

The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor of California  
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State Public Health Officer Dr. Erica Pan, and Director Sandra Shewry  
PO Box 997377, MS 0500  
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October 7, 2020

Dear Governor Newsom, Acting Public Health Officer Dr. Pan, and Acting Public Health Director, Ms. Shewry

Re: Guidelines for Adult Recreational Team Sports / Softball

I am the Commissioner of the North County Senior Softball League-Competitive Division in Carlsbad. The NCSS-CD has over 100 active senior softball players, ages 50 to 80, who play 9 innings of slow pitch softball twice a week for approximately 50 weeks per year. Many also play in Senior Softball USA (“SSUSA”) Tournaments. (SSUSA is a national softball association located in Sacramento that sponsors softball tournaments, enacts rules of play including Covid-19 adaptations, and provides standards and assistance to softball leagues including the NCSS-CD). Softball is the main physical activity of our primarily retired membership.

North County also has several other senior softball leagues with even more membership than ours and who are equally committed to our sport. Thousands in California are equally affected by the current ban on adults playing sports activities.

The coronavirus pandemic hits our senior age group the hardest. While the headlines note our increased physical risk, only seniors note the quickened loss of stamina and muscle tone that happens with inactivity. No individual exercise provides the same physical and mental benefits as playing senior softball.

Senior softball also cultivates friendships. The most difficult adjustment to retirement is replacing work-related social connections. Our members meet that need through softball.

We agree that external threats to health and safety require adjustment to normal activities. We do not expect to resume playing team sports without science-supported restrictions minimizing Covid-19 risks. For example, the NCSS-CD league fully supports the California Guidance already published for re-starting youth sports activities.

We hereby petition for similar treatment.

Senior softball can adapt to Covid-19 restrictions while maintaining the essential skill and exercise components of our sport. For example, our NCSS-CD league intends to adapt by changing to a softball game called 5-on-5-on-5 (5-5-5) with rules that incorporate Covid-19 restrictions. Our game of 5-5-5 will reduce the risks created by Covid-19 by addressing the 8 risk factors identified in the Covid-19 Interim Guidance for Youth Sports, as follows:

**RISK FACTOR 1:** NCSS-CD rules for 5-5-5 softball will meet the Cohort Guidelines for Youth Sports

Senior softball normally includes 11 defensive players and 11 offensive players on each team plus a couple of substitutes for a total of about 26 players on the field. NCSS-CD rules for 5-5-5 play reduces the number of players to three teams of 5 players for a total of 15 players on the field: one Team of 4 outfielders and the pitcher; one Team of 5 infielders; and one Team of 5 batters.

Each team rotates after three outs at bat and three rotations complete an inning. Games are 5 or 6 innings instead of 9 innings. There are no additional managers or coaches on the field. Spectators are discouraged and not allowed if possible. Substitute players are minimized to 1 or 2 players, if any, and they stay off the field and are separated from players.

California Guidance for youth sports requires following the guidance related to Cohorts of children and youth. That guidance limits team participants to a stable group of 14 players and 2 coaches. The 3 teams and 15 player limit of NCSS-CD 5-5-5 matches that very restrictive guidance.

Playing with a smaller cohort structure of players “decreases opportunities for exposure to or transmission of the coronavirus, facilitates more efficient contact tracing in the event of a positive case, and allows for targeted testing, quarantine, and isolation of a single group.” See Covid-19 Interim Guidance: Youth Sports (Release date: August 3, 2020).

**RISK FACTOR 2:** The Type of Location favors the safety of 5-5-5 softball because it is an outdoor activity, played on a large field, and played without the typical spectators that routinely attend youth sports activities.

**RISK FACTOR 3:** The Distance Between Participants with 5-5-5 softball meets or exceeds normal social distancing requirements.

NCSS-CD rules for 5-5-5 play requires at least 10 feet of distance between players on the field or 6 feet of distance if a player wears a mask. All 11 fielding positions are greater than 10 feet away from each other. The catcher must stay 10 feet behind the batter unless he wears a mask and stays 6 feet away. Umpires are eliminated in our 5-5-5 rules. All 5 batters are required to separate themselves and separate their bats and equipment to avoid incidental social contact in passing. Players must stay at least 6 feet apart and wear a mask if they are inside a dugout and they must stay socially distant by at least 6 feet if they stay outside the fence of the playing field while waiting to bat.

**RISK FACTOR 4:** The length of time of play does not require breaks or intermissions.

Games last approximately 2 – 2 and 1/2 hours and proceed continuously without breaks or intermissions. Play is accelerated by requiring a player to hit the ball before 2 strikes and by counting all foul balls as strikes. Walks are not allowed.

**RISK FACTOR 5:** NCSS-CD rules ensure that 5-5-5 softball is a low risk, non-contact sport.

Softball is typically a low risk sport compared to football, wrestling, cheerleading, basketball, and hockey. NCSS-CD 5-5-5 rules minimize contact even further by prohibiting sliding into a base and by providing separated bases for runners and fielders at 1<sup>st</sup> and home plate.

**RISK FACTOR 6:** The softball is sanitized after 3 innings and multiple softballs are put in play during a normal game.

The softball is the only shared equipment in senior softball. NCSS-CD rules protect players by sanitizing the softball every 3 innings. Home runs and lost foul balls cause an exchange of softballs during the game. Some players wear hand gloves when fielding. The rules also remind players to wash their hands often, bring their own sanitizer to a game, and avoid touching their face without first washing their hands.

**RISK FACTOR 7:** Face Coverings are required.

All players must have face coverings to play. All players must wear a face mask and stay at least 6 feet away from each other when on the field or they must stay 10 feet away from each other if they are not wearing a mask except for incidental passing,

**RISK FACTOR 8:** Our NCSS-CD does not attract players from locations with different levels of community transmission.

Almost all of our players are from the Carlsbad area and live within San Diego County. The time it takes to drive to our park twice per week acts as a natural limitation to travelers from different counties. Other counties also have their own softball leagues so there is little incentive to travel to our league.

**Finally, all risks are significantly reduced** because we do not intend to play 5-5-5 as a competitive game or scrimmage. We will not even keep score. All play is for the sole purpose of providing aerobic exercise through skill-practice in batting and fielding and through running. Like all athletes, we simply rely on the inherent joy of playing our sport to maximize our physical and mental health.

**To summarize:** senior softball as modified by NCSS-CD rules for 5-5-5 play meets the current Youth Sports Guidelines for physical distancing of at least 6 feet with a stable cohort of a limited and stable number of participants; is played outdoors and not inside; prohibits play that might cause contact; does not allow congregating; and significantly modifies normal softball rules to specifically reduce the risk of transmission of Covid-19 virus among participants.

We respectfully petition the State of California to expedite creating Interim Covid-19 Public Health Guidelines that will allow senior softball players to immediately begin playing our healthy, adaptive, and safety-first model of 5-5-5 senior softball.

Thank you for your time,

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