



## Position Paper

### Local Sport Organizations' Appeal to the Government of Ontario for Reopening of Outdoor Local Sport.

May 26, 2021

On May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the Sport Aurora Board held a Special General Meeting open to all 42 Member Local Sport Organizations. The single-topic Meeting was to discuss the position of the Membership with respect to the opening of outdoor sports activities that have been under variable orders, restricting and often prohibiting activity for many months. The recent announcement of the Three-Step Roadmap Reopening has been included here in Appendix 1.

It was noted that **local sport interests differ from the National and Provincial Sport Organization perspectives** and are **also different from the perspectives of Municipalities** who, in Aurora, are largely facility and general recreation providers. **Local Sport Organizations have not been treated as businesses** that provide valuable services to each Community in Ontario. **The interests of local sport, therefore, have not been specifically considered** as (presumably) governments have not included LSO's in conversations about the importance of their contributions to each Community they collectively serve. Local sport organizations have proved to be diligent and effective during previous reopening and **that 100% compliance with public health guidelines resulted in no outbreaks of COVID-19.**

The Purpose of this Position Statement is to identify the circumstances related to the opening of local sport and propose a solution that will comply with and extend public health guidelines if necessary, maintain the safety of participants and provide the social, emotional and physical benefits of sport participation to communities.

#### Statement of the Problem

1. This Position Paper respects and follows the research to date on the effect that the pandemic has had on the **physical, emotional, and social health of children, youth, and adults** of all abilities who have been restricted from participating in both individual and organized activity for almost 14 months. There is universal agreement that the **pandemic has caused a harmful reduction in physical activity due to restrictions** placed on group gathering, physical distancing, and other recommendations designed to reduce community spread. (1,2,3,4,5,7) Evidence also shows that **emotional and social disruptions** related to the restrictions of activity have occurred that are harmful, not only to children and youth, but adults as well (6, 8, 9).
2. The Sport Aurora Membership recognizes the **importance of slowing and eliminating community spread** of the contagion. They also understand the **important role that**



**increased vaccination** has demonstrated in reducing the incidence of virus spread in our community and elsewhere. **Safety is a core value for all organized sport.**

3. Sport Aurora Members also understand the importance of halting this pandemic **through community cooperation and collaboration** with government and Public Health officials.
4. **Sport Aurora Members are themselves businesses** --most not-for-profit-- that have been seriously harmed by restrictions. The Members identified significant **reductions in participants and revenue, increased costs of operation, lack of availability or variable availability of permits from the municipality and other providers** where programming occurs. In addition, there has been a reported loss of **sponsorship revenue** that, in normal times, keeps prices low. The **loss of valued volunteers** who contribute to their businesses and keep costs low to participants and their families is also a concern.
5. While Local Sport Businesses have been significantly impacted, all **have shown fiscal responsibility** by introducing measures to reduce expenses where possible and alleviate the financial impact of the pandemic while maintaining allowed service levels to their members. They have researched grants that may help survival, have pivoted where possible to provide activity when allowed, and done what any business would do to sustain themselves. **According to local surveys, seventy-five percent (75%) of these businesses do not qualify for Federal and Provincial as well as Foundation grants** due to their not-for-profit status or their balance sheets.
6. In additional surveys conducted locally within the last two months, Sport Organizations identified that **80% of their revenue comes from participant fees and 20% were 'concerned' or 'extremely concerned' with their sustainability** if restrictions were not lifted.
7. Recently, the Ontario Science Advisory Table (10 ) stated that the third wave of COVID spread has **been due almost entirely by indoor contact** in workplaces and specific hot-spots. **Public Health Authorities have urged everyone to get outside for our health. COVID transmission outdoors, it has stated, is exceedingly rare** if people take basic precautions about physical distancing and masking if necessary.
8. Continuing, the Provincial government's Science Advisory Table, published a bulletin called "Fighting Covid 19 in Ontario-The Way Forward", that is quite explicit about outdoor activity. Under the heading "What Won't Work," (10), it states, "**Policies that discourage safe outdoor activity will not control COVID-19 and will disproportionately harm children and those who do not have access to their own greenspace, especially those living in crowded conditions.**"
9. Dr. Peter Juni, the Director of the Ontario Science Table, reported that **outdoor activities are "probably roughly 20 times safer than indoor activities"** — if basic precautions about staying two metres apart are met.
10. **Sport Aurora agrees with the science.** It knows the importance of outdoor activity for the sake of our physical, emotional, and social health for all ages, genders, and ability



levels as well as the importance of activity-related social connection. It believes the science and urges the government to follow the science and encourage people to play safely.

