

SOFTBALL ALBERTA RETURN TO PLAY PROTOCOL



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Softball Alberta Return to Play (RTP) Committee is based on an overriding objective of providing an opportunity for as many participants to engage in softball activities as possible. The protocols are designed to permit TimBits activity, through adult fastpitch and slo-pitch. Softball Alberta's goal with the Return to Play protocol is to focus on softball development while providing mental and physical health benefits.

Our requirements are based on provincial health guidelines pertaining to COVID-19, for a minimized risk of transmission while engaged in softball activities.

The return to play will be a graduated process, with a plan to ensure participants are able to comply with each phase before being sanctioned to move to the next phase. As well, Government of Alberta requirements will take precedence over Softball Alberta requirements at all times. Phase One will consist of controlled practices, inter squad scrimmages and camps/clinics. Phase Two will incorporate games or training within designated sport cohorts (max 50 participants) and non-essential travel restrictions will remain in place. Activities will be restricted to local community opportunities, unless specifically sanctioned by Softball Alberta to do otherwise. Participants will not seek sport opportunities in other regions or out of province/jurisdictional areas, or inter-regional play will not occur at this stage. Phase Three may allow for inter club competitions such as major events, tournaments or championships.

Return to Phase 1 activities only will remain in place until July 5. Phase 2 activities can begin July 6 and Phase 3 activity is TBD. Softball Alberta members should not feel pressured to move onto Phase 2 or 3 if they do not wish to do so.

In reaching these criteria we have followed the need for safe protocols under the COVID-19 requirements, without sacrificing safety within the sport and maintaining, as much as possible, the spirit and intent of playing the game of softball.

Our protocols go beyond the playing rules, to ensure we are doing all we can to minimize risk, to include pre activity set up, spectator management and post activity cleanup. Plans have been designed to consider what needs to be done, and wherever possible minimizing costs to participants.

Our guiding principles include the following:

1. gatherings of no more than 50 people for Phase One or a maximum sport cohort gathering of 50 participants for Phase Two & group sizes TBD for Phase Three
2. physical distancing in place wherever possible
3. when physical distancing is not possible, alternative safety measures are in place
4. minimal shared use of equipment
5. when shared use of equipment cannot be avoided, sanitary measures are in place
6. plans in place to record and report community transmissions of the virus

Please note, this Return to Play plan is subject to change.

PHASE ONE	CONTROLLED PRACTICES, SKILL DEVELOPMENT (U12-ADULT FASTPITCH AND SLO-PITCH) Requires that provincial gathering restrictions are a minimum of 50 people
	1. Pre activity preparation • Venue or facility space outdoors is scheduled to ensure that a staggered arrival time is used to minimize overlap with previous time slot • Ensure players, parents and coaches are aware of safety protocols before arriving. • Teams are responsible for completing an Emergency Action Plan and ensuring equipment is sanitized and dugouts are clean. Once that has been completed, ensure all participants self-sanitize. • Participants arrive by household only, no carpooling. Each athlete and coach will report to a designated volunteer. This designated person will guide the players to designated areas where they are ensuring physical distancing and each maintains their own equipment bag and water bottle. • Each participant is required to have with them, their own water bottle, equipment bag, including their glove, batting glove, batting helmet, bat, shoes and catcher’s gear. Participants must come to the field dressed and ready to take part. This includes coaches and players. All equipment should be visibly clean. Each participant is also required to have their own hand sanitizer unless a sanitizing station has been set up beside each team’s dugout. • Every athlete and coach will report first to a designated volunteer to be registered and pre-screened before they are permitted on the softball diamond. • Spectators are directed to the outfield where they are advised to maintain physical distancing by household. Spectators must stay out of designated areas for players and coaches. • The designated volunteer records the first and last names of all participants, including coaches, and keeps the pre-screening information with the attendance record in case of the need for contact tracing. • If a person is denied entry due to pre-screening, ensure there is a procedure in place to encourage that person to visit a medical facility immediately and ensure that person’s contact information is maintained.
	2. Field of Play/Bench Area • Dugout/bench area should be disinfected prior to anyone stepping into the area. • Allow players to spread out beyond the bench either along the fence line or behind the bench to maintain physical distancing. The area can be marked with caution tape to extend the bench area. • Individual player bags should not be in the bench area but in the designated extended bench area to help keep the pathway to the field clear. • A closed garbage can is recommended at the bench area to allow for disposing of tissues, sanitizing wipes and other refuse. • All players and coaches must have their own water bottles/sports drink. Community water jugs or shared cups should not be allowed. • Sunflower seeds, gum, chewing tobacco, candy or spitting of any kind are not allowed. Sneezing or coughing must be in the crook of the elbow. • Each bench area is recommended to have a first aid kit with a supply of materials including masks and gloves to address any medical concerns or injuries. Teams should have a designated medical person to attend to injuries or issues. • A pre-practice meeting can be held. However, all social distancing and 2 metre spacing must be enforced.

