

viaSport Return to Sport webinar

Sport Medicine, Sport Science

Kevin Bowie- viaSport Host

Dr. Andy Van Neutegem – OTP, Moderator

Dr. Jack Taunton – UBC

Samantha Pritchard – UBC

Dr. Paddy McCluskey – CSIP / Athletics Canada

Dana Agar-Newman - CSIP

What are some best practices for screening athletes prior to return to sport, or, for reporting self-reporting prior to arriving at a practice?

Sports looking for key indicators to appear on pre-screening, and questionnaires should consider.

- Recent fever (over 38 degrees) combined with chills
- Cough (barking or whistling) with sore throat
- Runny nose (not related to seasonal allergies)
- Contact with someone with COVID
- Travel in last 14 days
- Fatigue, headaches, muscle aches and pains - more than usual
- A loss of sense of taste or smell

For the older athletes: a loss of coordination or feeling their balance is off.

For the young athlete: more sluggishness or lack of appetite.

Dr. Jack Taunton: What is the risk of transmission through sweat?

There has been a fair amount of research done and, to this point, it is not spread by sweat. As we've heard it is spread by droplets from your mouth, your nose or if you have runny eyes it comes from there.

Dr. Jack Taunton: In your opinion what is the safe number of people in a running group and how far apart should they be?

Two meters is fine to walk but it's not to run. It should be three meters. And what is the safe number of runners within a group? Ideally four to five. Unless everybody is paying attention, you could increase that to six. For cycling the social distance is four to five meters. That is dependent on cross winds. With a heavy crosswind droplet spray increases. In this case you need more distance and the same with cyclists.

Samantha Pritchard: What additional health measures would you recommend Team Sport follow that may be different from Individual Sport? Do your recommendations vary with Indoor vs Outdoor training environments?

All sports should be following very similar basic health measures and these are things that are being put out by the BCCDC and Public Health in terms of hand hygiene, equipment sanitization and cleaning protocols. That being said, due to the nature of team sport, there is likely a need to be more vigilant in implementing and monitoring these health measures due to the number of athletes that you might have. Shared equipment will need to be more vigilantly cleaned. Pay attention to when you're cleaning them and how you're sharing the equipment. With the group size of athletes, individual sport is much easier to have that low number one athlete per coach or two or three per coach whereas team sports is much more challenging so you'll just have to be more conscious of how are you divvying up those group sizes to minimize the risk of transmission across the teams.

How does this is different from an indoor versus an outdoor environment?

With outdoor training it's being assumed that it's lower risk and this is due to the natural ventilation of being outside as well as the open space that you can naturally physical distance much better. So with indoor teams again it really comes down to vigilance. Entering an indoor facility has a high number of touch points, so with the indoor sports it does come down to maintaining a high level of hand hygiene, cleaning and sanitization protocols and having them done on a regular basis especially when you have multiple groups coming in and out of the same training facility.

Dr. Paddy McCluskey- How risky is sharing equipment with COVID 19?

With COVID the most important mode of spread is respiratory droplets. It's important to keep that in the back of your mind with all the measures we take. Fomites, refers to any object for which respiratory droplets that have the virus have landed on. If someone then touches that object and then touches their mouth or their eyes they can transmit the virus from that object. For example, a door handle up to the eyes. If someone that has the virus would cough or sneeze, respiratory droplets would be spread in a room they would land on the door handle you would open the door and then afterwards touch your face to scratch. It's a common habit that we all have and then you would transmit the virus to yourself. This reflects back to Sam's comments about outdoor training being safer than indoor training. It's really important that you're looking at the environment and ensuring that you have cleaning protocols that

you can apply to all the surfaces and objects. Surfaces you think might be damaged by cleaning products or ones that are difficult to clean regularly should be removed if you can.

Only use clean products that are approved by Health Canada, the Government of Canada has a list of all cleaning agents that are approved for cleaning services for infectious disease purposes. Every product should have a DIN, a drug identification number. The most common product out there is household bleach (10 mls of bleach diluted in 990 mls of water). It is important to note that recurrent use of bleach can damage some surfaces and so that's where you need to put some thought into what you're cleaning and maybe consider other products.

Dana Agar-Newman: From your perspective, what are the reasonable health considerations and best practices that an athlete should consider when entering the S&C environment?

Make sure to check-in with the athlete on their psychological readiness to return to the training environment, including what concerns they have. It is we take the time to have empathy for the athletes and their concerns, so we can address them. The next thing is to gauge what the athlete has been doing during their time away from formalized training. We want to reduce a rash of injuries as we return. Coaches are often biased towards making up for lost time. We should realize what the athlete's doing currently, then slowly progress from what they're doing to where we want to be when their seasons begin. Daily symptom checks are important. Then I think you have to do an audit of your training environment. Can you adequately social distance? If not, how can you design your training sessions so that social distancing can occur? Are there barriers you can use? Can you remove items that might be shared between athletes? Next are sanitization protocols and appropriate cleaning agents. There's a difference between cleaning and disinfecting items.

