

**MLS NEXT**

**COVID-19 PROTOCOLS**

**AS OF AUGUST 31, 2022**



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## I. OVERVIEW

This document outlines MLS NEXT’s guidance for member clubs (each, a “**MLS NEXT Club**” or a “**Club**”) in their operation with respect to the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 and any resulting disease (together with any mutation, adaptation, or variation thereof, “**COVID-19**”).

These protocols are part of the MLS NEXT Rules, as defined in the MLS NEXT Rules and Regulations. Capitalized terms not defined herein shall have the meaning ascribed to them in the MLS NEXT Rules and Regulations. Note that this guidance is in addition to – and does not supersede – any restrictions and other guidance or regulations provided by governmental authorities (e.g., county, state, province), **and you must consult with, and abide by, the applicable restrictions and other regulations in your location.**

***Parents and guardians should read this document carefully, be thoroughly aware of all safety recommendations and guidelines, and ensure that their family follows all applicable directives.***

### A. Core Principles

This Protocol is based in part on the U.S. Soccer Federation’s PLAY ON Initiative (see below for further information) and guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”), Public Health Agency of Canada (“PHAC”), and other infectious disease experts. There are certain core principles that consistently apply to all participants (coaches, players, instructors, administrators) throughout:

- **Physical Distancing:** By practicing physical distancing, individuals reduce their chances of being infected by COVID-19 and passing it on to someone else. As a general principle, physical distancing is encouraged during periods of heightened transmission of COVID-19 within the Club or local community.
- **Face Masks:** Face masks must be worn consistent with all applicable local or state/provincial regulations, and are otherwise nonetheless required in certain circumstances as set forth herein. Where face masks are not required, individuals are encouraged to consider use of face masks to avoid infection, particularly in indoor or crowded environments. Face masks should cover the nose and mouth, be breathable, consist of material that is multiple layers (including, where possible, masks that are medical grade (i.e., ASTM-rated), N95, KN95 or KF94), and follow applicable [CDC](#) or [PHAC](#) guidelines. The CDC and PHAC recommend against the use of gaiters, masks with an exhalation valve, or face shields (as replacements for face masks).
- **Quarantine and Isolation Measures:** Individuals exposed to or infected with COVID-19 must quarantine/isolate in accordance with applicable [CDC](#) or [PHAC](#) guidelines and all applicable local or state/provincial regulations (see Section III.B. of this Protocol).

***Please note:*** If a player tests positive for COVID-19, the Club will treat all teammates and staff that have trained or played with such player (i.e., in small group or full-team training, or in matches) in the two (2) days prior to the onset of symptoms (or test specimen collection for asymptomatic cases) as “close contacts.”

Testing using reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (“RT-PCR”), the Cue COVID-19 Diagnostic Test, or Lucira’s molecular in vitro diagnostic test (the “Lucira Check It”)<sup>1</sup>(collectively, the “Approved Molecular Tests”) is recommended for all such close contacts at least two (2) days

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<sup>1</sup> As of this publication, the Lucira Check It is only approved for use in the United States. MLS NEXT Clubs, when located in Canada or other countries outside the United States, may not use the Lucira product as an Approved Molecular Test.

following exposure and preferably five (5) days following exposure. Those who test positive should be managed as confirmed COVID-19 cases.

As a reminder, participation is a personal choice, and each individual should decide for himself or herself whether or not he or she wishes to engage in team activities, whether in a small group or full team environment. Individuals who are not comfortable due to COVID-19 concerns should not be urged to participate or have adverse actions taken against them as a result of their decision. Club coaches are responsible for communicating directly with all players and parents/guardians about the safety policies in place, including updates to protocols as they occur, and work together in an effort to protect against the spread of COVID-19.

## **B. Safe Sport / Safe Soccer**

It is important for all parents and guardians, along with Club coaches, staff and volunteers to remain vigilant and ensure a playing environment for children that is free of emotional, physical and sexual abuse and misconduct. As was the case prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, MLS NEXT Clubs must continue to follow U.S. Soccer's [Safe Soccer Framework](#).

