

**The Massachusetts Chapter of the
American Academy of Pediatrics (MCAAP)
Statement on School Sports
January 12, 2021**

The Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MCAAP) represents more than 1,600 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists, and pediatric surgical specialists across the Commonwealth. Our members are dedicated to improving the health and well-being of children by providing quality health care and advocating for them and their families. As our mission dictates, the MCAAP strictly promotes the health of children and we believe the following recommendations are in the best interests of children and their families.

The MCAAP, since June, has supported the goal of bringing as many children back to in-person learning as possible, click [here](#) for the MCAAP Policy Statement and School Reopening.

As pediatricians we recognize the value of children participating in organized sports through school programs, town-based teams, and informal interactions with friends and peers. There are both physical and psychological health benefits for children and adolescents. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) COVID-19 Interim Guidance on Return to Sports dated 12/17/2020 states that “Participating in sports allows youth to improve their cardiovascular health, strength, body composition, and overall fitness. Mentally, youth may experience benefits from the increased socialization with friends and coaches as well as from the return to a more structured routine. These psychological and physical benefits can help support their developmental growth. Exercise also has immune system benefits.”

However, the benefits of participating in organized sports must be weighed against the potential risk of COVID-19 transmission that can occur during those sports. The MCAAP endorses the considerations and mitigation efforts included in the above-mentioned guidance from the AAP, that should be taken when evaluating which sports should resume and whether an individual child should participate.

While we recognize the value of organized sports, we feel it is essential that resumption of school-based sports do not come at the expense of a return to in-person learning. When a school district is discussing when and which sports to allow this year, they need to consider how that will affect educational activities. **We believe in-person education should be prioritized over sports.**

The MCAAP does not support the resumption of higher-risk contact sports, such as basketball and hockey, in districts where education remains fully remote. We also do not support shortening the academic day to allow for sports teams to be able to utilize large common spaces that could be used for appropriate spacing during the school day.

As has been stated in the MCAAP's prior Statement on School Reopening, schools play a critical role in children's social and physical development, provide emotional support, peer and mentor relationship-building, nutrition services, and physical activity that keep children's minds and bodies healthy.

We as pediatricians support the AAP statement that all policy considerations for school COVID-19 plans should start with a goal of having students physically present in school. The MCAAP urges against any policies which prioritize athletics over in-person academics.