### Further Relevant Information

1. In the past four weeks, COVID-19 spread has been reduced in York Region yet outdoor activities such as **Farmer's Markets been allowed to open, with the approval of public health authorities.** The science appears sufficient to allow these types of businesses to operate. **Evidence of reduced spread** has been published daily, and the Province has published new guidelines for the re-opening of the economy, yet **local sport has not been clearly identified in these new orders**, nor has any supplementary attempts at providing protocols to allow our local sport organizations to open, as has been done with Farmer's Markets.
2. **Vaccinations have now hit full-stride and the percentage of vaccinated citizens in Ontario has climbed dramatically (11,12).** The new Re-opening plan (13) recognizes the importance of vaccination and is a critical metric in re-opening. There is no doubt that vaccination is becoming the premier risk reduction strategy that will continue for months. In York Region first dose vaccinations are reported to be 70% at the time of this Position Statement and second doses have been reported at 3.8%. Meanwhile, the **fourth season of restricted participant registration has not been considered for local sport businesses.** These businesses provide important local activity opportunities using professionally trained leaders who are committed to safe opening of sport and are experts at doing so.
3. **None of our Sport Aurora organizations experienced an outbreak** during their 2020 seasons nor was one case traced to their sporting events. The respective leagues' Return-to-Play protocols were 100% successful in maintaining safety standards.

### A Request to Re-open Outdoor Local Sport Activities

Local Sport businesses **have proved** that they can comply with orders to monitor numbers of participants, ensure distancing, and they have applied sanitization and other protocols imposed upon them in order to return-to-play safely. **Sport Organizations are supervised, they are structured, and they are highly organized with safety as a core value**

The current circumstances warrant a **thorough review of the science and discussion of risk management for outdoor organized/supervised and structured sport participation** in each of Ontario's Communities.



*Sport Aurora therefore requests that the Government of Ontario:*

1. trusts Local Sport Organizations to manage further risk with guidance from York Region Public Health and in partnership with providers of sports facilities, similar to the special circumstances afforded Farmer's Markets.
2. recognizes that local sport organizations have the **capacity to provide safe return to sport participation** for a large segment of the population and relieving the damage done by 14 months of the pandemic. With the guidance and approval of local health authorities, sport is capable of **delivering supervised, organized sport activities outdoors** areas where distancing can be maintained. We believe that local sport organizations should be deemed an essential service and restrictions allow a reasonable and safe return that benefits many participants.
3. requires all Local Sport Organizations to provide an approved **risk management plan** that conforms to public health guidelines to sport facility providers as a requirement of permitting. This plan will guarantee proper supervision and risk mitigation protocols.
4. requires all Local Sport Organizations to be responsible for ensuring that **accurate and timely communication** regarding preventive measures be provided to all members of their sport community to ensure compliance.
5. **Exempts Local Sport Organizations who comply with Items 3 and 4 (above) from Step 1 restrictions and moves them immediately to Step 2 and allow 25 (or more) persons per outdoor session with a professional coach or coaches supervising activities, including risk reduction strategies.**



## APPENDIX 1

### The Three-Step Roadmap to Safely Re-Open the Province

Roadmap to Reopen outlines three steps to easing public health measures, guided by the following principles:

- **Step One** An initial focus on resuming outdoor activities with smaller crowds where the risk of transmission is lower, and permitting retail with restrictions. **This includes allowing outdoor gatherings of up to 10 people**, outdoor dining with up to four people per table and non-essential retail at 15 per cent capacity.
- **Step Two** Further expanding outdoor activities and resuming limited indoor services with small numbers of people where face coverings are worn. This includes **outdoor gatherings of up to 25 people, outdoor sports and leagues**, overnight camps, personal care services where face coverings can be worn and with capacity limits, as well as indoor religious services, rites or ceremony gatherings at 15 per cent capacity.
- **Step Three** Expanding access to indoor settings, with restrictions, including where there are larger numbers of people and where face coverings can't always be worn. This includes indoor sports and recreational fitness; indoor dining, museums, art galleries and libraries, and casinos and bingo halls, with capacity limits.