## **C. Additional COVID-19 Response Resources**

Club players and parents are encouraged to refer to the following publicly available resources:

- United States Soccer Federation
  - [PLAY ON Initiative](#)
  - [Phase I](#)
  - [Phase II](#)
  - [Phase III](#)
  - [Indoor Considerations](#)
- Canada Soccer Association
  - [CSA Return to Play](#)
  - [Ontario Soccer](#)
  - [BC Soccer](#)
  - [Soccer Québec](#)

## **II. GENERAL HYGIENE**

The following hygiene requirements apply through all phases of MLS NEXT.

### **A. General Health**

- If you are sick or have symptoms of an illness:
  - Stay home, regardless of what is causing your illness and contact your primary care physician.
  - If you are confirmed or suspected to have COVID-19, immediately practice isolation measures in accordance with applicable [CDC](#) or [PHAC](#) guidelines, all applicable local or state/provincial regulations, and Section III.B of this Protocol, and consider contacting your primary care physician.
  - To discontinue isolation and return to team activities, you must comply with any applicable public health instruction and may wish to obtain additional clearance from your primary care physician.

- If you have been in close contact with someone who is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19, including family members, colleagues, classmates or friends, take appropriate measures in accordance with applicable [CDC](#) or [PHAC](#) guidelines, all applicable local or state/provincial regulations, and Section III.B of this Protocol.
- Parents must communicate with the Club and coach to disclose if their child has had close contact exposure to COVID-19, either inside or outside of the team, training or Club environment, if the child is experiencing potential symptoms of COVID-19, or if the child has tested positive for COVID-19.

## **B. General Hygiene Measures**

- Avoid touching your eyes/mouth/nose as much as possible.
- Wash your hands, or use hand sanitizer, often.
  - Use soap and water for a minimum of twenty (20) seconds.
  - When soap and water is not available, use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% ethanol (preferably 70% isopropanol) to disinfect hands.
- Cover your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze.
  - Follow with washing or sanitizing your hands.
  - Dispose of tissues in a sealed trash can.
- Avoid spitting or clearing the nose in the competition area (e.g., playing field or technical area).
- Remain up to date with vaccinations, including the flu vaccine.
- Wear face masks consistent with all applicable local or state/provincial regulations and consider use in indoor or crowded environments.

## **C. Physical Interaction**

- As a general principle, physical distancing is encouraged during periods of heightened transmission of COVID-19 within the Club or local community.
- Distance yourself from anyone exhibiting signs of sickness, including but not limited to [COVID-19 related symptoms](#).

## **D. Equipment & Training Gear**

- Where possible, use individual equipment. Do not share items like water bottles (where mouths touch the bottle) and towels.
  - See Section IV (Team & Individual Equipment) of this Protocol for further details.
- Disinfect sports or exercise equipment after each training session and match.
- Wash all personal gear at home after each training session and match.

## **III. COVID-19 CONSIDERATIONS AND PREPARING FOR TRAINING / MATCHES**

These practices address exposure to COVID-19 and the Club's and players' advance preparation for each training session and match. Note that the same standards should apply to all Club coaches, staff and

volunteers, except to the extent otherwise provided by applicable law, rule or regulation. MLS NEXT applies the same standards for match officials and administrators attending matches.

## **A. Emergency Action Plans**

Each Club must develop, establish, and implement an Emergency Action Plan (“EAP”) that addresses the steps that will be taken if any player, staff or other individual at a Club facility or event tests positive for or reports symptoms of COVID-19. The EAP must include the designation of the Workplace Health Coordinator (see below) who should be contacted in such circumstances.

The Club must ensure that the following measures are in place:

- Exit plan for individuals who become symptomatic while at the Club facility and that reduces, to the extent possible, contact between such individuals and other attendees.
- Individuals who become symptomatic must immediately put on a face mask (if not already worn), perform hand hygiene and be physically separated from others.
- Processes to clean and decontaminate an infected individual’s prior locations and provide appropriate care that permits the individual to remain in strict isolation as much as possible.
- Availability of face masks and other appropriate personal protective equipment for any individual caring for or assisting an infected person.
- Ability to monitor that an infected individual has complied with all isolation requirements prior to return to work or training/competition with the Club.
- Inclement weather plan (see Subsection VII(G), below).

The EAP must include specific procedures for isolating, and potentially transporting, testing and treating any individual who displays potential symptoms of or tests positive for COVID-19. The EAP also must include contact information for any local health officials responsible for the jurisdiction.

