

# RETURNING TO SKATING PROGRAMS AND DISCIPLINES



## **MAY 15, 2020** **FIGURE SKATING DURING** **THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

After weeks of stay-at-home orders due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a vast majority of states have begun easing restrictions on social gatherings and businesses. While we're all eager to return to skating, there are still many precautions facilities, athletes and all who enter an ice sports facility should practice to ensure each other's safety.

For those whose local health officials have deemed it safe to return to the ice, U.S. Figure Skating recommends members become familiar with and abide by your local ice sports facility's requirements and procedures.

When it's finally time to lace up your skates, things will be different. Your rink will have new policies and procedures and your coach will be encouraged to take additional precautions. And remember, you have been off the ice for quite some time, so take it slow and be patient with yourself and those around you.

As we all ease back into skating, U.S. Figure Skating recommends a staged approach to Returning to Skating Programs and disciplines. These guidelines are meant to help athletes transition back to the ice in a safe and responsible manner.

After consulting medical professionals, athletes, numerous skating experts and facility managers, U.S. Figure Skating's recommendations and guidelines for figure skating during the COVID-19 pandemic are being presented in three documents.

1. [Returning to the Rinks](#)
2. Returning to Skating Programs and Disciplines (below)
3. Considerations for Competitions and Events (week of May 18)

*These documents may be updated as the situation evolves.*

Until a vaccine is developed, there will remain a risk of infection. U.S. Figure Skating encourages all participants to follow these recommendations and guidelines.

## **BEFORE YOU GET STARTED**

### **CHECK LOCAL/STATE HEALTH GUIDELINES**

Club leadership and facility management should adhere to their state and local guidelines when determining their own re-opening policies and procedures.

- [Directory of state health departments](#)

### **REVIEW RETURNING TO THE RINKS**

It is the responsibility of each skating director, coach and facility staff member to enforce policies and procedures intended to keep all participants safe. By following these guidelines and those of local government and health agencies, athletes and their families will be able to make informed decisions as to when they can return to the ice.

- [Returning to the Rinks guidelines](#)

### **KNOW THE BASICS OF STAYING SAFE**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends these tips to limit the spread of the coronavirus:

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and equipment.
- Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol).
- Wear a cloth face covering (mask) that covers nose and mouth.
- Practice physical distancing (6 feet apart).
- Cover mouth/nose with a tissue or crook of elbow when coughing or sneezing.
- Stay home if you are sick.

# AT THE RINK

## MONITOR PARTICIPANTS/ FACILITY STAFF HEALTH

It is important to monitor and record (for the possible need for contact tracing) basic health and emergency contact information from all those entering the facility.

- Implement symptom-monitoring protocols where possible.
  - Click [here](#) to learn how to conduct a facility health screening.
- Encourage all who enter facility to fill out a questionnaire. If the person answers yes to any of the following, ask the person to return home.
  - Fever > 100 F (> 38 C)
  - Cough
  - Shortness of breath/difficulty breathing
  - Chills
  - Muscle aches
  - Sore throat
  - New loss of taste or smell
- Include a waiver on the questionnaire to ensure participants understand risks they may face in participating in a public activity.
- Develop procedures if a participant shows signs of being sick:
  - Isolate in a well-ventilated area ensuring physical distancing
  - Notify public health officials and cooperate with their recommendations and instructions. It is important to maintain privacy of the individual who is sick
  - Disinfect all areas where ill person participated
  - Advise ill person to remain home
  - Require written clearance from healthcare provider before returning to facility

## WHEN TO WEAR A MASK

All who enter the facility should wear a cloth covering (mask) over their mouth and nose. However, if athletic activity is pursued, a mask is not required. If the athlete wears a mask during training, it should not restrict breathing.

- Mask should be worn covering both nose/mouth.
- Mask should be worn at all times while within the facility and on the ice, unless pursuing athletic activity.

- Athletes may choose to not wear masks during athletic training.
  - If they choose to wear a mask, a physician should be consulted to ensure they are getting enough oxygen and not overheating.
- Avoid adjustment/removal/dropping during skating session and while near others.
  - If adjustment is needed, wash hands before adjusting as to not infect mask.

## ENFORCE PHYSICAL DISTANCING

Physical distancing, also called social distancing, is one of the best tools to avoid being exposed to the coronavirus and slowing its spread.

- Enforce Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's physical distancing of 6 feet.
- Divide coaches and athletes into "training groups," if ice time can accommodate.
  - Number and assign each coach to a designated area along the boards where they should stand to teach private lessons.
  - Coaches should remain in their area and may not skate alongside any student.
  - Limit coach/skater contact; coaches should not help students up unless the student is unable to get up. Coaches should use verbal cues instead of physical contact.
- All warm-ups should be done outside (weather permitting).
- Athletes, coaches should come dressed to take the ice.
- Athletes should enter/exit ice at staggered times through separate entrances.
  - Clearly label entry/exit and traffic flow through building.
- Provide 6-foot markers in spectator areas.
- Do not allow any gatherings in lobby, bathrooms, etc.
- Post signage reinforcing social distancing and COVID-19 prevention measures.