The province will remain in each step for at least 21 days to evaluate any impacts on key public health and health system indicators. If at the end of the 21 days, the following vaccination thresholds have been met, along with positive trends in other key public health and health system indicators, then the province will move to the next step:

- **Step 1:** 60 per cent of adults vaccinated with one dose.
- **Step 2:** 70 per cent of adults vaccinated with one dose and 20 per cent vaccinated with two doses.
- **Step 3:** 70 to 80 per cent of adults vaccinated with one dose and 25 per cent vaccinated with two doses.



## References

The following are only a few of the references that identify the value of physical activity for all ages and genders that speak to the importance of getting back to play.

1. The Impact of COVID-19 on Physical Activity Behavior and Well-Being of Canadians, *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 2020, 17(11), 3899; <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17113899>
2. Depression, Anxiety and Stress during COVID-19: Associations with Changes in Physical Activity, Sleep, Tobacco and Alcohol Use in Australian Adults, *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 2020, 17(11), 4065; <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17114065>
3. The Impact of COVID-19 on Physical Activity Behavior and Well-Being of Canadians, Iris A. Lesser Carl P. Nienhuis, Faculty of Health Sciences, Kinesiology Chilliwack campus at CEP, University of the Fraser Valley, 45190 Chilliwack, BC, Canada, *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 2020, 17(11), 3899; <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17113899>
4. Effects of COVID-19 Home Confinement on Eating Behaviour and Physical Activity: Results of the ECLB-COVID19 International Online Survey, *Nutrients* 2020, 12(6), 1583; <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu12061583>
5. The impact of COVID-19 on physical activity behavior and well-being of Canadians IA Lesser, CP Nienhuis et al, *Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, May, 2020
6. The Mental Health Benefits of Physical Activity in Older Adults Survive the COVID-19 Pandemic, Daniel D.Callow<sup>ab</sup> Naomi A.Arnold-Nedimala<sup>a</sup>Leslie S.Jordan M.S.<sup>ab</sup>Gabriel, PenaM.S.<sup>a</sup> JunyeonWonM.A.<sup>a</sup>John L.Woodard, American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry. Volume 28, Issue 10, October 2020.
7. Reduced Physical Activity During COVID-19 Pandemic in Children With Congenital Heart Disease, Nicole M. Hemphill BSc Mimi TY Kuan BSc, MSc Kevin C. Harris MD, MHSc, Canadian Journal of Cardiology, Volume 36, Issue 7, July 2020, Pages 1130-1134
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9. Physical Activity as a Coping Strategy for Mental Health Due to the COVID-19 Virus: A Potential Disconnect Among Canadian Adults? *Front. Commun.*, 24 September 2020 | <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2020.571833>
10. Fighting COVID-19 in Ontario: The Way Forward. *Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table*. 2021;1(23).<https://doi.org/10.47326/ocsat.2021.02.23.1.0>
11. [https://covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-19-vaccines-ontario?gclid=Cj0KCQjwwLKFBhDPARIsAPzPi-JIbII7B7YYoX7thjknuh-X6zHIGCuFBVustKW2gmQBZjbySLiLFvsaAoBLEALw\\_wcB&gclsrc=aw.ds#covid-19-immunization-program](https://covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-19-vaccines-ontario?gclid=Cj0KCQjwwLKFBhDPARIsAPzPi-JIbII7B7YYoX7thjknuh-X6zHIGCuFBVustKW2gmQBZjbySLiLFvsaAoBLEALw_wcB&gclsrc=aw.ds#covid-19-immunization-program).
12. <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/data-and-analysis/infectious-disease/covid-19-data-surveillance/covid-19-data-tool?tab=summary>
13. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1000161/ontario-releases-three-step-roadmap-to-safely-reopen-the-province>