Each Club must designate a “Workplace Health Coordinator” who will be responsible for managing COVID-19 issues and their impact on the workplace, including (1) implementation of these Protocols and the EAP, (2) educating personnel on steps they can take to protect themselves, and (3) coordinating with all relevant local or state/provincial health authorities in their market and securing any approvals necessary to operate. Each Club must also designate a back-up Workplace Health Coordinator who is capable of handling the functions of the Workplace Health Coordinator in the event that the Workplace Health Coordinator becomes incapacitated or unavailable for any reason.

## **B. Isolation and Potential Medical Clearance/Close Contacts**

- **For individuals at increased risk for more severe COVID-19:**
  - Individuals at increased health risk, according to the [CDC](#) or [PHAC](#), should consult their primary care physician and make an informed choice prior to play. Such individuals include, but are not limited to, people of all ages with underlying medical conditions, including cancer, chronic lung disease (including moderate to severe asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), serious heart conditions, obesity, hemoglobin blood disorders (such as sickle cell disease), diabetes, chronic kidney disease, chronic liver disease, HIV infection, mental health conditions (mood disorders, including depression), or immunocompromised status.
- **For an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19:**
  - Isolate at home in accordance with applicable [CDC](#) or [PHAC](#) guidelines and all applicable local or state/provincial regulations. The period of isolation may differ depending on whether the

individual is symptomatic. The criteria for discontinuing isolation must be in accordance with any applicable local public health instruction.

- At minimum, an individual must isolate from the Club until: (i) at least 5 days after a positive test (if always asymptomatic), or (ii) at least 5 days after fever-free for 24 hours without use of fever-reducing medication and symptoms are improving. If severely ill with COVID-19, an individual should isolate for at least 10 days and consult with a doctor.
- Upon exiting isolation, the individual must wear a medical-grade (i.e., ASTM-rated), N95, KN95 or KF94 face mask through Day 10 (with Day 0 being when symptoms first appeared or, where always asymptomatic, when the individual first tested positive), except when eating, hydrating, or engaging in outdoor athletic training or match play. In addition, the individual must eat physically distanced from others through Day 10.
- Provide written notice of the positive test to your Club, which Club, if requested by MLS NEXT, must provide prompt notice of positive test results during the MLS NEXT 2022-2023 season to MLS NEXT in a manner that anonymizes the identity of the individuals.
- At the end of isolation, confirm to your Club coach or designated Club staff member compliance with applicable CDC or PHAC guidelines and all applicable local or state/provincial regulations on ending isolation.
- Players are encouraged, and employees required, to provide all contact information to their Clubs and/or local or state/provincial agencies necessary for complying with any contact tracing requirements. Please see the [CDC](#) and [PHAC](#) sites for further information on contact tracing.
  - For example, contact tracing in Canada is initiated by local public health authorities, which may seek informational assistance and support from Clubs.
- **For an individual who is a close contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19:**
  - Follow applicable [CDC](#) or [PHAC](#) guidelines<sup>2</sup> and all applicable local or state/provincial regulations.
  - It is recommended to arrange for an Approved Molecular Test for COVID-19 at least two (2) days following exposure and preferably five (5) days following exposure, including on a repeated basis if symptoms develop. If symptoms occur but you are not positive for COVID-19, arrange for written confirmation from your primary care physician prior to return to the Club that you are COVID-19 negative (including information on date of exposure, date of test, type of test, and result of test), and provide that written confirmation to your Club coach or designated Club staff member.

***Please note:*** The CDC defines a “close contact” as “Someone who was less than 6 feet away from an infected person (laboratory-confirmed or a clinical diagnosis) for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period. For example, three individual 5-minute exposures for a total of 15 minutes.” At this time, the CDC does not recommend differential determinations of close contacts for those using face masks.

As stated above, if a player tests positive for COVID-19, the Club will treat all teammates and staff that

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<sup>2</sup> Notably, PHAC differentiates between high-risk exposure (close contact) and low risk exposure. See <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/interim-guidance-cases-contacts.html>.

have trained or played with such player (i.e., in small group or full-team training, or in matches) in the two (2) days prior to the onset of symptoms (or test specimen collection for asymptomatic cases) as “close contacts.”