3. Practice

- Coach/coaches have prepared practice plan which ensures all activities are done while maintaining physical distancing of 2 metres. No contact is permitted. When athletes take a break, they must return to their designated position for a water break and rest.
- Athletes are required to have their own hand sanitizer (minimum 60% alcohol content) and every participant attending practice must sanitize their hands no less often than every fifteen (15) minutes and more often when possible. Hand washing for a minimum of 20 seconds is ideal if possible.
- Designated volunteers will sanitize the balls as often as possible during the practice, and at a minimum, once after every drill. Coaches are responsible for ensuring there are enough balls to rotate through planned drills, or to stop and sanitize the ones being used before continuing the practice. While different forms of sanitation for the softballs have been examined, at this point, we recommend a spray application of a sanitizer with a minimum of 60% alcohol, same as hand sanitizer requirements.
- Base running drills will be done while maintaining physical distancing, in all cases, by both coaches and athletes.
- Skill development exercises including batting cages and pitching machines will only be done outdoors or in facilities with no enclosed walls (chain link or mesh fencing areas).
- Whenever possible, the equipment will not be shared, batter will tee up the ball themselves and hit into a net. Once they have completed the drill, the balls are sanitized and the next batter enters the area.
- No shared batting helmets
- When bats are shared, the batter will hand the bat to a designated volunteer, holding it by the grip, the volunteer will take it holding the bat by the barrel and proceed to sanitize the bat before the next batter takes it.
- Pitching and catching drills will be done between a single catcher and pitcher only, they will have a supply of balls that those two are touching and once they have finished, each athlete sanitizes their hands and the balls are sanitized before the next battery begins.
- Players should not wear masks when engaging in intense physical activities. Coaches and spectators may wear a mask if they wish as cheering and yelling are a higher risk of spreading respiratory droplets.

4. Post Practice

- A post-practice meeting and cool downs can be held. However, all social distancing and 2 metre spacing must be enforced.
- Teams are asked to exit the bench area and facility as efficiently as possible.
- Players leave the venue immediately after the practice, and only within their own household. Parents must be present to pick up their child as soon as the game ends.
- Designated volunteers inspect the area to ensure nothing has been left and the area is clean and sanitary.
- Players are encouraged to wash their equipment and shower once they get home.

PHASE ONE – ADDITIONAL CRITERIA FOR TEAMS U10 AND UNDER

1. Protocol

- All criteria of Phase one above will apply for this age group as well as the following
- A parent/guardian will be required to be present for the entire duration of every practice and skill development exercise
- When minor first aid (cuts, bruise, scrape) is required, only the household member will administer first aid.
- Major first aid will be administered by the qualified and assigned team member, practicing usual medical sanitary protocol with the household member only in attendance.
- Parents and athletes will be instructed on the protocols in place for physical distancing and managing their own equipment bag, beverages and food.