Sam Pritchard: What are some of the key considerations for a PSO or a club before engaging with other PSOs or clubs from a competition perspective?

We've started that plan but have to look to our public health authorities for what's reasonable and what are we allowed to do. Physical distancing is a major piece that's currently in place. We will need those regulations to change before we'll be able to engage in what we would normally see as sport. That being said we have started already look at how we can modify rules that fit within the public health guidelines. That may help reintegrate the competitive aspect of play. Consider keeping competition within your own club or between clubs only in your localized area. PSO's need a clear understanding of the travel risk associated before looking to compete outside your municipality. Understanding the community risks within regions is key. If there is a high level of community spread in that region that poses an increased risk to your athletes or your staff, don't take that risk. Can you achieve your goals with intra club play versus inter club play.

Dr. Paddy McCluskey- : Is it reasonable for sports to recommend their members to wear a mask? Is there a respiratory risk to wearing a mask when exercising at medium or high intensity?

When you're by yourself training in isolation you don't need to wear a mask for any reason. When you're training with others the most important question is, is it okay for you to be training with others? This speaks to our collective personal responsibility not to attend training with others if we have any symptoms. We want to create a low risk group and establish that being around others is okay. In BC, the limits on gathering size of gatherings is 50. So if you're in this low-risk group, then it's okay to be training with others. Now, should you wear a mask? It's actually really difficult to exercise with a mask. The mask quickly becomes saturated with the humid air and it loses effectiveness. Also important to note the mask doesn't protect you, it protects others from you. If people are in this low risk group and acknowledging how ineffective a mask would be, then I don't think we need to recommend people be wearing masks when they exercise. Social distancing is the key in all cases. The mask is not meant to replace the limits on social or group size gatherings. It's not meant to replace physical distancing measures either.

Dana Agar-Newman: How would you advise we approach the training environment in terms of spotting? ie strength conditioning, working with weights or even in gymnastics environments

The first thing to ask, is it necessary? There are multiple ways to get strong. A lot of things we do are what are called path dependencies, we do it because that's what historically we've always done. We need to critically evaluate our programs. Is this movement necessary? If you come up with the answer yes, then is there a way that you can make a subtle change in the movement where you no longer need to spot? For example, a back squat can be modified to a front squat where the athlete can easily ditch the bar with no need to spot. An example of a para athlete, taking them off a bench put them on the floor. So there's lots of creative ways you can modify movements so that you may not have to spot. If you're a spot in gymnastics, can you use extra mats? But that brings us back to cleaning ie. the mats. So you have to really be asking those hard questions, can you tweak the movement and say yes, I have to do this movement this exact way, then move to washing and sanitizing your hands and equipment beforehand. In this case the spot could use a mask, then post exercise, washing and sanitizing your hands again.

Sam Pritchard: What's your experience now given all of the conditions you have to deal with, what legal information have you received?

The short answer is no, it's not the club or organization's responsibility to inform everyone. It's a health matter and should be treated within the federal privacy regulations. It is breach of confidentiality to share a positive test. Especially sharing who those individuals are. We're very lucky in BC that we have a very robust public health system and it is their job to do the contact tracing. They will be in charge of informing everyone of risk or will contact an individual that has tested positive. Organizations can help this process and make sure that they're logging registration or keeping charts of who's been in the facility or who's been at training sessions during particular times. If Public Health in your region does reach out and say we've had a positive test and this athlete has been identified you're able to provide that information to Public Health. Providing that information to Public Health it is not a breach of confidentiality because that is for the best interest of public health.

Dr. Paddy McCluskey: Can you provide an update or response to hosting of events or traveling outside of provinces. What are some of the considerations we need to think about?

This is a question that has a couple of different layers. Right now BC remains in a state of emergency on the BC CDC site. This asks residents of BC to remain in their communities and avoid all non-essential travel. The public health officer will determine that change. When it comes to the specific consideration around hosting, is your group under 50, can I achieve the same goals by holding a training session within my group, can I manage appropriate physical distancing? It's a good question and I don't have the answer. But there are things to consider. Just to clarify, groups under 50 is everybody. That's the athletes, the coaches, any officials and anybody that might be there to observe. Consider the officials demographic, they are often from an older generation. This places them in a separate risk group. Last, consider the site itself; what are the enhanced cleaning protocols, entry and exit, flow to ensure no crossing of paths and physical distance, log all participants for contact tracing.