To the extent a player tests positive for COVID-19 who played in a match in the two (2) days prior to the onset of symptoms (or test specimen collection for asymptomatic cases), the Club should notify the other Club and referees that a player who participated in the match has tested positive. The identity of the player must not be provided absent express written consent of the player’s parent or guardian. Instead, Clubs should follow the guidance and any applicable mandates of their local departments of health with respect to close contact analysis of the opposing team and referees.

- **For an individual who experiences the onset of any new COVID-19 symptoms (as further described below):**
  - Do not go to the Club’s training facilities or fields if you are exhibiting any COVID-19 symptoms. Speak to your primary care physician for applicable medical advice and remotely communicate your health status to your Club coach or designated Club staff member. Parents (and not the player) should communicate with the Club coach.
  - Symptoms include, without limitation, the following:
    - New or worsening cough;
    - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing;
    - Fever;
    - Chills;
    - Fatigue or weakness;
    - Muscle or body aches;
    - New loss of smell or taste;
    - Congestion or runny nose;
    - Sore throat;
    - Headache; and/or
    - Gastrointestinal symptoms (abdominal pain, diarrhea, vomiting).

### **C. Getting Ready for Training / Matches**

The following are best practices when preparing at home prior to your departure for training sessions and matches:

- Prepare and pack two (2) water bottles (to limit the need for refills).
  - Clearly mark your name on your water bottles. Do not share water bottles (where mouths touch the bottle).
- Dress at home in gear so that players arrive at the training site or match field ready to play and avoid the use of congested locker rooms or changing areas.
- Pack and bring a towel and personal sanitation and disinfection supplies, including hand sanitizer. Towels should not be shared.
- Consider bringing appropriate face masks (and any other applicable PPE) for use before, during or after play, consistent with all applicable local or state/provincial regulations. Consider also packing

a backup face mask in the event the primary mask becomes visibly soiled or damp/wet due to sweat or environmental conditions.

- Wash your hands before departing for training and matches.
- Use the restroom before you depart from home as there may be no access to facilities at training or matches.

#### **D. Day Travel to Training / Matches**

The following are best practices when traveling to training sessions and matches:

- Travel with as few people as possible (e.g., one (1) parent and one (1) child).
- For players who must ride together, seek to travel with the same individuals for each Club activity, limit the number of stops between departure site and destination, and consider wearing face masks in the vehicle and open windows (weather permitting).
- In accordance with the Safe Soccer Framework, a player and an adult who is not the player's parent or legal guardian must not be alone in a vehicle together.
- To the extent bus or large-occupancy transportation is necessary for training, Clubs should configure seating to provide as many seats, rows and free space between passengers as possible. Seating charts are recommended in case contact tracing analysis is later necessary. Passengers should not eat when on the bus or large-occupancy vehicle unless the trip is of a long duration. Clubs are permitted to provide bottled water to the Traveling Delegation for consumption on the bus to stay hydrated. Unless drinking, all travelers are strongly encouraged to wear face masks (where possible, medical grade (i.e., ASTM-rated), N95, KN95 or KF94) for the duration of the trip. Drivers must be certified as healthy by the company and otherwise ensure that the vehicle is cleaned and disinfected regularly. All efforts to increase ventilation, such as opening windows, during travel should be implemented.
- **Please note:** Certain state/provincial and municipality travel restrictions may impact travel operations and require additional compliance steps. Clubs should routinely monitor for any travel restrictions imposed by their home jurisdictions, and those to which they plan to travel, given that restrictions may change. (See also Section VIII of this Protocol regarding air travel and overnight stays.)
- Club staff must maintain a participant attendance list for all training sessions and matches.

#### **E. Face masks (and Other PPE)**

- Face masks (and other PPE) used by participants should be new or clean. Both the [CDC](#) and [PHAC](#) provide guidance for washing face masks. In addition, all face masks should comply with current applicable [CDC](#) or [PHAC](#) guidelines. Where possible (or where otherwise required herein), medical grade (i.e., ASTM-rated), N95, KN95 or KF94 face masks are recommended.
- Face masks must be worn consistent with all applicable local or state/provincial regulations, but always by: (i) Qualified Medical Professionals (as defined in the MLS NEXT Safety & Wellbeing Policy) while treating players; (ii) individuals who become symptomatic; and (iii) individuals exiting isolation through Day 10, except when eating, hydrating, or engaging in outdoor athletic training or match play.
- For players who choose to wear face masks while playing, the following should be considered:
  - Discuss with your primary care physician if any medical conditions pre-dispose you to avoid

the use of a face cover while participating in physical activity.

