

# MLL Return to Play 2021



Leveraging Little League International Return to Play protocols, this document describes the specific implementation details for Mississippi Little League.

Summer 2021

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## INTRODUCTION

MLL is committed to providing baseball to our players in 2021. MLL's primary focus is keeping our players, coaches, volunteers and families safe while still providing an option for physical activity for the youth in our boundaries.

MLL has instituted mandatory rules for 2021 season that must be followed in order for approved MLL activities to proceed. These guidelines may change at any time following the guidance of the Leeds Grenville and Lanark County health authorities.

COVID-19 has been declared a worldwide pandemic by the World Health Organization and is extremely contagious. MLL has put in place preventative measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19; however, we cannot guarantee that participants will not become infected with COVID-19.

While these guidelines will help mitigate the risk of COVID-19 infections, they cannot eliminate it completely. All participants must be aware that participation is voluntary and at your own risk. People who do not feel safe in returning to baseball activities, are encouraged to refrain from doing so.

The need to pay attention to sanitizing protocols, attendance tracking and distancing remains of prime importance. Game play puts players in greater proximity to their teammates and opponents, and to umpires in game play. We remain vigilant in our implementation of protocols in the interest of everyone involved.

We will need **everyone** to help if we are to return to baseball in a safe and responsible manner. The protocols below require more volunteers than usual and are going to be challenging. Understanding and patience will be required as we learn new habits and social norms.

There will be a learning curve, and the methods used to implement these guidelines will likely be adjusted over time as we learn. We will do this together and support each other. However, continued blatant disregard for these guidelines by parents and/or players will be cause for league intervention and potential discipline or removal.

A new mandatory role for each team will be created - **Safety Manager** (See Page 12). The Safety Manager will work with the Head Coach to monitor, encourage, and support compliance of both the team and spectators. This role will be as critical as any on the field.

MLL will continue to monitor the situation in Lanark County and will follow guidance provided by Public Health authorities. Our Return to Play guidelines will be adjusted accordingly. All players, parents and volunteers must review the Return to Play Guidelines and acknowledge them as part of the registration process. Updates will be sent to registered players for review if guidelines change.

Little League Canada instructed leagues to follow provincial and local direction, which we have done.

## 2021 PROGRAM

At this time, we are planning to start our season after July 17<sup>th</sup>. Things can easily change so we are planning for a number of possibilities.



The guidelines listed below apply to all individuals participating in MLL programs in 2021. Additional

guidelines may be added as we progress further into the season in accordance with any new information provided by Public Health authorities.

We intend to offer a program for the Rookie level (ages 7-8 years old) up to the Senior level (15-16 years old) who are of age before August 31<sup>st</sup> of the current year. Our goal would be to have 1 practice and 1 game each week depending on the total number of players registered.

Divisions will be grouped into bubbles. As per provincial requirements, the maximum players in each bubble is 50. Coaches, safety managers and umpires are not part of the maximum. Safety managers will continue to be present and in charge of safety protocols and attendance tracking at all games and practices. The focus will be on SAFE, FUN, exercise, skill development & camaraderie.

Of note, there will be no tournaments or league wide kick off/wrap ups this season at any level.

We will plan to run a program as long as we do not move into the red or grey zones in the provincial COVID-19 response framework.

## CHANGES TO MLL HOUSE LEAGUE RULES

The following changes are implemented for 2021 at all levels:

**Coaches and Umpires:** Upon arrival to diamond, mandatory to wear a mask. Masks for players is optional unless there is an indoors practice.

**Equipment** – All players must have their own helmet, gloves and if desired batting gloves. We encourage athletes to have their own bats if possible but we will have team bats available which will be sanitized between players if necessary with an approved disinfectant.

**Dugouts and stands will be limited use. All players must come with a lawn chair to sit on and maintain distancing. (See page 9)**

### **Rule Changes for Minor level and above:**

**Call ups:** No call ups from other divisions, nor call overs from teams in other bubbles – players may not play outside their own bubble even if they originate from the same league.

**Complete games:** As long as two innings have been played the game will be considered a complete game; NO continuation on another day nor rescheduling will apply.

**Forfeits:** In an effort to minimize forfeits, teams may borrow players from the opposing team. Teams may also pick up available players from teams in the same bubble. The goal is to play games, not enforce fo

## MLL Return to Play Rules

given what could be a limited season. Teams that know in advance that they cannot field a team must inform the convenor as soon as possible and will be subject to forfeit.