## AT THE RINK CONTINUED

### MAINTAIN A CLEAN ENVIRONMENT

While the facility and its staff should be diligent in disinfecting often-touched areas, it is everyone's job to help prevent the spread of the virus.

- Follow all CDC recommendations for disinfectant.
- Schedule between-session cleanings.
  - Wipe down dasher boards, door handles and all frequently touched surfaces.
- Require athletes (or parent, if a younger child) to wipe down their readiness area before/after use.
- Limit personal items on dasher boards.
  - Spread out personal items across the bench.
  - Do not share water bottles, tissue boxes.
- Ensure adequate trash cans for tissues.
- Create policies for using music equipment. Keep sanitizing wipes next to music player.

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# TRAINING SESSIONS

### LIMIT THE AMOUNT OF PEOPLE

- In accordance with your city, county or state's gathering restrictions, limit the number of people inside the facility and on the ice.
- Recommend only one parent/guardian accompany younger children, if needed.
- Shorten programming, stagger ice times to create a buffer between sessions.
- Use tape to mark readiness areas 6 feet apart where athletes put on/take off skates.
  - Areas may be in hallways, spectator areas, etc.
  - Leave all personal equipment in skating bag or car.
- Establish amount of time ("15 minutes") athletes, coaches have to pack up and exit facility.
- Online bookings and payment are recommended.

### DEVELOP A TRAINING PLAN

Most competitive figure skaters have never been away from the ice for such a long time and will need guidance on how to return safely to prevent injury. A sensible return should be done in small-group classes, focusing on rebuilding core conditioning, technique basics, skating fundamentals and basic skating movements.

### Return to on-ice training checklist

- Go slow. Plan 6-8 weeks to return to a normal training load.
- Athlete should devote first 4-6 weeks to build/maintain:
  - Mobility, stability, flexibility
  - Agility, balance, coordination
  - Strength, power, endurance
    - Resources: [Aspire program](#), [off-ice training videos](#) on [Members Only](#)
- Create a plan for a dynamic warm-up and post training recovery
  - Resources: [S.T.A.R.S.](#), [Aspire program](#) and [Learn to Skate USA](#)
- Plan a weekly skating workload
  - Focus first on skating skills
    - Allow the mind-body to "re-connect" first 1-2 weeks
  - Monitor introduction of jumps/lifts
    - Remember on-ice landing impact forces are far greater than jumps off-ice
  - Progressively increase workload
    - Increase either jump-load or training intensity by 10% each week until safe training volume is met

# A STAGED APPROACH TO RETURNING TO TEAM PRACTICES

## SYNCHRONIZED SKATING, THEATRE ON ICE AND SHOWCASE PRACTICES

### STAGE 1

At this time (May 15, 2020), many local and state governments restrict the numbers of people allowed in a facility to 10. With facility staff, athletes and coaches, Stage 1 presents obstacles in training on the ice as a full team. With this in mind, teams will need to plan accordingly.

- Know the number of people allowed in training facility during Stage 1.
  - Consider separating athletes into training squads: Half the team practices on ice/half train outside. Then switch.
- Athletes, coaches should enter facility dressed ready to skate.
- Focus on a training plan that builds endurance, strength and stretching to prevent injury.
- All warm-ups, including off-ice training, should adhere to physical distancing (6 feet apart).
- There should be no contact between participants.
- Coaches should wear masks during practices and remain in designated areas.
- Athletes may choose not to wear masks during athletic training.
  - If they choose to wear a mask, a physician should be consulted to ensure they are getting enough oxygen and not overheating.
- All should wash hands before/after practice. Use rink-side hand sanitizer during practice.
- Athletes, coaches should leave facility immediately after practice.
- Athletes, coaches should launder training clothing as soon as possible and before next practice.
- Athletes should not be punished for missing practice if they do not feel well or if they stayed home because a member of the household is ill.
- If diagnosed or suspected to have COVID-19, an athlete should be cleared by a physician before returning to training.

### STAGE 2

When your local health agency or government allows, the size of gatherings inside a facility could increase to as many as 50 people. Physical distancing and disinfecting practices will remain in place. Masks will still be recommended.

- Full teams will practice on the ice, but physical contact will not be allowed.
  - Teams should practice using disconnected run-throughs or continue to work on skating skills/drills.
- Now a common practice, infection control procedures from Stage 1 should still be incorporated.