- Face masks should be breathable and not prevent or disrupt ventilation.
- Face masks should not be shared.
- Face masks should not obscure your vision.
- Face masks should not pose a risk to another participant.
- Face masks should be in good condition, maintained at the responsibility of the individual.

## **IV. TEAM & INDIVIDUAL EQUIPMENT**

### **A. Team Equipment**

- All field equipment (e.g., balls and cones) must be disinfected prior to the start of the training or match with anti-bacterial solution of at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol.
- Where possible, team bibs should not be used.
  - The Club should provide advance notice to players to wear a specific training gear color.
  - If team bibs are used, they should only be used by the assigned player (i.e., not shared or rotated amongst players). Any team bibs used must be laundered by the Club after each training session and match.
  - The Club may temporarily issue team bibs to players for a certain duration. Players would be responsible for bringing these bibs to team activities and washing them after use. Issued bibs should be clearly labeled and not shared or rotated amongst players.

### **B. Individual Equipment**

- All participants should arrive to training and matches in their gear.
- For players who use mouthguards, once the mouthguard is placed in mouth, it should not be taken out during the activity to limit the transmission of bacteria and viruses.
  - If a mouth guard has been in contact with hands or the floor/ground, the mouthguard should not be re-used until it has been washed thoroughly. Wash your hands thoroughly after washing the mouthguard.
- Upon arrival home, participants should immediately wash hands, bathe (including washing hair), and launder/clean clothing used.

## **V. CLUB FACILITIES**

### **A. Overview**

- Clubs must incorporate facility cleaning and disinfecting standards that meet or exceed applicable guidelines issued by federal, state/provincial, local, EPA, CDC or PHAC authorities. Clubs are responsible for monitoring any changes to applicable guidance and for appropriately updating their cleaning and sanitizing protocols. Current guidelines include, without limitation:
  - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>
  - <https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2021-04/documents/cleaning-disinfecting-one-pager.pdf>

- <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>
- <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/cleaning-disinfecting-public-spaces.html>

## B. Signage

- Facility policies and procedures, as related to any COVID-19 mitigation measures, must be posted at Club facilities.
  - This should include clear signage indicating that participants must stay home when sick.

## C. Restrooms

- If the use of restrooms within a Club training facility is necessary, such restroom operation should be adjusted, where possible, to allow for physical/social distancing in an effort to prevent the spread of the virus.
  - If the restroom is small (e.g., without separate stalls), consider making it a single-occupant restroom or limiting the number of people inside.
  - Clubs are responsible for ensuring the regular disinfection of the restrooms.
- Restrooms should have the following signage:
  - CDC or PHAC recommended hand washing procedures above each sink.
  - Signage limiting the number of people in each restroom.

## VI. TRAINING SESSIONS

### A. Overview

- Training sessions should be held outdoors so long as safe (see, e.g., [the U.S. Soccer Federation Cold Weather Guide](#)).
  - Clubs must consult all applicable federal, state and local guidance and rules with regard to any indoor training, including with respect to occupancy limits. Clubs must comply with those mandates, including where they conflict with MLS NEXT protocols.
  - When indoor training, Clubs should consider limiting occupancy in training areas to avoid crowded environments. The use of staggered and/or cohort training is encouraged to promote physical distancing.
  - Clubs should monitor and, where possible, upgrade their physical plant mechanical and ventilation systems (e.g., MERV-13 air filters), including to increase circulation of outdoor air and avoid recirculated air. Where possible, Clubs should strongly consider using ultraviolet germicidal irradiation (UVGI) in areas where players train in an effort to inactivate potential airborne virus. Clubs also are encouraged to monitor carbon dioxide levels in consultation with local infectious disease experts and conduct comprehensive cleaning and disinfection when carbon dioxide levels exceed acceptable levels.
  - Additional guidance for protecting your players and staff with respect to indoor activities can be found here:
    - [CDC](#)

