



# Press Release

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For Immediate Release

January 25, 2021

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## **SUFFOLK COUNTY EXECUTIVE STEVE BELLONE ANNOUNCES COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TO ALLOW FOR THE RESUMPTION OF HIGH-RISK HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS**

***Suffolk County is First in the State to Require Mandatory Weekly Testing of Student Athletes for High-Risk Sports***

***Suffolk County Unveils 'The Champion of the Community Pledge' to Encourage Students to Comply with COVID-19 Safety Recommendations and Protocols***

***Starting in March, County Parks will be Available to Host Cross Country Meets for Teams in Need of Locations***

Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone today announced a comprehensive plan that would allow for sports deemed as high-risk to resume with common sense safety measures and guidelines in place. The County's plan, which was developed in close consultation with the Suffolk County School Superintendents Association and Section XI, will allow for approximately 21,500 student athletes to participate in their respective high-risk sports.

Additionally, due to previous locations being unavailable due to the ongoing pandemic, County Executive Bellone announced that various parks locations across the County will now be available to cross country teams in need of outdoor space.

"As a parent, I understand just how critical of an outlet sports are for our youth," **said Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone**. "With safety at the forefront, we are committed to working with all of our partners to ensure our student athletes who have been on the sidelines for months are able to get back in the game they love. Today's announcement is a win for all athletes, parents, and coaches as we work to regain some sense of normalcy."

While high-risk sports will be allowed to resume in Suffolk County, the County Health Department has issued guidelines that will help protect public health and ensure we continue the progress we are making in the fight against COVID-19.

With testing as one of the most powerful tools in containing the spread of COVID-19, Suffolk County will be the first in state to require mandatory weekly testing of student athletes for high-risk sports. The County will provide rapid tests to school districts, free of charge, to administer weekly testing by the school nurses. Suffolk County will receive an initial allocation from New York State for 20,000 rapid tests, and will continue to seek additional allocations to provide to schools to administer tests each week.

Following CDC and New York State guidance, if a student participating in high-risk sports is found to be COVID-19 positive, they will be required to adhere to a 10-day quarantine, and each coach will be required to supply information to the County Health Department for a comprehensive case and contact tracing investigation.

Suffolk County Department of Health guidelines to ensure safe play include:

- Taking the temperatures of players and coaches prior to practices and games.
- Masks should be worn whenever possible, especially when on the sidelines not engaged in play.
- Enforce social distancing when not engaged in play.
- Require hand washing or sanitizing of hands before and after practices and games, and after sharing equipment.
- Minimize equipment sharing. Players should bring their own equipment; have individual water bottles, and no sharing of food.
- Maintain attendance logs of players, staff, and coaches. Attendance logs should include contact information.
- Play in smart spaces. Always outdoors if possible. Use large and well-ventilated spaces for play.
- Consider dividing larger teams into smaller groups and stagger practices with different times or days. Limit those individuals not essential to the practice from attending.

Additionally, as part of the safety guidelines, Suffolk County launched the “Champion of the Community Pledge” to encourage smart decisions during the season, including complying with all COVID-19 safety recommendations and protocols. The Suffolk Community Champion Pledge asks student athletes to:

- **S**tay safe, healthy and informed of COVID -19 updates both on and off the field
- **U**nite with my team members and school community to have a memorable season
- **F**ollow face mask, hygiene and social distancing guidelines

- Follow all of the additional health and safety requirements of the school. This may include participating in testing, self-quarantining, and contact tracing.
- Operate in a healthy environment and complete daily health attestations
- Lead by example and support members of my team who may be experiencing physical and mental health challenges
- Know that I am a role model for my team members and community

Last year, Section XI announced plans to run three shortened sports seasons for JV and Varsity athletes, starting with winter from January 4 to February 27, then fall sports from March 1 to April 25, and the spring sports season from April 26 to June 19. Earlier this month, low and moderate risk winter sports including, boys and girls winter track, fencing, bowling and boys swimming resumed in Suffolk County. Sports deemed high-risk, including boys and girls basketball, wrestling and competitive cheer will resume on February 1, and conclude on February 27.

On average there are more than 60,000 student athletes participating in various high school sports during a normal school year. By allowing high-risk sports such as basketball, wrestling and competitive cheer to resume, the County Health Department is providing opportunities for approximately 21,500 student athletes to compete in their respective sports for the upcoming winter, fall and spring seasons.

Additionally, County Executive Bellone directed the Suffolk County Parks Department to work with Section XI, the governing body for high school sports in the County, to set up a fair and equitable process for local school districts to schedule cross country meets in County Parks. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, locations that had previously hosted meets are now unavailable.

Parks sites that would be recommended for Cross Country races include:

- Cathedral Pines County Park in Middle Island
- Southaven County Park in Yaphank
- Farmingville Hills County Park in Farmingville
- West Hills County Park in Huntington
- Indian Island County Park in Riverhead
- Blydenburgh County Park in Smithtown
- Cedar Point County Park in East Hampton
- Gardiner County Park in Bay Shore
- Sears Bellows County Park in Hampton Bays

By making County parks available, the Parks Department is helping to ensure that the season, which will begin on March 1, can continue on without any interruptions. The meets will include strict safety measures and guidelines to protect student athletes, coaches, and any staff onsite.