Dr. Paddy McCluskey: With British Columbia being right next to Alberta, how should we consider interacting with border municipalities given the current situation? What are some of the considerations people need to think about before they travel into another province for a tournament?

If BC remains in a state of emergency that probably reflects the fact that there's still concerns about community transmission and a risk to the more vulnerable in our communities. People should continue to consider provincial guidelines. Consider what is going on in our communities where winter sport athletes train in Calgary? Some Alberta athletes travel from Calgary to Whistler. Consider that the City of Calgary has almost twice as many cases as the province of BC. Whistler has no cases. That's a really different consideration than two small communities straddling the border of Alberta, where there are no cases in either community. I think for sports in these small communities its okay to reach out to your public health officials or your community physicians to get their take. They may have a better idea of what's presenting in the hospital.

Dana Agar-Newman: From a safe sport perspective we have the rule of two, how do we respect the rule of two during these times?

It's important that we always have at least two athletes in the training environment, and an opportunity for coaches. Often, coaches want to hop in and provide the solution for athletes and I think this is actually a great opportunity to develop resilient athletes who have skills and strategies to problem solve on their own. I'm proud that during this period athletes have been trained on their own buy watching the videos of themselves and submitting it. When we have to be in the gym, the rule of two should be considered with spacing between the athletes. Make sure that people are in a position where they can see one another. Don't be alone with an athlete and use a back to the wall technique, where the trainer has their back to the wall to see the whole room in front of them. Ask yourself; does the athletes need to enter the training environment? Can you continue with online training sessions? If yes, make sure that you have two athletes on those calls because the rule of two applies to those settings as well.

Dr. Jack Taunton: How do we manage risks with vulnerable people before we bring them into a training environment? Can you comment on considerations for vulnerable people?

It the very young group and individuals that are over 70 that are most at risk. Consider coaches, officials, staff and athletes that have comorbidities, like; compromised immune system, received chemotherapy medication, transplants, corticosteroids for asthma or arthritis, an autoimmune disease, or long-standing condition (diabetes emphysema asthma), a heart condition, high spinal cord injury or individuals who regularly go to a hospital. Simply going to a hospital, more frequently, increases your risk. New research indicates that it can take at least eight weeks for the individual to recover their cardiovascular system with an inflammatory attack of COVID 19. There are some indicators that it can also affect brain health, symptomatic of a concussion or somebody with a chronic brain condition, like Parkinson's. The studies are emerging concerning the heart. COVID 19 can cause an inflammatory reaction in the heart muscle called myocarditis which, under extreme exertion, can lead to heart failure or arrhythmias. I would recommend echocardiogram testing for individuals experiencing these symptoms before they are allowed to come back to training. These symptoms are likely not going to last forever but it will certainly compromise their cardiovascular program, go slow.

Samantha Pritchard: Should we develop a return to sport guideline for our club? How do we go about doing this?

viaSport has done a great job with very general guidelines that sports can look at to build their own. Use the plans already published to help yours. Alignment and consistency can be helpful. You may not have to change very much. The second piece that I think is really important is the facility. So if you are an indoor sport and you don't own your own facility. You're likely renting space from a municipal or a private facility, understand what their guidelines look like, this way you can work with them every step along the way. The other piece that's really important to note is that Worksafe BC does require all employers to have a COVID 19 safety plan. Think of these three elements within your Return to Sport plan

Dr. Paddy McCluskey: Should we be getting tests done in a provincial camp environment to safeguard our athletes if we think they have symptoms?

Right now testing is available for anyone with symptoms, even mild symptoms. It's not available for asymptomatic athletes, so we're not in a position just to offer it to teams to ensure that they're all safe to train together. Other measures that we've discussed to ensure the training is done safely are the appropriate way to go. Organizations and athletes should have a very low threshold for considering testing and if they present with symptoms they should go get tested. If you if you're being tested you need to take steps around self-isolation, until the test result has been reported. Even if the result is reported and you're negative, you should still probably self-isolate until you're symptom-free and you've been cleared by your physician.

Dana Agar-Newman: How do I modify training programs when we cannot have large groups training at one time?

Setting priorities can help ie. Olympic qualifying athlete vs general performance athlete. You may have to bite the bullet and provide some in person training for an Olympic qualifier compared to the general training group. Eg, my divers, I have two athletes that have a legit shot at Tokyo. I'm taking those athletes and train them in person. But then the other 10 athletes I'm going to continue with online training sessions, which allow me to see them all in one touch point. So I think we need to be creative and ask: Do I need to see these athletes face to face, if the answer is yes you have to break them up into small groups. Try move your training outdoors. And another thing is to really simplify your sessions so they're easy to manage.