PHASE TWO	COMPETITION Phase 2 activity can begin July 6, 2020. Phase 2 requires that gathering restrictions are a maximum sport cohort gathering of 50 participants. Cohort is defined as a closed, small group of no more than 50 individuals who participate in the same sport or activity, and remain together for the duration of Phase 2.
Where sports and activities cannot be modified to maintain distance, it is essential to limit the number of contacts between different participants. This is done by playing within set cohorts with a fixed number of participants. Fixed cohorts cannot exceed 50 participants. This number includes those participants, officials, trainers and the designated sanitization volunteers who cannot maintain two metres of distance from others at all times. This number does not include parents and spectators. At U14 age categories, coaches do not have to be part of the cohort <u>only if</u> they can maintain physical distancing at all times. At U12 and under age categories, coaches must be part of the cohort. Cohorts will remain together during Phase 2 of Return to Play and only play within the same geographical region (Activities will be restricted to local community opportunities, unless specifically sanctioned by Softball Alberta to do otherwise). 1. Pre-game - Venue or facility space is scheduled through the home team. Staggered arrival from the previous facility patrons should be ensured - Ensure players, parents and coaches are aware of safety protocols before arriving - Each team is responsible for completing an Emergency Action Plan and ensuring equipment is sanitized and dugouts are clean using cleaning products approved and listed on the Government of Alberta website. Once that has been completed, ensure all participants self-sanitize. - Participants arrive at a pre-set time by household only, no carpooling. The designated volunteers are present to guide the players to designated areas where they ensure physical distancing and each athlete maintains their own equipment bag and water bottle - Every athlete and coach will report first to their team’s designated volunteer (in the case of the officials, to the home team designated volunteer) to be pre-screened before they are permitted on the softball diamond. - The designated volunteer records the first and last names of all participants, including coaches, and keeps the pre-screening information with the attendance record in case of the need for contact tracing - Each participant is required to have with them, their own water bottle, equipment bag, including their glove, batting glove, batting helmet, bat, shoes and catcher’s gear. Participants must come to the field dressed and ready to take part. This includes umpires, coaches and players. All equipment should be visibly clean. Each participant is also required to have their own hand sanitizer unless a sanitizing station has been set up beside each team’s dugout. - Spectators are directed to the outfield or bleachers where they are advised to maintain physical distancing by household. At no time should spectators sit in the designated player and coach area or the dugout. - Coaches prepare a controlled pre-game warm-up, minimize shared use of equipment and ensuring physical distancing is maintained. - All players sanitize hands after warming up before entering the bench area. - Coaches meeting: one coach allowed for each team and must maintain physical distancing (suggested to stand at top outside corner of each batter’s box when available). No players allowed at the plate meeting. Coaches will hand lineups to umpire and umpire will verbally approve or ask any questions about lineups - Pre-game team huddles are allowed with physical distancing measures, but no high fives, team cheers, etc.	2. Field of Play/Bench Area - Ensure diamond layout is proper for coaches’ box, on deck circle, umpire/catcher area to maintain physical distancing when possible. - Dugout/bench area should be disinfected prior to anyone stepping into the area. - Allow players to spread out beyond the bench either along the fence line or behind the bench to maintain physical distancing. The area can be marked with caution tape to extend the bench area. - Individual player bags should not be in the bench area but in the designated extended bench area to help keep the pathway to the field clear. - A closed garbage can is recommended at the bench area to allow for disposing of tissues, sanitizing wipes and other refuse. - All players and coaches must have their own water bottles/sports drink. Community water jugs or shared cups should not be allowed. - Sunflower seeds, gum, chewing tobacco, candy or spitting of any kind are not allowed. Sneezing or coughing must be in the crook of the elbow. - Each bench area is recommended to have a first aid kit with a supply of materials including masks and gloves to address any medical concerns or injuries. Teams should have a designated medical person to attend to injuries or issues.

