can [find the document here](#). As a Board, and for our coaches, these new guidelines put a lot of liability on us, more so than anyone should ever be asked to take on as a volunteer, because we want to offer soccer in our community. Below is a list of modifications for the fall 2020 season:

### **Mask Requirements**

Based off of MA Youth Soccer's August 19 webinar:

- Face masks must be worn by all players, coaches, referees and spectators during all games & practices, except during designated water break or rest periods **and** while a minimum 6 feet distancing from other persons can be maintained and enforced
- Facial coverings must be worn while on the sidelines at ALL times and in any huddles or time-outs.
- Coaches, staff referees, umpires, and other officials are required to wear facial coverings **and** maintain a social distance of 6 feet from players, coaches, spectators and other persons at all times.
- Masks must be the ear loop style masks and must cover the nose and mouth. Gaiters are NOT acceptable per MYSA guidelines. Masks with straps that go all the way around the back of the wearer's head/neck are NOT acceptable per MYSA guidelines
- Coaches and each team's 'Covid Manager' are responsible for enforcing this requirement
- Referees are not the mask police

MA Youth Soccer return to soccer guidelines give an example that soccer players should have facial coverings with them at all times and where possible play with the facial covering on, removing it for long runs down the field, for plays without close contact, and in the goal. RYS will require face coverings for goalies at the U10 and U14 age groups.

Coaches are responsible for enforcing mask usage by their team members. It is expected that masks will be worn as much as possible unless there is a documented medical condition or disability.

### **Equipment Requirements**

There should be no shared equipment for the fall 2020 season. This means no sharing of goalie jerseys, goalie gloves, pinnies, etc.

- Pinnies – Each player is being provided two different color pinnies. They are theirs to keep, and they are expected to bring them with them to all practices and games/scrimmages.
- Goalie Gloves & Jerseys – Goalie gloves and jerseys are not being provided to coaches this year. The kids can wear one of their pinnies. If a child plays goalie regularly and has his/her own goalie jersey and/or gloves, they can use them.
- Only coaches should be touching goals, cones and other equipment.
- RYS provided soccer balls (for games) should not be touched by anyone by hand. The ball must be sanitized when any coach, ref, spectator or field player/sub touches ball with hands. Goalies are permitted to touch the ball, but the ball must be sanitized when the goalie has touched his/her face (goalie must also sanitize hands)

### **Field Requirements**

- A maximum of 25 participants can be on any one playing surface (game or practice) at a time. This include players and coaches. If splitting a field for practice, groups must be at least 14 ft apart (7 feet from center line).
- For practices, RYS is asking that parents drop their kids off and pick them up. Please do not come to the field planning on watching the practice from the sideline. If you can see from inside your vehicle that would be ok.
- Each player is allowed 1 parent/guardian spectator in immediate vicinity of field during games/scrimmages. This is subject to change based on guidance from MA Youth Soccer or from compliance within RYS. Siblings or other children under care of the spectator are permitted, but they must be with the parent/guardian. Spectators, including kids, must always wear facial coverings.
- Spectators must be at least 8 feet from sideline and spaced 6 ft apart.

### **Health Monitoring**

Parents are required to monitor their own child's health:

- Take temperature daily. The average normal body temperature is generally accepted as 98.6°F (37°C). Some studies have shown that the “normal” body temperature can have a wide range, from 97°F (36.1°C) to 99°F (37.2°C). A temperature over 100.4°F (38°C) most often means you have a fever caused by an infection or illness
- If your child has any symptoms, even mild ones, do not send them to practice or a game. Public health urges you to stay home and isolate until:
  - You have had no fever for at least 72 hours (without the use of medicine) AND
  - Other symptoms (cough, shortness of breath) have improved AND
  - At least 7 days have passed since your symptoms first appeared
- Anyone in your household that you have had close contact with (within six feet for approximately 10 minutes) should self-quarantine for 14 days, even if you haven’t been tested for COVID-19
- Notify your RYS coach immediately if your child has become sick
- Adhere to physical/social distance requirements posted by the organization. These are based on state and local requirements. When at training, wear a face covering if you are outside of your car.
- Ensure that your child has a water bottle, equipment (ball and GK Gloves if necessary), light and dark shirt (no shared scrimmage vests will be provided) (RYS has provided new pinnies for each player so there is no sharing)
- Ensure your child’s personal equipment, cleats, balls, shin guards etc. are cleaned and sanitized before and after every training
- Ensure your child’s clothing is washed after every session
- Do not assist the coach with equipment before or after a training session.
- No carpooling with other members of the team
- Be sure your child has necessary sanitizer with them at every session
- Ensure athletes arrive dressed for practice and leave immediately after practice. No recreational play, or loitering is allowed
- A mask or face covering that wraps around the head or head and neck of players (i.e. gaiter) will be considered dangerous equipment. A mask that fits over the ears only will be considered safe to wear
- A player showing COVID symptoms should be sent home and cannot return until cleared by health professional