### STAGE 3

When local state gathering restrictions are lifted and Stages 1 and 2 have been successfully implemented, contact activities may begin. However, this will heighten the need to follow strict protocols (Stages 1 and 2) meant to keep all safe and lessen the spread of the virus.

- On-ice practice will begin to resemble pre-COVID-19 practices.
- Gatherings inside the facility (lobby, bathrooms) still will be discouraged.
- Parents/guardians will be asked to consider limiting attendance at practices.
- Records of attendance should be kept for the purpose of contact tracing in the event of a participant is diagnosed with COVID-19.

## PAIRS AND ICE DANCE

### STAGE 1

Unlike teams that require more than two athletes, pairs and ice dance teams present a reduced risk, allowing more control over the two partners. Strict adherence to COVID-19 policies and procedures will be key in keeping not only the team members safe, but the greater community.

- Individual families and athletes should assess overall risk before conducting training together. In some cases, partners live together. In others, partners are in frequent contact and know if each other has sheltered in place.
- Partners should not train together if:
  - Either partner exhibits symptoms of the virus.
  - Either partner has knowingly been exposed to the coronavirus in past 14 days.
  - Either partner lives with or is in frequent contact with a more vulnerable group (e.g., elderly, those with compromised immune system, [others at higher risk for severe illness](#).)
- Athletes, coaches should come dressed ready to skate.
- Partners should begin/end session by immediately washing/sanitizing hands.
- Partners should train off-ice exercises, lifts and other movements outside when possible.
- Coaches should wear masks during practices and remain in designated areas.
- Athletes may choose to not wear masks during athletic training.
  - If they choose to wear a mask, a physician should be consulted to ensure they are getting enough oxygen and not overheating.
- Gatherings inside the facility (lobby, bathrooms) will be discouraged.
- Athletes, coaches should leave facility immediately after practice.
- Athletes should launder training clothing and gloves as soon as possible and before the next practice.
- If diagnosed or suspected to have COVID-19, an athlete should be cleared by a physician before returning to training.

### STAGE 2

When your local health agency or government allows, the size of gatherings inside a facility could increase to as many as 50 people. Physical distancing and disinfecting practices will remain in place. Masks will still be recommended when not engaged in physical activity.

- With more people on the ice, special attention will be needed to allow for physical distancing keeping personal items apart on barrier, not sharing personal items, entering and exiting ice separately. As skaters begin to train their programs, use physical distancing when waiting for music, give right away to skaters who are using music, use cleaning wipes in-between music rotations to clean music areas.
- Now a common practice, infection control procedures from Stage 1 should still be incorporated.

### STAGE 3

When local state gathering restrictions are lifted and Stages 1 and 2 have been successfully implemented, strict adherence to protocols (Stages 1 and 2) will be important to keep all safe and lessen the spread of the virus.

- On-ice practice will begin to resemble pre-COVID-19 practices, but with a heightened sense of good hygiene and disinfectant practices.
- Masks are still recommended but are now optional.
  - If athletes choose to wear a mask, a physician should be consulted to ensure they are getting enough oxygen and not overheating.
- Gatherings inside the facility (lobby, bathrooms) will still be discouraged.

## TEAM COMMUNICATION

- Before return, communicate with athletes/parents that they should expect changes due to COVID-19.
- Create a training guide that lists new policies and protocols; require athletes/parents to sign document signifying they have read and understand.
- Remind athletes/parents that two-deep leadership still applies.
- Encourage feedback. Include an email for those uncomfortable speaking to team manager or coach.

## CONTRACTS AND POLICIES

In many team skating sports, contracts are used to ensure teams and clubs can reserve the ice time they need while policies enforce the intent of the team. During this time of uncertainty due to COVID-19, contracts and policies should be reviewed with special consideration for these areas:

- If the season is shortened or unable to be competed, what will be refunded?
- What fees are non-refundable?
- If an athlete contracts COVID-19, will they receive a partial refund?
- If an athlete is unable to practice due to quarantine, will there be a penalty?
- Consider updating Codes of Conduct to include adherence to practices to decrease the spread of the coronavirus (physical distancing, proper hand/respiratory hygiene, etc.).
- If virtual tryouts were held, consider not offering a full-season contract.

## RELEVANT RESOURCES

- [Opening Up America Again](#)
- [Returning to the Rinks](#)
- [USOPC Return Event Considerations – May 7, 2020](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control & Prevention \(CDC\) Recommendations for Cleaning and Disinfecting Community Facilities](#)
- [WHO - Considerations for sports federations/ sports event organizers when planning mass gatherings in the context of COVID-19 – April 14, 2020](#)
- [Printable signs from USOPC](#) (scroll to bottom)

## U.S. FIGURE SKATING DEPARTMENT CONTACTS

If you have questions, comments or concerns, please contact us. We're here to help!

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