**Umpire positioning on the field has changed** – see page 10

**Tag plays are allowed**, but the defensive player should vacate the area as soon as reasonably practicable following the tag. Where possible tags should be made with the glove.

**No mound visits by catcher**

**Mound visits by coaches are to be kept to a minimum** and distancing must be respected.

## GENERAL

### BUBBLES / ATTENDANCE

- Teams will be grouped into “leagues / bubbles” with a maximum of 50 players per bubble, as prescribed by provincial requirements
  - We do not yet know what the bubbles are and will depend on our numbers at registration.
  - We may ask families if they would be accepting of playing in another bubble if one is full.
  - We encourage people to register early to best secure a spot as we may need to limit registration based on these numbers as well as our coaching numbers. We may have to use waitlists.
- Physical distancing of all spectators is always required. If not maintaining distancing then masks are required outside.
- Ride sharing/carpooling is discouraged unless families are part of the same social bubble.
- Attendance record will be collected for all players, coaches and umpires in attendance. A copy of this will be provided to the town which may be provided to Lanark County Public Health for contact tracing if required.

### SCREENING/DIAGNOSED WITH COVID- 19/RETURN FROM COVID- 19

- **Self-screening** through <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/> is required by all volunteers, and spectators prior to attending any game, practice, meeting or other in-person team activity and any individual shall not attend if they fail the screening protocol. Any person who is sick or has any of the following symptoms may not attend nor participate: cough, sore throat, runny nose, shortness of breath, headache.
- Players and coaches will be required to complete a covid screening questionnaire prior to attendance at a game/practice. Anyone failing the questionnaire is NOT permitted to attend. Anyone feeling in any way unwell is encouraged NOT to attend.
- A person, who has been identified by public health to have a high risk exposure, is awaiting a COVID swab result or a member of their household is awaiting result, will not be allowed to

participate in baseball activities until cleared by public health or the swab comes back negative and they remain asymptomatic.

- Any participant, volunteer or spectator diagnosed with COVID-19 or who has been in contact with any person having COVID-19 in the previous 14 days MUST not attend any game, practice, meeting or other in-person team activity and MUST notify their local public health authority.
- If anyone falls ill during an event, they will need to remove themselves from the field and seek appropriate care

## **CLEANING/SANITIZATION**

The following applies whenever the guidelines refer to cleaning, sanitizing, disinfecting, wiping or similar terms

- Teams are always to have hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes (or acceptable option) readily available. MLL will supply this for each team. A list of recommended disinfectants is available on the Health Canada website <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>
- Players and coaches shall wash or sanitize their hands after each inning or at least every 30min. For indoor sessions they will sanitize upon entering the facility and between stations.
- Players will bring their own hand sanitizer and keep it in their equipment bag.
- Teams will be expected to wipe off benches, gate handles or other high contact surfaces at the end of each game.
- Only adults shall perform cleaning/sanitization functions.
- Those not involved in the cleaning/sanitization shall stay a minimum of 2 meters away from the cleaning/sanitization activities.
- Cleaning/sanitization products will not be used by or stored within access of young children.
- Where this document requires the use of protective gloves, this shall mean rubber gloves and not batting gloves or baseball mitts.
- When it is necessary to share critical or limited equipment, increased attention should be paid to detailed cleaning of all equipment directly contacting the head and face (catcher's mask, helmets).
- When possible, allow as much time as possible for the wet surface to dry naturally (ideal 3 to 5 min)

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF SAFE PHYSICAL DISTANCE**

- Maintain minimum of 2 meters distancing during physical activity, including warm-ups, pre-game and post-game activities. Games are modified to avoid physical contact between players.
- Use as much space as required outside the dugout (but in safe areas outside of the field of play) to maintain adequate physical distance
- Avoid congestion at points of entry to the diamond (i.e. gates, dugout doors, etc.) to allow maintenance of 2 meters distancing among participants
- All spectators must follow the physical distancing rules as required/recommended by Lanark County Public Health and ensure they observe areas required for players.

## **ESTABLISHMENT OF HYGIENE STANDARDS**

- Wash hands frequently for at least twenty (20) seconds
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with your hands

- Sneeze and/or cough in a tissue or the internal crease of the elbow. Avoid contact of hands with personal respiratory points
- All potentially infected waste (i.e. disposable tissues, Face coverings, protective gloves, etc.), hygiene material, rubbish, debris, etc., in all shared spaces (diamonds, dugouts etc.) shall be disposed of safely at the end of in-person baseball activity.
- There will be no sharing or drinks (water bottle etc.)
- There will be no food present and in particular – NO END OF GAME SNACK.