### **Modifications to Game Play**

- Heading – All intentional heading of a soccer ball is suspended for all ages. Any intentional heading will result in an indirect free kick restart
- Shoulder to Shoulder Contact – Suspended and or any other intentional physical contact is to be considered a violation resulting in an indirect free kick restart or other applicable foul or misconduct based on the referee’s decision
- Close Contact – Deliberate close contact must be eliminated, which includes, but is not limited to collisions, body checking, tackling, blocking, and racing/riding in packs

- Intermittent Contact – Game situations that result in intermittent close physical or face-to-face contact must be modified or eliminated, including restarts, face-offs, throw-ins, scrums for the ball/puck, or similar activities
- Slide Tackling – Whenever within 6 feet of another player is suspended resulting in an indirect free kick restart or other applicable foul or misconduct based on the referee's decision
- Throw-Ins – Suspended and to be replaced by a Kick-in. Modifications for the procedure for a Kick-in is:
  - The player taking the kick-in must be facing the field of play and need not keep both feet on the ground during the Kick-in
  - Must put part of the ball on the touchline or on the ground outside the touchline
  - The ball may not be kicked directly into the opponent's penalty area
  - All opponents must stand at least 10 yards (8 yards for small sided) from the point on the touchline where the Kick-in is to be taken
- Corner Kicks – Suspended and to be replaced by a Corner Kick-in. Modifications for the procedure for a Corner Kick-in are:
  - The ball may not be kicked directly into the opponent's penalty area.
  - Opponents must remain at least 10 yds (8 yards for small sided) from the corner arc until the ball is in play
- Restarts – All players must comply with the 6 -foot distancing from both teammates and opponents. Opponents must remain at 10 yds (8 yards for small sided) from the ball prior to the kick. The use of a traditional defensive Wall is currently suspended.
- Dropped Ball – Use as a restart is suspended. To replace this procedure, an Indirect Free Kick will be awarded to the team whom the referee deemed to be in possession when the referee stops play.

### **What if I Don't Want My Child to Play Anymore?**

Please remember that RYS is simply the messenger. We didn't make up the rules and requirements, but we must enforce them for the entire organization. If you are not willing to follow **ALL** the rules and requirements (including all mask and spectator requirements), please follow the opt-out guidance below.

The waiver included as part of your registration did contain COVID information, but insurance companies do not provide coverage for COVID-related claims. This puts a lot of responsibility on RYS and our coaches. After careful discussion and consideration of the modifications and guidance mentioned above, we still wanted to be able to provide a soccer program for our kids, but the liability, risk and ever changing requirements were deciding factors in offering a modified program.

These are unprecedented times. We understand these changes may cause families to want to drop out of the program, but keep in mind that games weren't even an option when registration opened. At that time, RYS stated we would provide a 100% refund if **no** soccer

activities were offered. As we currently plan to offer a soccer season, albeit modified, we truly hope that RYS families understand we are making these changes to keep everyone as safe as possible and will stay in the program this fall.

For those that decide they can no longer participate this fall and want to opt-out, a 50% refund will be provided. Uniforms and other purchases to prepare for the season have already been made. **If you plan to opt-out and request a refund, please fill out the [Google Form \(link\)](#) we have created by Friday, September 4.**

Thank you for taking the time to go through all this information. I want to thank the RYS Board and our coaches, all of whom volunteer their time to make sure we provide a safe and fun soccer program to the residents of Rutland. And thank you parents for bearing with us through these everchanging times.

See you on the field,

Ken Lebetkin  
President  
Rutland Youth Soccer