

Athlete Return to Training Guidelines During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Ty Walrod and Mike McCormick keep their distance for coronavirus concerns while using a phone app to do a full body workout at Mission Dolores Park in San Francisco, Tuesday, March 24, 2020. Photo:

By Robert L. Herron |

Without question the SARS-CoV-2 virus, COVID-19 illness, and public-health responses have made tremendous impact on the world in which we live. As the health experts continue to learn more about the virus and public-health measures evolve, in the coming weeks and months ahead – more people will

work. The process of returning to work will differ for everyone. As such, in the world of sport, the of returning to training and competition must be met with the reality that things have changed.

To this end, the National Strength and Conditioning Association ([NSCA](#)), and their COVID-19 Return Training Taskforce, recently published [guidelines](#) to assist those preparing for the new normal. With report, the guidelines discuss a number of issues that require an altered plan of action for those who return to training for sport and sport competitions. The guidelines are summarized below. It should be noted that everyone is encouraged to read the full guidelines and resources, follow best-practices, and observe policies put forth by one's organization, local-, state-, and federal governments.

Minimizing Risk – Scheduling

Currently, the public health recommendations still encourage [social distancing](#). In sport, this is obviously a challenge. Those working in sport should attempt to minimize the COVID-19 related risks for everyone involved by making sure the training schedule allows for smaller group sizes, minimizes person-to-person exposures, allows appropriate time to clean facilities between sessions. This is important in training applications but also in other day-to-day activities (i.e., film sessions, medical treatment, meetings, etc.).

Sanitation Procedures – People, Facilities, & Equipment

Safety should be the number one priority in all sport-related activities. Weight-room training surfaces and group spaces (i.e., restrooms, meeting spaces, etc.) should be cleaned regularly and between exposures. Proper cleaning supplies should be readily available. Furniture items and equipment that are unnecessary should be removed and placed in storage to reduce the number of items that need cleaning. Fresh air circulation and allowing sunlight to enter the space are recommended.

Training Safety Following Period of Inactivity

For a number of reasons, athletes may have experienced limited exposure to training during this, unprecedented period. As such, the NSCA's Guidelines recommend two resources.

1. [CSCCa & NSCA Joint Consensus Guidelines for Transition Periods: Safe Return to Training Following Inactivity](#) was published in 2019 and aims to provide guidelines for protecting athletes for situations similar to those most are experiencing due to the pandemic. In short, coaches should refer guidelines to alter training sessions to account for risks related to exertional heat illness, exertional rhabdomyolysis, and cardiorespiratory failure in athletes. The guidelines suggest alterations for the first 2-4 weeks

2. The NCAA Sport Science Institute's [Interassociation Recommendations for Preventing Catastric Injuries in Death in Collegiate Athletes](#) was also published in 2019 and provides further support respect to lowering risk for strength and conditioning coaches – more specifically – at the NCAA

Along with individual-athlete and environmental considerations, the guidelines recommend no more training sessions per week, with 1-2 days of recovery between sessions, and favor the upper-limits of recovery time with respect to work-to-rest ratios. Additionally, initial programming should eccentric- and plyometric-heavy activities until athletes have had time to adjust to consistent training stimuli. An initial focus of introductory programming is encouraged with an emphasis on redevelop dynamic-movement patterns within the warm-up period. As always, strength and conditioning programs should follow best practices.

Other Important Factors

The athlete's primary needs are still of utmost importance. This includes reacclimating to their "normal" schedule, managing stress, getting an appropriate amount of sleep, meeting their nutritional needs taking care of themselves and other non-athletic responsibilities.

In summary, these are difficult times. When working with athletes, make safety a priority and follow policies established by health experts and those within your government. It is important to have a place that protects the athletes and those working with and around them. While transitioning back to a regular schedule, be mindful of COVID-19 testing and tracing resources that may be available to your organization or community. I encourage all to please review the [guidelines](#) and related resources. In the guidelines one will also find a checklist, which could be especially helpful in developing a plan that fits one's athletes and organization. Below, are two infographics created by [Adam Virgile](#) that dispense from these resources in a creative and concise format.

COVID-19: NSCA Guidance on Safe Return to Training for Athletes

Minimizing Risk: Managing Schedules and Teams Training Sessions



Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) Resources:



- ✓ Adhere to social gathering and distancing policies at your institution, according to local, state, and federal authorities.
- ✓ Group size counts should include both athletes and staff, and account for transition periods between sessions.
- ✓ Schedule mid- and post-workout cleaning periods, allowing a 10-15 minute buffer between teams or groups.
- ✓ Limit or stagger training groups throughout workout blocks and/or alternate training days.
- ✓ Favor efficient training methods, limiting groups to 2-3 non-consecutive sessions per week.
- ✓ Avoid person-to-person contact while spotting with use of bar catches and the two-spotter technique.
- ✓ For programming purposes, consider grouping athletes based on conditioning status.
- ✓ Create exercise pairings to limit weight room traffic; Or one-way traffic flow based on entrances and exits.
- ✓ Maximize fresh air flow in the weight room, and a relative humidity $\leq 60\%$.
- ✓ Use outdoor training spaces whenever possible.
- ✓ Keep doors propped open and lights on throughout the day.



