



Suggested Post-COVID-19 Gradual Return-to-Play Progression

The overall objective of a return-to-play (RTP) protocol is to gradually and safely increase the athlete's physical activity after an illness or injury. RTP after COVID-19 can be thought of as similar to a RTP protocol for concussion. With any viral infection, including but not limited to COVID-19, recovery from infection needs to occur. This includes resolution of symptoms, including fever, with no use of medications/treatment. Deconditioning during recovery from infection often occurs.

Prior to starting any gradual RTP, the level of severity of COVID-19 infection and necessary recovery period should be determined, along with verifying resolution of symptoms. In addition, the recommended medical clearance prior to gradual RTP is available in our accompanying algorithm and at aap.org.

Gradual RTP progression should occur **over at least 7 days**. Those who had more significant symptoms and/or a prolonged recovery from infection may experience more deconditioning and require a longer RTP period. Consideration for extending the progression should be given to athletes who experienced moderate COVID-19 symptoms as outlined above.

Below is a potential gradual RTP schedule. Gradual RTP should be adjusted based on the individual's type of previous physical activity and sport. Supervision is recommended with monitoring for any red flag symptoms. If an individual experiences any red flag symptoms, activity should be stopped and a physician notified.

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6
Duration	Over 1-2 days	At least 1 day	At least 1 day	Over 1-2 days	At least 1 day	
Type of activity	Light	Increase frequency	Increase duration and complexity	Increase intensity	Participate in usual sport-specific activities	Fully return to sport
Examples of exercise allowed	Walking, Elliptical, Stationary Bike at low intensity No weight lifting	Jogging, Running Drills, Stationary Bike at increased intensity, Jump Rope	Sport-specific drills, more complex drills Light weight lifting can start	Normal practice activities	Complete practice	
Time	15 minutes	30 minutes	45 minutes	60 minutes	Entire practice	
% Heart Rate Max	<70%	<80%	<80%	<80%		

Adapted from Elliott N, et al, infographic, *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 2020

References:

1. American Academy of Pediatrics. (Nov. 2020). COVID-19 Interim Guidance: Return to Sports. Retrieved from <https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-interim-guidance-return-to-sports/>
2. 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>

Recommendations based on expert opinions, dated Dec. 8, 2020*. Also see our:

- [Recommendations for Primary Care Providers Regarding Post-COVID-19 Return-to-Play \(RTP\) for Pediatric Athletes & Patients](#), with references and contributors
- [Return-to-Play \(RTP\) for Pediatric Athletes & Patients – ALGORITHM](#)

*Recommendations are subject to change – see www.mottchildren.org/COVIDUpdate for updates and additional information.