

How Do I Gradually Return-to-Play after COVID-19?

What is a return-to-play protocol?

The goal of a return-to-play (RTP) protocol is to gradually and safely increase the athlete's physical activity after an illness or injury. With any viral infection (including but not limited to COVID-19) you need to recover from your infection. This means your symptoms, including fever, need to resolve with no use of medications or treatment.

You may feel like you are out of shape when trying to return to physical activity after an illness.

Before starting any gradual RTP, your doctor should determine your recovery period based on how severe the COVID-19 infection was, along with verifying that your symptoms are resolved.

Below is a potential gradual RTP schedule. Gradual RTP will occur **over at least 7 days** and will be adjusted based on your type of previous physical activity and sport.

Stop the activity and contact your doctor if you have any **red flag symptoms** such as:

- Chest pain
- Difficulty breathing
- Palpitations (fast, strong, or irregular heartbeat)
- Loss of consciousness/dizziness
- Edema (excess of watery fluid collecting in the cavities or tissues of the body)
- Persistent or recurrent fever
- Vomiting
- Significant ongoing fatigue

Potential gradual RTP schedule

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6
Duration of this step:	Over 1-2 days	At least 1 day	At least 1 day	Over 1-2 days	At least 1 day	Fully return to sport
Type of activity:	Light	Increase frequency	Increase duration and complexity	Increase intensity	Participate in usual sport-specific activities	
Examples of exercise allowed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walking • Elliptical • Stationary bike at low intensity No weightlifting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jogging • Running drills • Stationary bike at increased intensity • Jump rope 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sport-specific drills • More complex drills • May start light weightlifting 	Normal practice activities	Complete practice	
Duration of exercise:	15 minutes	30 minutes	45 minutes	60 minutes	Entire practice	
Percentage of your heart rate maximum allowed (see table below)	Less than 70% of your max heart rate	Less than 80% of your max heart rate	Less than 80% of your max heart rate	Less than 80% of your max heart rate		

Age	Maximum heart rate	70% of Maximum Heart Rate	80% of Maximum Heart Rate
10	210	147	168
11	209	146	167
12	208	145	166
13	207	145	165
14	206	144	165
15	205	143	164
16	204	143	163
17	203	142	162
18	202	141	162
19	201	141	161
20	200	140	160

These recommendations are based on expert opinions dated Dec. 8, 2020. **They may change.** See www.mottchildren.org/COVIDUpdate for updates and additional information.

References:

1. Adapted from Elliott N, et al, infographic, British Journal of Sports Medicine, 2020
2. American Academy of Pediatrics. COVID-19 Interim Guidance: Return to Sports. (Nov. 2020). Retrieved from <https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-interim-guidance-return-to-sports/>
3. Elliott, N., Martin, R., Heron, N., Elliott, J., Grimstead, D., & Biswas, A. (June 2020). Infographic. Graduated return to play guidance following COVID-19 infection. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2020-102637>

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