3. Game Protocols

- Only scorekeeper, coaches and on deck batter are allowed in the dugout while maintaining physical distancing. All other members of the team on offense are to remain outside the dugout in areas designated the team members and coaches.
- On deck batter should be limited to only 1 bat and stay in designated area until stoppage of play.
- Athletes are required to have their own hand sanitizer (minimum 60% alcohol content) and every participant attending practice must sanitize their hands no less often than every fifteen (15) minutes and more often when possible. Hand washing for a minimum of 20 seconds is ideal if possible.
- Prior to each team going on defense, and when they come off the field after being on defense, all team members must use hand sanitizer or soap and water if available.
- Umpires should not handle any equipment (bats, helmets, etc). If an umpire must handle equipment (ex. safety check), the equipment should be sanitized before use by player.
- Game balls should not be shared between teams. Each team, or the home team, should provide sanitized, approved or mutually agreed upon, game balls. Balls should be controlled by the respective benches.
- If a ball goes out of play, the defensive team will put a sanitized ball into play. The out of play ball will be returned to the bench and be sanitized. All balls should be disinfected after each half inning by the appropriate team.
- Equipment must not be shared among players, especially gloves and helmets.
- All catchers must have their own gear.
- Each player should have their own bat. Each bat is sanitized prior to the game or if shared, should be sanitized prior to another player using.
- Players are encouraged to carry hand sanitizers with them on the field and apply as often as possible.
- Between each pitch, the umpire will physically move away from the catcher to maintain distance
- Between each pitch the batter will move out of the batter's box to maintain physical distancing. They can return to the batter's box when the pitcher and catcher have resumed their positions. The umpire will signal play ball before the pitch is made.
- On field coaches will be permitted to stand outside the coach's box when physical distancing is necessary, but safety of the coach and athletes must be a priority.
- No bat boys/girls are allowed. The batter must be responsible to pick up their own bat if an out is made. If the batter reaches a base, the on deck person should retrieve the bat by the barrel side and return it to the bench avoiding contact with the grip.
- Conferences should be allowed at the pitching area only with the coach and pitcher/catcher while maintaining proper physical distancing. It is recommended the coach wears a mask when coming onto the field.
- Any lineup changes or coach challenge with an umpire it is recommended that the coach wear a mask while maintaining proper distancing. The coach will ask for time from his current location and once granted, the umpire will go to a designated safe area to receive the change or discuss with the coach.
- No high fives, handshakes or intentional contact.
- Cheering and yelling on the bench and by spectators is strongly discouraged as it presents a high risk of spreading droplets. Players should not wear masks when actively participating.
- Players will acknowledge their teammates, competitors and officials with a wave or a cheer, while maintaining physical distancing among themselves and their opponents.
- Athletes should not touch their mouth or nose, do not lick your fingers prior to, immediately after or while you are touching the ball or bat.
- In the event of a minor injury to an athlete or official, only one representative from the team will tend to them. The teams will move away from the injured participant, respecting the physical distancing protocol
- In the event of a serious or major injury, the team emergency preparation protocol will be observed with team officials assuming their roles to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants

4. Post-Game

- There should be no post game handshakes or celebrations.
- A post-game meeting & cool downs can be held. However, all social distancing & 2 metre spacing must be enforced.
- Teams are asked to exit the bench area and facility as efficiently as possible.
- Players leave the venue immediately after the game, and only within their own household. Parents must be present to pick up their child as soon as the game ends.
- Designated volunteers inspect the area to ensure nothing has been left and the area is clean and sanitary.
- Players are encouraged to wash their equipment and shower once they get home.

UMPIRES, RULES AND MECHANICS RECOMMENDATIONS

Umpires who are not comfortable with an environment may remove themselves at any point without fear of discipline. Umpires should be encouraged to wear gloves and a mask if they wish. Umpires must bring their own hand sanitizer to an event.

1. Rule Modifications

These are temporary additions to current rules and not replacing any rules. These additions are subject to change.

- Rule 4, Section 1.c.1: Base coaches must always stay 2m from a runner or batter they wish to talk to, including during offensive conferences.
- Rule 5, Section 9.b: Coaches holding defensive conferences should stay on the home plate side of the pitcher’s circle and the pitcher/catcher should be on the opposite side while all maintaining 2m distance. All other players should remain in position and not participate in the conference.
- Rule 4, Section 9: It is recommended that only players and coaches be in the dugout. Players may also be out of the dugout in the extended bench area. The number of players and coaches in the dugout will depend on the size of the dugout due to maintaining 2m distance.
- Rule 4, Section 9: Players should not be allowed to leave the dugout area to congratulate players when scoring or after home runs.
- Rule 6, Section 6.b.3 (FP), Section 5.b.3 (SP): Pitchers should not be permitted to lick fingers.