## VENUES (FIELDS)

- Drinks must be taken at least 2m apart from others
- MLL will provide cleaning/disinfecting materials that safety managers or coaches shall bring to all practices and games.
- Scheduling of diamonds will allow for 30 minutes between the conclusion of the prior event and the start of the subsequent event to allow for: (1) the participants involved in the prior event to clean/sanitize equipment, dispose of garbage from common areas, and have all team members vacate the facility BEFORE (2) participants involved in the subsequent event enter the facility and clean/sanitize common areas; without crossover between the those participating in the two events. Such games will have time limits. The second game may start sooner if all steps have been accomplished and umpires are available.
- Participants, volunteers, and spectators for a subsequent game shall remain in/near their motor vehicle in the parking lot until participants the prior game have returned to their motor vehicles. Please do not show up before 30 minutes prior to a game or 10 minutes before a practice. Please avoid congregating.
- **Dugouts are limited use only. A maximum of 4 are allowed in the dugout at any given time. Example: Dugout may be used by the on-deck batter, in the hole batter, coach and the safety manager. Distancing guidelines to be followed.** This is intended to help move the game along.
- Teams will ensure thorough disinfection of common spaces before/after use including:
  - Dugouts benches, equipment bins, fence/gate latches, any other spaces that come into frequent touch
- Every effort should be made by managers/coaches to physically distance. Masks shall be worn at all times by coaches.

## SPECTATORS (PARENTS)

- When spectators are present, whether game or practice, they are expected to follow local municipality, league guidelines or host organization/ municipal guidelines. It is suggested that families limit attendance at games
- A parent or designated adult must remain at the field in the case of emergency.
- Ensure physical distance of 2m between non-family participants and spectators
- Spectators are encouraged to bring their own chairs for personal use – bleachers will typically be closed for use and will not be disinfected.
- Parents are at no time allowed onto the field of play unless permission has been given by the designated trainer or coach when there is an incident on the field.
- Spectators are encouraged not to wander to other areas of parks in which their diamond is located as other events may be in progress.
- If a baseball event is interrupted by thunder, participants, volunteers, and spectators are to



return to their motor vehicles until the baseball event is cancelled or able to resume. If someone does not have a motor vehicle; they should shelter in a safe location and try to maintain a minimum of 2 meters distancing from other.

- **Spectators MAY NOT retrieve baseballs that leave the field of play** – players will retrieve balls and ensure they are returned to the Safety Manager.
- Even more than in normal years, there will be zero tolerance for umpire heckling / negative commentary from coaches, players, spectators. Coaches are responsible for their fans and are encouraged to remind everyone that calling pitches from behind the pitcher is not easy. The job of spectators is to cheer for good plays, preferably when made by either team.

## PRACTICE

The protocols listed in this document also apply to Practice.

### EQUIPMENT

- No sharing of equipment such as batting helmets, catcher's masks, or other equipment likely to have been exposed to respiratory droplets. Each player should have his/her own helmet, baseball gloves, batting gloves, etc. and store these items inside their personal bag when not in use.
- Avoid personal clothing, equipment or electronics etc. being left in common places. Store inside personal bag always.
- Equipment that must be shared must be cleaned/sanitized between each player use.
- If possible, each player should also have their own bat. If a player has their own bat, it cannot be shared with another player.
- Physical distancing is not possible 100% of the time. As such face coverings may be worn at the discretion of the participant.
- Players should not wear protective medical gloves on the field during game play.
- Rules of acceptable behaviour cannot be contravened.
- Equipment must be sanitized between groups if it must be shared.

### PARTICIPANTS

- No spitting
- No sunflower seeds, chewing gum or chewing tobacco
- No sharing of water bottles or food
- No shared coolers
- No handshakes, fist or chest bumps, high fives, hugs, kisses, etc

## GAME PLAY

Sports activity has been significantly affected by COVID-19 prevention measures in place across the globe. Our traditional ways of competing will need to be altered in many instances to allow us to be back on the field of play while minimizing the risk of infection. The protocols listed under General and Practice also apply to games. Below are some competition specific protocols.



All levels use the rules in the Little League Rule book – often referred to as the “green book” but now it’s a nice shade of blue. At least one copy has been provided to each team. New this season, it’s available for downloading to your device for a nominal charge.

