



## Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS)

### Fall Heat Plan ♦ Q & A for Coaches

### Updated July 2023

The following are potential questions and answers regarding the 14-day Fall Heat Plan for fall MCPS sports. This information supplements other information distributed to schools.

#### General

- Q:** Why does MCPS implement heat acclimatization guidelines and procedures?

**A:** First, because evidence supports that proper acclimatization to extreme heat is safer for student-athletes. Also, because the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) requires all Maryland school systems to develop and implement a plan to safely acclimate fall student-athletes to practicing in summer heat. MCPS is conforming to the law, which provides a greater degree of safety for student-athletes.
- Q:** How did MCPS develop its guidelines? Will our teams be at a competitive disadvantage when playing against teams from other school systems?

**A:** The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) assembled a comprehensive work group to create a model heat acclimatization plan. This plan was updated for the 2022–2023 school year and is available [here](#). MCPS is aligning with this model plan, similar to other school jurisdictions.
- Q:** What changes are in the updated plan?

**A:** Updated temperature guidelines, including four codes – green, gold, orange, and red – based on the heat index, enhanced emergency action plan and response information, and communication protocols.
- Q:** Do the heat acclimatization guidelines and procedures also apply to winter and spring sports?

**A:** No.
- Q:** Do the heat acclimatization guidelines and procedures apply on an individual basis?

**A:** Yes. The heat acclimatization period is designed for student-athletes on an individual basis. Days in which student-athletes do not practice due to a scheduled rest day, injury, illness, or other reasons do not count towards their heat acclimatization period.

#### Scrimmages

- Q:** I know that during the heat acclimatization period practices are restricted to a maximum of three hours, but how about scrimmages? Are they limited to three hours?

**A:** Yes.
- Q:** Can a “play day” or multiple team scrimmage last more than three hours?

**A:** Yes and no. Yes, the scrimmage itself may last for several hours, but a particular team’s participation must end three hours from the point that it begins to scrimmage. In essence, a team’s participation is limited to a period of three consecutive hours.

3. **Q:** Can a team practice and have a scrimmage on the same day?  
**A:** Yes – but only on a day in which two practices are allowed. One of the practice sessions can be used for a scrimmage.
4. **Q:** Is the first day in which a team may scrimmage affected by the guidelines?  
**A:** In some instances, yes. Scrimmage parameters, including the first day in which scrimmages are allowed, are included in the Standards and Schedule section of the *MCPS High School Athletics Handbook* (each sport has its own Standards section).

### **Practices – General**

1. **Q:** May two or more teams participate in a joint practice before the first scrimmage date?  
**A:** Yes – but the joint practice must conform to all heat acclimatization guidelines, including the extent of physical contact and equipment that is allowed.
2. **Q:** I know that teams may only practice once on days that student-athletes are in school; however what about professional days, when student-athletes do not have school, like the preservice days in which teachers report back to school in August? Can teams practice twice on those days?  
**A:** No – they never could. The *MCPS High School Athletics Handbook*, states that “Two practices are not allowed on professional days or other days not specified above.”
3. **Q:** What about two practices on holidays? Or on Saturdays during the season? Where in writing is the number of practices per day discussed?  
**A:** A section entitled *PRACTICE INFORMATION* is included in the *COACHING INFORMATION* section of the *MCPS High School Athletics Handbook*. The aforementioned questions, among many other matters, are addressed in this section.
4. **Q:** Does it matter whether a team has its one-hour walkthrough first, before the practice? Or does the walkthrough have to be second, after the practice?  
**A:** The order does not matter. What is important is that there is a three-hour recovery period in between the walkthrough and practice (or practice and walkthrough).
5. **Q:** Can practices be three-hours long all season?  
**A:** No. The three-hour maximum practice limit applies to the 14-day heat acclimatization period. Beginning the first day of school for student-athletes, the maximum practice length becomes two hours.
6. **Q:** Can teams conduct weightlifting sessions beyond the three-hour time limitation, or in place of the one-hour walkthrough?  
**A:** No. If a team wants to include weightlifting/conditioning in the heat acclimatization period, the weightlifting will have to be incorporated into the three-hour practice session. The definition of a practice session makes clear that weightlifting/conditioning is part of the practice (see the definition section on the last page of the *MCPS Fall Heat Plan*).
7. **Q:** I know that there must be a minimum of a three-hour recovery period between practice sessions, or a practice and walkthrough; however, what does “recovery period” mean? Can we show films, or have a classroom session?  
**A:** The recovery period is defined in the “Definitions” section of the model program provided by the state as simply “The time between the end of one practice or walkthrough and the beginning of the next practice or walkthrough.”