2. Umpire Mechanics on Field

- SP: 2 umpire system, base umpire will start on the line at 1B
- SP: Remove being in the slot. Umpires can be in front, behind or to the side of the catcher keeping the 2m distance from the catcher.
- FP: Plate umpire will position deeper than normal to call pitches.
- Umpires will still check equipment before a game. Bats should be placed outside the dugout away from players. Umpires should wear gloves during the pre-game equipment checks.
- Use of verbal exchange from safe distance when making lineup changes from coach to scorekeeper and opposing team is recommended.
- Umpires should maintain 2m distance from any player as a starting position when rotated and/or counter rotated.
- Umpires should not handle equipment on the field during play.
- Umpire to umpire or umpire to coach interactions must happen 2m apart.

It is recommended that the catcher stay 2m from the plate when dusting is needed.

PRE-ACTIVITY SCREENING

Designated volunteers will ask every participant attending a sanctioned softball activity the following questions:

1. Have you experienced any of the following symptoms in the last 14 days?

Fever / Cough

Shortness of Breath

Difficulty Breathing

Sore throat

Chills / Painful swallowing

Runny Nose / Nasal Congestion

Feeling unwell / Fatigued

Nausea / Vomiting / Diarrhea

Unexplained loss of appetite

Loss of sense of taste or smell

Muscle/ Joint aches

Headache / Conjunctivitis
2. Have you, or anyone in your household, returned from travel outside of Canada in the last 14 days?
3. Have you or your children attending the program had close unprotected contact (face to face contact within 2 metres) with someone who is ill with cough and/or fever?
4. Have you or anyone in your household been in close unprotected contact in the last 14 days with someone who is being investigated or confirmed to be a case of COVID-19?

If the participant answers yes to any of the above questions they will not be allowed to take part in the team activities. This person will be encouraged to visit a medical facility and will be required to leave the area.

Associations/single affiliated teams are to ensure that every participant (coaches, designated volunteers, players, officials) has signed the updated Softball AB Declaration and Waiver and acknowledge that they are following the required Return to Play checklist. A copy of the signed acknowledgement must be submitted to the Softball AB office before a sanction will be provided. These attendance and pre-screening records should be kept up to date for 2 weeks to facilitate contact tracing should the need arise. These records should be stored in a safe, secure location for at least 2 weeks and then disposed of to maintain the confidentiality of participants. All participants are encouraged to download the ABTraceTogether contact tracing app.

There are to be no indoor activities until further notice. Additional protocol information will be forthcoming regarding indoor training and tryouts.

RAPID RESPONSE PLAN

Facilities and organizers are required to have a rapid response plan in place to manage symptomatic participants, spectators and staff. A rapid response plan sets out a fast-action plan for operators when an attendee shows symptoms of COVID-19.

Details on rapid response can be found in the [General Relaunch Guidance](#).

Plans should include:

- Immediate isolation of the symptomatic participant from others, including arrangement for safe travel home (e.g., no public transit).
- Consideration of suspension or temporary cancellation of the event.
- Cleaning and disinfecting of all equipment and surfaces that may have come into contact with the symptomatic participant.
- Performance of hand hygiene by remaining participants.

BEST PRACTICES

These are highly recommended, but NOT mandatory:

1. Participants should refrain from touching their eyes, nose, mouth and face while participating.
2. Participants should exhibit proper respiratory etiquette (sneezing or coughing into crook of elbow, no clearing of nasal passages, etc.)
3. Associations/single affiliated teams to confirm with their municipality that adequate signage warning of physical distancing and sanitary requirements is displayed
4. Associations/single affiliated teams to ensure their municipality is servicing and monitoring washrooms (if applicable). If not, the club/league must either do so themselves to current standards or ensure the facilities remain closed and notify all participants.
5. Associations/single affiliated teams should ensure concession stands have been permitted to open and are meeting all local health authority requirements for their sanctioned activities, or they remain closed.
6. Youth participants are to follow a rule of two when using the washroom. Either a member of their household accompanies them to the washroom, or if appropriate, a teammate, while respecting physical distancing.

APPENDIX

- Emergency Action Plan template
- Attendance & Screening sheet
- Softball Alberta Assumption of Risk & Waiver
- Softball Alberta Declaration