- MLL House League rules will be used – will be posted on website

### PRE-GAME

- The two teams may share the field for pre-game warm up. Each team shall stay in the outfield and remain on its side of the field. No use of the infield. Any batting practice must be done into a net or using whiffle balls.
- Pre-game meeting with umpire is optional. If having:
  - Involvement in the meeting is limited to one coach from each team; one or both umpires may attend. Players may not attend.
  - Maintain physical distancing of 2 meters.
- Line up cards must be prepared but will not be physically shared - photos may be taken by scorekeepers etc. and the lineup card must be made available to show the umpire when requested.

### DUGOUT/BENCH

- **Players should come to the game with a lawn chair.** Each player will be given a designated area outside of the field of play for them to sit at when not in the game. All player equipment including their bat should be kept at this location. Coaches will supervise players in this area.
- It is encouraged that players arrive at the fields dressed including cleats to maximize field time.
- **Dugouts are limited use only. A maximum of 4 are allowed in the dugout at any given time.**  
**Example: Dugout may be used by the on-deck batter, in the hole batter, coach and the safety manager.** Distancing is required and a coach must be present. This is intended to reduce game delays. All other players should sit in their chair in the designated area.

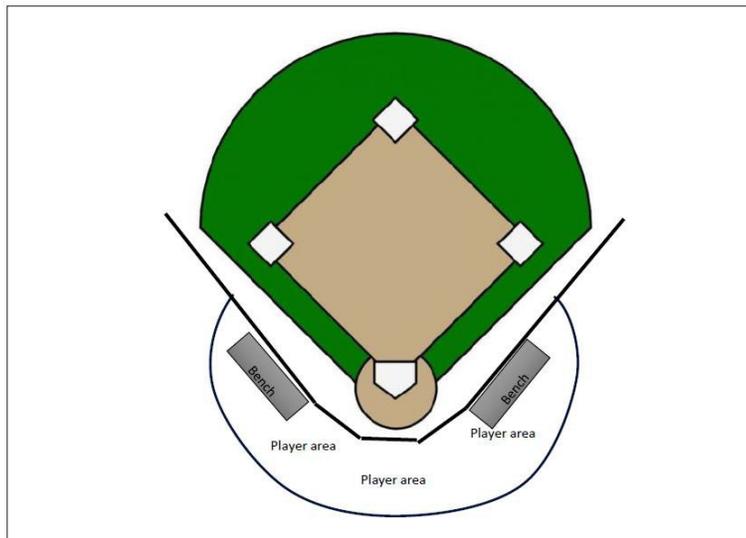


Figure 1: Recommended Player area. Spectator should avoid areas around dugouts and backstop.

## BASEBALLS

- Each team will have the Safety Manager designated to handle the baseballs.
- Each team will use their own baseballs when playing defense. They will take their baseballs on the field and then bring them back to the dugout when they leave the field.
- The defensive team will maintain control of the game balls used while they are on defense.
- Defensive team will need to chase all foul balls while they are in the field.
- Spectators MAY NOT touch any baseballs that leave the field of play.
- If a ball leaves play it shall be returned to the Safety Manager. Another ball can be thrown into play by the defensive team.

## BATS

- Ideally every player would have their own personal bat. If this is not possible or realistic, designated team bats may be used (see below). Personal bats will not be shared by anyone else throughout the game.
- If a player does not have their own bat, they will use one of the team bats that will be disinfected after every use.
- If a batter does NOT get on base, they will retrieve their bat and bring it back to their designated area (lawn chair).
- If a batter DOES reach base and is therefore not able to retrieve his/her own bat, the Safety Manager or a coach shall pick-up the bat and sanitize.

## OTHER EQUIPMENT

- 2 sets of catcher's equipment are available to each team. Each team will designate two players to catch per game. Catcher's equipment will be thoroughly sanitized after the game. No player will be forced to play in the catcher position. Pitch count rules are still in effect. (innings pitched)
- In the event one of the catchers is unavailable due to injury, the equipment may be sanitized in-game for an alternate player. The Safety Manager MUST get parental approval prior to a new player wearing the equipment.
- No sharing of catcher's masks in pitcher pre-game warm-up, between innings or in the bullpen. If one of the designated catchers is not available, warm up pitches may be thrown to a player or coach who is standing, but not squatting. In this circumstance, no use of a mound is permitted.
- If a face covering (ie. Medical mask) is worn by the pitcher it will be assessed as per existing rules regarding distracting colours. It is recommended that it not be white or grey.

## UMPIRES

- Umpires will be required to wear a face covering under their regular protective cage.
- Umpire positioning.
  - The ball/strike umpire will work 2 meters behind the pitcher. The second umpire will be positioned as normal behind first base and move as necessary to make calls. This makes umpire equipment unnecessary.