Essentially, this would mean that no physical exertion is allowed, and that student-athletes be in a relatively cool environment. As long as the student-athletes are physically resting, and in a relatively cool environment, classrooms sessions or their equivalent may occur.

### Practices—Two Practices in a Day

1. **Q:** On days in which two practices are allowed, the heat acclimatization guidelines limit total practice time to five hours. Does it matter how that five hour time period is apportioned?  
**A:** Yes and no. Yes, in that a single practice session may not exceed three hours. Other than that, a team may apportion the time between the two sessions how it chooses, as long as the combined time does not exceed five hours. For instance, both sessions can be two and half hours long, or one session two and three-quarters hours, the other two and a quarter hours, etc. As always, there must be at least a three-hour recovery period between sessions.
2. **Q:** Can a team take the five hours allotted for practice and divide it into three practice sessions?  
**A:** No.

### Education

1. **Q:** What do coaches need to know about heat acclimatization?  
**A:** All MCPS coaches will have to take the “Heat Illness Prevention” online course from the NFHS ([www.nfhslearn.org](http://www.nfhslearn.org)). All coaches must carefully review, and implement, the *Fall Heat Plan* (they have been distributed to fall coaches through athletics specialists, and are available on the *Health and Safety* page of the Athletics section of the MCPS website). All coaches will have to review all other safety related documents contained on the aforementioned webpage.  
  
There is a document in the General Coaches Info page of the Athletics section of the MCPS website titled: *MCPS Health and Safety Expectations and Information*. This document summarizes health and safety information and expectations for MCPS coaches.
2. **Q:** What about student-athletes? Is it true that coaches have to present a power point to student-athletes regarding heat acclimatization?  
**A:** Yes. All student-athletes are required to watch the *MCPS Student-Athlete Preseason Health and Safety Presentation* regarding a variety of safety concerns, not just heat acclimatization. The PowerPoint also includes hydration, steroids, MRSA, sudden-cardiac arrest, hazing, promoting a positive culture, use of social media, and head injuries—items that coaches are supposed to discuss with student-athletes anyway. The PowerPoint is also presented to student-athletes in the winter and spring seasons. The PowerPoint is very specific. It is up to schools to decide the best way to present this information, and to ensure all student-athletes have seen the presentation.
3. **Q:** How much time will it take to present the PowerPoint, and when does it need to be presented?  
**A:** The PowerPoint is presented in approximately 45–60 minutes. Student-athletes must view the PowerPoint on or before the first day of practice.
4. **Q:** What if a student-athlete is not present for the PowerPoint?  
**A:** Schools will determine a means for having all student-athletes watch the PowerPoint presentation. One potential idea is having someone in the school present the PowerPoint every other day, or every three days, for the first week or two of practices.
5. **Q:** How about parents/guardians? Are they educated on heat acclimatization? Or health and safety in general?

**A:** Yes. All parents/guardians, and all student-athletes, are required to review specific health and safety information included on the *Health and Safety* page of the Athletics section of the MCPS website including the *Fall Heat Plan*. Parents/guardians and student-athletes must indicate during the online registration process for athletes that they have reviewed the health and safety information, including resources on the MCPS website.

### **Emergency Action Plan**

1. **Q:** Where can I find the emergency action plan?  
**A:** Coaches, parents/guardians, and student-athletes may access this information on the local school website.
2. **Q:** What additional supplies have been provided to schools to assist with cold water submersion?  
**A:** While schools have had pools/tubs available, each high school has been provided with a new 100 gallon cooling tub. Additionally, schools were given tarps to use in instances when a cooling tub may not be available.
3. **Q:** Will there be a training or rehearsal of the emergency action plan?  
**A:** Yes. Coaches will be trained at the local school and the emergency action plan will be rehearsed in-person and interactively by all members of the coaching staff of each sport before each season.

### **Other Questions**

1. **Q:** There seems to be a lot of information—where can coaches and parents/guardians access this information?  
**A:** Coaches, parents/guardians, and student-athletes may access this information on the Athletics section of the MCPS website ([www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/developments/athletics](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/developments/athletics)). In particular, coaches, parents/guardians, and student-athletes should visit the General Info for Coaches page, the General Info for Parents/guardians and Student-Athletes page, and the Health and Safety page.