Facility & Equipment: Cleaning Sanitation Procedures

- ✓ Clean all weight room surfaces with germicide
- ✓ Consider providing masks and/or gloves.
- ✓ Educate on weight room upkeep expectation onboarding meetings with new athletes.
- ✓ Provide COVID-19 related updates to weight
- ✓ Promote hand washing before and after work
- ✓ Keep extra bottles of disinfectant for athletes equipment after use, and provide hand saniti
- ✓ Don't share cloth towels or rags.
- ✓ Remove and store extra loose equipment fro floor to minimize cleaning surfaces.
- ✓ Carry a personal water bottle instead of drink the community water fountain.
- ✓ Delegate staff cleaning duties, especially to shared pieces of equipment, including medic dumbbells, kettlebells, weight belts, bars and
- ✓ Ensure that cleaning and sanitation procedu to restrooms, locker rooms, carpet and floori mats, water fountains, and athlete nutrition "I

Training Safety: Risk Factors Following Periods of Inactivity



- ✓ Avoid high-volume submaximal exercises to fatigue, or performed within in a limited time frame.
- ✓ Emphasize a 10-20 minute daily dynamic warm-up for reestablishing sport-related movement patterns.
- ✓ Consider that prolonged inactivity increases the likelihood of delayed onset muscle soreness.
- ✓ Communicate regularly with the medical & coaching staffs about at-risk athletes, including athletes cardiac abnormalities, history of exertional or nonexertional collapse, asthma, and diabetes.
- ✓ Consider the use of daily readiness surveys and/or workload monitoring for tracking athlete status.
- ✓ Plan & adjust workouts to match environmental factors, especially in cases of high heat & humidity.
- ✓ Do not perform physically exhausting drills for the purpose of developing "mental toughness."

The 50/30/20/10 Rule: Conditioning Training

- ★ COVID-19: All Student-Athletes Returning from Inactivity
- Normal Circumstances: Returning Student-Athletes



The F.I.T. Rule: Weight Train

F.I.T.	Week
FREQUENCY Sessions per Movement or Muscle Group <i>Adapted for COVID-19</i>	2 Sessions per Week
INTENSITY Sets x Reps %1RM as a Decimal for Each Periodized Lift	11-30 Un
TIME Rest Interval	1:4 Work:Re



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Primary reference: National Strength and Conditioning Association COVID-19 Return to Training Task Force. COVID-19: NSCA Guidance on Safe Return to Training for Athletes. May 2020. Available at: <http://nsca.com/covid-19-return-to-training>
Additional references: Catersano, A., et al. (2019). CSCCa and NSCA Joint Consensus Guidelines for Transition Periods: Safe Return to Training Following Inactivity. *Strength and Conditioning Journal*, 41(3), pp. 1-23. NCAA SSI Interassociation Recommendations: Preventing Catastrophic Injury and Death in Collegiate Athletics. July 2019. Available at: <http://www.ncaa.org/sport-science-institute/preventing-catastrophic-injury-and-death-collegiate-athletes>

CSCCa and NSCA Joint Consensus Guidelines for Transition Periods: Safe Return to Training Following Inactivity

Conditioning Activities The 50/30/20/10 Rule

Aim: to ensure that strength & conditioning coaches are evaluating their programs to be certain that student-athletes return to training in a safe, effective manner

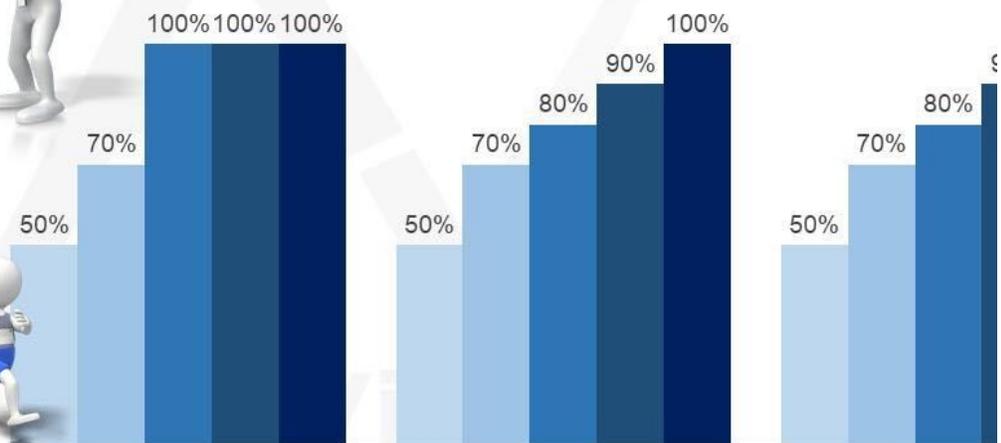
1 The 50/30/20/10 rule provides recommended percentages of weekly volumes and/or workloads for conditioning in the first 2-4 weeks of return to training following inactivity

2 Percentages are based on the uppermost volume of the conditioning program



Percent of Maximum Conditioning Volume per For Safe Return to Training Following Inactivity

Week 1 Week 2 Week 3 Week 4 Week 5



EHI= exertional heat illness
ER = exertional rhabdomyolysis

Returning student-athletes or new sport coach

New student-athletes or new head strength coach

Return from EHI, E inactivity



Created by Adam Virgile
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Graphic References

Catersano, A., Decker, D., Snyder, B., Feigenbaum, M., Glass, R., House P., Sharp, C., Waller, M. and Witherspoon, Z., 2019. CSCCa and NSCA Joint Consensus Guidelines for Transition Periods: Safe Return to Training Following Inactivity. *Strength & Conditioning Journal*, 41(3), pp.1-23.

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