



# PENNSYLVANIA ICE HOCKEY OFFICIATING

703 MILLERS LANE, PITTSBURGH, PA 15239  
PIHOREF.COM

Friday, November 20, 2020

Officials,

The governmental rules and orders surrounding Covid-19 mitigation continue to evolve and change almost daily. We are trying our best to keep up with these changes and to interpret as best we can the vague and inconsistent directives issued by the Pennsylvania Department of Health.

In that regard, late TODAY, additional guidance and clarification was issued by the PA Department of Health with respect to the wearing of masks during athletic competition. That guidance provides an exemption for persons participating in athletic competition who would experience a "medical issue" as a result of wearing a mask while engaged in competition. The guidance (available here: <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Guidance/Universal-Masking-FAQ.aspx>) specifically uses the example of a football player (professional or youth) who wears a helmet and a mouthguard during competition and as such might experience impaired breathing, hyperventilation, oxygen deprivation, or dizziness if the player also wore a mask during competition. Football players are nonetheless expected to wear masks on the bench while not actively playing the game.

While hockey is not specifically mentioned in the Order, the similarities between the football example and a hockey game are undeniable. At this late hour, we cannot say for certain how our area teams and leagues will react to this latest guidance from the Health Department. Therefore, in light of this new guidance, do not be surprised if players on the ice this weekend are not wearing masks while actively playing. It at least appears from this latest guidance that masks are not required for players while on the ice, but they are required for players on the bench. Please note that we are holding to our original directive for officials to refrain from attempting to police mask usage by game participants. This is not your responsibility and you have no authority under the USA Hockey Rule Book to penalize any player or coach for mask-related issues. We are simply letting you know that we expect many teams and players to take the position that they are exempt from mask requirements while on the ice and engaged in competition as a result of this new guidance.

As this new guidance relates to mask usage by officials, it remains uncertain. Officials obviously wear helmets, but they seldom wear mouthguards, and they are probably not physically exerting themselves as rigorously as players playing hockey. Therefore, the following is PIHO's interpretation of this new guidance:

1. Officials are **STRONGLY ENCOURAGED** to wear masks at all times while on the ice, including during play, if you are physically able to wear a mask and officiate without causing yourself a medical issue. Officials are strongly encouraged to obtain e-whistles to allow them to keep their masks on at all times. If an official does not have an e-whistle, an official may **BRIEFLY** pull the mask down, blow the whistle, and then pull the mask back up.
2. If you believe that wearing a mask during play will cause you to experience a medical issue (such as shortness of breath, hyperventilation, oxygen deprivation, dizziness, etc.), then you may take your mask down during play. However, **DURING ALL STOPPAGES, YOU SHOULD PUT YOUR MASK BACK UP AS SOON AS YOU FINISH BLOWING THE WHISTLE**. This especially includes all situations when you are talking to players or coaches during stoppages, and **ESPECIALLY WHILE CONDUCTING FACEOFFS**. Once you have completed the faceoff and play has resumed, you may take the mask down, if you desire, until the next stoppage.
3. Masks must be worn at all times while not on the ice, including in the dressing room, lobby, hallways, bathrooms, parking lots, and anywhere else on the premises of any ice rink.

Again, we apologize for what appears to be inconsistent messaging, but this is entirely out of our control. These are government mandates that seem to change hourly and we are doing our best to get you the information you need in a timely manner.

If this latest information causes you concern or discomfort with regard to officiating games, or you are unable or unwilling to abide by the above, please turn your games back immediately.

Zachary Roberts  
Executive Director  
Pennsylvania Ice Hockey Officiating