- **U.S. Soccer Indoor Considerations**

- As a general matter, Clubs also are encouraged to hold team meetings outdoors or in virtual settings. If such meetings occur in confined indoor environments, all participants are encouraged to wear face masks (where possible, medical grade (i.e., ASTM-rated), N95, KN95 or KF94 face masks are recommended).
- Where possible, progressions between training activities should be set up prior to players arriving to enable smooth transition and negate the need for players to move equipment.
- Players should clearly label their water bottles with their own name and bring at least two (2) drink bottles to a training session (e.g., 2 x 32oz bottles). This will limit the need to refill bottles onsite at the facility. Players should not share bottles (where mouths touch the bottle).
- Note that anytime there is one (1) coach alone with players, there must be one (1) other adult (designated Club staff member) observing from a distance, in accordance with the Safe Soccer Framework.

## **B. Parents and Guardians**

- Parents and guardians are discouraged from attending training and should remain distanced from participants (at least 6 feet (2 meters)). Instead, they are encouraged to remain in their cars or depart the area while their child is training.
- For matches, the Club may arrange a designated viewing area for parents. However, this area must be away from the team benches. Clubs must follow all venue guidelines issued by federal, state/provincial or local authorities, and may further limit permissible attendance based on an assessment of physical/social distancing protocols, particularly in periods of high COVID-19 transmission rates.
- Parents and guardians must follow all applicable Club and/or local or state/provincial physical/social distancing and face mask guidelines.

## **VII. MATCHDAY**

### **A. Overview**

- This protocol applies not only to official MLS NEXT competition matches, but also any friendlies and/or tournaments outside of MLS NEXT in which the Club is a participant.

### **B. Warm-ups**

- Warm-ups should not begin until all individuals from previous teams have left the field and field equipment has been cleaned and disinfected. Allow for extra time between matches to accommodate, as necessary.
- Competition warm-up recommendations follow training recommendations outlined in Section VI.A of this Protocol above.

### **C. Game Time**

- Cleaned and disinfected balls must be readily available for use, in the case of the ball not being easily retrievable by the active player. It is the responsibility of the home Club to supply disinfected balls.

- Avoid delays in start of play, so that players do not have prolonged periods of standing in close proximity.
  - For example, encourage all participants to conduct free kicks and set plays with efficiency so players do not have prolonged periods in shoulder-to-shoulder defense walls.

#### **D. Halftime**

- All referees, players and coaches must wear proper face masks where required by applicable local or state/provincial regulations.
- Coaches should limit the amount of time the entire team is congregated closely together.

#### **E. Injuries**

- If able, the referee should maintain physical/social distance from the injured player while determining if medical attention is necessary.
- If needed, the Club coach or medical professional from the injured player's team may enter the field and attend to the player. The medical professional must wear a face mask (where possible, medical grade (i.e., ASTM-rated), N95, KN95 or KF94 face masks are recommended) and gloves are encouraged while attending the player regardless of applicable local or state/provincial regulations.
- The referee will remind other players to keep their distance from each other, and the injured player, during the break in play. Players should not congregate.

#### **F. Post-Game Activities**

- Each Club must clean up its bench area so that it is clean of all trash.
- Match hosts must disinfect all equipment, including benches, balls, flags, etc.
- Parents/Guardians and other spectators are encouraged to maintain physical/social distancing following the game while waiting for their child. This may require that they wait further away from the field.

#### **G. Inclement Weather**

- Facilities should have a plan in place in the event of inclement weather.
  - As this plan may be different from pre-COVID-19 protocols, it should be adjusted and then communicated with all Clubs in advance of competitions.
  - If inclement weather is forecasted, protocols must be posted at all entrances and arrival/check-in locations.
- It is highly recommended that, where possible, physical/social distancing be observed during any shelter-in-place or evacuation protocols.
  - It is encouraged that face masks (where possible, medical grade (i.e., ASTM-rated), N95, KN95 or KF94 face masks are recommended) should be worn throughout the delay if physical/social distancing is not possible.
- Encourage all participants and spectators to return to their vehicles in the event of inclement weather.
  - When possible, individuals in each car should be limited to members of the immediate family.