- Umpire(s) will not hold game balls or handle bats. However if a bat presents a hazard during play then it is at the umpire's discretion to remove the bat. Example: kicking a bat out of the way would be preferred.
- If incidental contact with baseballs or equipment occurs, umpire shall sanitize their hands.
- Umpires are responsible for the safety of all participants during game action and may intervene to ensure proper safe game play; they are not responsible to oversee sanitizing or related protocols
- Even more than in normal years, there will be zero tolerance for umpire heckling / negative commentary from coaches, players, spectators. Coaches are responsible for their fans and are encouraged to remind everyone that calling pitches from behind the pitcher is not easy.

### IN-GAME CHANGES

- Players shall not lick their fingers, blow on their hands, or otherwise go to their mouth.
- **Tag plays are allowed**, but the defensive player should vacate the area as soon as reasonably practicable following the tag. Where possible tags should be made with the glove.
- **Mound visits by coaches are to be kept to a minimum** and distancing must be respected.
- No mound visits by catcher

### COACHES

- Team meetings, including pitching visits, shall maintain physical distance of minimum 2 meters.
- A maximum of 1 coach and the pitcher may be included in a pitching visit.
- All coaches must wear a face covering upon arrival to the diamond.
- If a coach must approach an umpire, physical distancing of at least 2 meters must be maintained. Failure to do so may result in ejection.
- While on offence, base coaches must always stay within their box, except to avoid a play being made in the coach's box. Any discussions between coaches and players (e.g. batter visiting 3<sup>rd</sup> base coach; coach talking to runners, etc.) must maintain physical distancing of at least 2 meters.
- Pitchers, catchers, spotters, and coaches must always maintain a physical distance of 2 meters while pitchers are warming up in the bullpen.

### INJURIES

- The player parent or delegate in attendance shall be allowed to attend the player directly and will be responsible for directing care once the player has been removed from play
- Coaches, or any other person other than a parent attending an injured player SHALL wear a face covering.
- Critical injuries (head injuries, breathing, bones, blood) shall be dealt with as an emergency medical situation.

## POLICY ENFORCEMENT



The procedures laid out in this guideline are intended to ensure that all MLL sponsored activities adhere to Provincial/Municipal and Little League Canada best practices for

player health and safety.

## COMMUNICATION

- MLL expects all our player and spectators to follow these guidelines and the onsite instructions of the MLL representatives who are responsible for communication and enforcement of these guidelines.
- MLL will communicate these guidelines to all League participants and ensure proper cleaning equipment is made available to volunteers. MLL will monitor the progress of league activities and update these instructions as needed
- **Umpires** – Responsible for the safety of all participants during game action and may intervene to ensure proper safe game play.
- **Head Coaches** - Responsible to ensure the safety of their players and coaches during all team activities, primarily at practices and games, involving both baseball activities and player health including COVID 19 procedures. Further, to allow Head Coaches to manage both baseball and player safety issues in real time, each team participating in 2021 League play should have two adults available to support the Head Coach.
  - **Assistant Coach** – Game play and practice baseball assistance as guided by Head Coach
  - **NEW! Safety Manager** – Physical safety and health practices. This person SHALL NOT BE the HEAD COACH. In addition to their spectator interface role, Safety Managers will support Head Coaches with team activities (games and practices), primarily focused on managing equipment and facility cleaning, as well as ensuring social distancing requirements.

## PENALTIES

Violations of MLL safety protocols may result in penalties to violators from either the Municipal authorities or from MLL/partner Leagues.

- For League related issues - except where a protocol identifies a specific sanction or penalty - enforcement should be by way of:
  - An initial warning against the violator
  - A subsequent request to leave the in-person activity in the case of repeated violation
  - Further disciplinary action, up to and including, suspensions
  - MLL may also be subject to sanctions from District, Provincial or Little League Canada for failure to follow or enforce the protocols laid out in this guideline.

## SAFETY MANAGER

The focal point for all aspects of safe baseball activities in MLL rests with Head Coaches. This includes both ensuring safe playing conditions and maintaining a healthy playing environment. Coaches will be supported by MLL, as well within each team by the mandatory assignment of the Safety Manager. The primary safety responsibilities are:

- working with the Head coach on sanitizing during games and practice
- taking attendance
- ensuring cleaning of facility is performed
- reporting to the league any issues or need for league intervention
- handling of baseballs
- covid screening protocols