If non-family members must be present in the vehicle, it is encouraged that everyone in the vehicle should wear face masks (where possible, medical grade (i.e., ASTM-rated), N95, KN95 or KF94 face masks are recommended).

- If possible, have a back-up option for those who were dropped off or do not have a vehicle on-site. This location should only be used as a last resort.
  - The number of people in these locations should be pre-determined and posted on the wall.
- In accordance with the Safe Soccer Framework, a player and an adult who is not the player's parent or legal guardian must not be alone in a vehicle together.
- If inclement weather is forecasted, depending on the size of the field complex, the match hosts should consider taking a conservative approach by communicating game delays or cancellations well in advance of match time.

## **VIII. AIR TRAVEL AND OVERNIGHT STAYS**

### **A. Discretionary Participation**

Certain MLS NEXT matches for the 2022-2023 season will require airline flights and/or overnight stays due to the geographical distance between the participating Clubs. In the event any coach, staff or player ("Participant") registered in MLS NEXT does not want to participate in these matches because the Participant does not feel comfortable based on concerns related to COVID-19, Player Development, LLC ("PDev"), as organizer of MLS NEXT matches, will take no negative action against either the Club or the Participant. Similarly, Clubs are not permitted to punish or take any negative action against Participants for opting out of participating in a MLS NEXT match based on COVID-19 concerns.

Clubs must communicate in writing to Participants that attending matches that require flights and/or overnight stays this season is optional if Participants have concerns related to COVID-19, and that the Club will not take any negative action against Participants for choosing not to attend.

Clubs must proactively communicate any collective or individual decisions regarding such travel that will materially impact the MLS NEXT match by writing to Chris Schuler of the MLS NEXT League Staff. This notification is important as other Clubs may be affected by these decisions.

### **B. Travel Agreement and Readiness Plan**

- Each Participant in a MLS NEXT match that requires flights and/or overnight stays must review in full and execute (or, as appropriate, have a parent or legal guardian execute) the 2022-2023 MLS NEXT Travel Agreement, which explains the voluntary nature of the travel activity and that each Participant assumes all inherent risks. The Travel Agreement must be returned to the Club prior to any flights or overnight stays.
- Each Club participating in a MLS NEXT match that requires flights and/or overnight stays must prepare, prior to departure, a Readiness Plan that addresses the steps that will be taken in the event that a Participant tests positive for or reports symptoms of COVID-19 during travel involving an overnight stay or that had involved an airline flight. The Readiness Plan must be reviewed and approved in writing by the Workplace Health Coordinator, and a summary of the Plan should be shared with the families of all participating players, prior to the trip. At minimum, this Readiness Plan must include:
  - An isolation plan for individuals who become symptomatic or who test positive for COVID-19. That Plan should reduce, to the extent possible, contact between such individuals and other

Participants, and must be in accordance with applicable CDC or PHAC guidelines and all applicable local or state/provincial regulations.

- An operational plan for how the Club will handle any extended isolation of the infected Participant out of market if necessary, or private transportation of the Participant home in a manner that reduces, to the extent possible, contact between the infected Participant and other Participants (e.g., a parent or chaperone renting a car, with the infected Participant sitting in the back row alone with windows down and both passengers wearing N-95 masks).
- Availability of face masks, disinfectant wipes, hand sanitizer, and appropriate personal protective equipment for the Club, including for an individual who becomes symptomatic or who tests positive and for an individual caring for or assisting an infected person.
- Understanding of all applicable local or state/provincial regulations regarding COVID-19.
- Contact information for: (i) local COVID-19 testing centers to the extent an individual becomes symptomatic; and (ii) any public health authorities who must be notified of any infected individuals.

### **C. Review of Applicable Governmental Restrictions**

- As set forth above, prior to engaging in any overnight or airline travel, each Club must understand all applicable state/provincial and municipality regulations related to COVID-19 in the destination location (e.g., any mask mandates, occupancy restrictions, reporting obligations) and relevant to return home (e.g., mandatory quarantines, out-of-state travel reporting).
- Clubs should routinely monitor for any travel restrictions imposed by their home jurisdictions, and those to which they plan to travel, given that restrictions may change on a continual basis.

### **D. Best Practices**

All individuals traveling with the Club should:

- Pack alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% ethanol alcohol (preferably 70% isopropanol)) and disinfectant wipes, and keep them within easy reach (in your carry-on). Wash hands frequently.
- Bring enough of any medication that may be necessary to last the entire road trip, including an extension caused by an unanticipated positive COVID-19 infection.
- Consider wearing a face mask (where possible, medical grade (i.e., ASTM-rated), N95, KN95 or KF94 face masks are recommended).
- To the extent a non-family member drives to the airport, ask the driver to open windows or put air conditioning on non-recirculation mode. If the driver is not wearing a face mask, request that he or she do so.
- Avoid touching frequently touched surfaces such as kiosks, touchscreens, and fingerprint scanners, ticket machines, turnstiles, handrails, restroom surfaces, elevator buttons, and benches. When you must touch these surfaces, use hand sanitizer afterwards.
- Use touchless payment and no-touch trash cans and doors when available. Exchange cash or credit cards by placing them in a receipt tray or on the counter rather than by hand, if possible.
- On the airplane:
  - Where possible, follow physical distancing guidelines by staying at least 6 feet (2 meters in Canada) from people at the gate – and while boarding and leaving the aircraft.

- Encourage wearing a face mask (where possible, medical grade (i.e., ASTM-rated), N95, KN95 or KF94 face masks are recommended).
- If you are seated next to someone outside of the Club, ask the flight attendant if you can move to a seat that has unoccupied seat(s) next to it.
- Clean surfaces, like tray tables, with disinfectant wipes and use hand sanitizer after touching any frequently used surfaces, such as the in-flight entertainment system.
- Where possible, avoid eating and drinking at the same time as others in the same row or in the two rows in front or behind their row.
- When using the restroom, use a disposable glove (or, if unavailable, a paper tissue) to touch any surface and wash hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer after each use. Close toilet lids before flushing. Wait several minutes before entering a lavatory after each use.

## **E. Team Ground Transportation**

- To the extent bus or large-occupancy vehicle transportation is used in the away market, Clubs should configure seating to provide as many seats, rows and free space between passengers as possible.
- Seating charts are recommended in case contact tracing analysis is later necessary.
- Encourage all passengers to wear face masks (where possible, medical grade (i.e., ASTM-rated), N95, KN95 or KF94 face masks are recommended) at all times on the bus or large-occupancy vehicle.
- Passengers should not eat when on the bus or large-occupancy vehicle unless the trip is of a long duration, but passengers may consume bottled water to stay hydrated.
- Bus and large-occupancy vehicle companies and their drivers must adhere to the minimum standards for bus transit operators established by the CDC. Drivers must be certified as healthy by the company and otherwise ensure that the bus or large-occupancy vehicle is cleaned and disinfected before and after every trip.
- All efforts to increase ventilation, such as opening windows, during travel should be implemented. Any air conditioning should be set on non-recirculation mode.

## **F. Lodging**

- Club should confirm that all hotels in which they stay adhere to the enhanced industry-wide cleaning standards established by the Safe Stay initiative of the American Hotel & Lodging Association (“AHLA”) ([https://www.ahla.com/sites/default/files/SafeStayGuidelinesV8\\_032722%20Final.pdf](https://www.ahla.com/sites/default/files/SafeStayGuidelinesV8_032722%20Final.pdf)), which is focused on enhanced hotel cleaning practices, social interactions, and workplace protocols to meet the new health and safety challenges and expectations presented by COVID-19.
- It is encouraged to clean rooms upon arrival using disinfectant wipes and other cleaning products, including any high-touch surfaces (e.g., luggage handles, key cards, remote controls, phones).
- Where possible, eat in outdoor environments or private locations away from the public (e.g., room or delivery service).
- To the extent the Club gathers for meetings, video review or other purposes, choose an area that has good ventilation and permits physical distancing between participants. Outdoor space is highly encouraged, consistent with the approach taken at Club facilities set forth above in this Manual. If such meetings occur in confined or indoor environments, all participants are encouraged to wear face masks (where possible, medical grade (i.e., ASTM-rated), N95, KN95 or KF94 face masks are recommended).

## **G. Compliance with Safe Soccer Framework**

- All aspects of travel must follow U.S. Soccer's Safe Soccer Framework, including prohibition of a player and an adult who is not the player's parent or legal guardian being alone in a vehicle or hotel room together.