

Good afternoon, Everyone. First, as always, I hope you and your respective families are remaining healthy.

I know we are all anxious for some semblance of a return to normalcy, and as I am sure you are seeing, Governor Hutchinson is moving the state in that direction with gradual re-openings of businesses. Arkansas Soccer Association is required to follow state and federal directives during this reopening process. As previously indicated, Arkansas is poised to enter Phase 2 of the White House guidelines on Monday, May 18, and under Phase 2 of those guidelines, youth sports may start re-opening, subject to State government directives. During yesterday's press conference, Governor Hutchinson indicated that games for team sports remain prohibited in Arkansas; however, practices that followed social distancing and other elements of the Governor's directives were permissible. Therefore, we will still proceed with a Return to Play on Monday, May 18, subject to the limitations and restrictions set forth in Governor Hutchinson's directives.

The below link provides the details on ASA's Return to Play protocols which mirror Governor Hutchinson's directives. This includes social distancing of a minimum of six (6) feet between all players and coaches. Games and contact drills are not permitted. Groups cannot exceed 10 individuals (i.e. 1 coach and 9 players). Note, though, that Governor Hutchinson advised during today's press conference that he will have a new team sports directive on Wednesday, May 20 so we will be monitoring that development next week. To the extent that the directive next week changes anything, we will modify our protocols accordingly and be sure to update all of you.

[/Content/directors/upimg/dir5210/arkansas return to play protocols \(final\).pdf](/Content/directors/upimg/dir5210/arkansas%20return%20to%20play%20protocols%20(final).pdf)

Some people may not be comfortable with a return to play at this time. This is perfectly normal and totally acceptable. Those that decline the option of playing soccer right away should not be penalized or otherwise punished for that decision. The decision to participate rests with each individual family with respect to their level of comfort. Since Governor Hutchinson is allowing limited practices and Arkansas will enter Phase 2 of the White House guidelines on May 18, ASA is affording clubs and teams the opportunity to resume practices if they are so inclined to do so, provided they follow all local, state, and federal guidelines. They are not required to do so but now have the option available.

With respect to out-of-state leagues and/or tournaments, if the hosting state allows for those events to occur, ASA will approve participation for those teams, though all participating teams will be required to adhere to the local and state guidelines set forth by that hosting state. Additionally, Arkansas teams are required to follow Governor Hutchinson's directives regarding activities within the State of Arkansas. This creates the strange anomaly where a team may be permitted to play a game or tournament in Oklahoma or Texas but be prohibited from engaging in any contact activities for practices in Arkansas, including scrimmages and friendlies. In other words, a team might be able to play 11v11 matches in OK but be limited to 10 individuals and social distancing during practices in Arkansas, pursuant to the current directive issued by Governor Hutchinson. Again, this may change when the new directive is announced next Wednesday.

As for tryouts, ASA encourages all clubs to delay tryouts into June for the safety of the players. Many, if not most, of the players have not engaged in any type of athletic activity since early March. They are not in game shape and certainly could use 2-4 weeks of training before entering the physically demanding activity of tryouts to minimize the possibility of injuries. Players will also need time to re-hone their skills. Additionally, many families may not feel comfortable with attending tryout sessions quite yet.

Plus, with Governor Hutchinson providing an updated directive next Wednesday on team sports, there may be information within that directive that allows for greater flexibility with respect to tryouts. Therefore, delaying tryouts into early/mid-June would seem the prudent course of action. However, ASA is not prohibiting clubs from conducting tryouts as early as May 18. BUT, all tryouts must follow Governor Hutchinson's directive noted above: social distancing between players and coaches, size gatherings limited to no more than 10, no games (small-sided or otherwise), no player contact, etc. In the event that Governor Hutchinson's directive changes next Wednesday, we will adapt accordingly to comply with that directive. At this time, though, Governor Hutchinson's directive, as summarized in the attached document, applies to both practices and tryouts so if clubs opt to proceed with tryouts as early as next week, they must conduct them within the confines of the current directive.

I am sure many of you will have questions, and if so, please feel free to reach out to me. We are certainly not requiring ANY club or team to resume practices on Monday. We are simply allowing for that possibility to occur, provided local, state, and federal guidelines are followed. The protocol document attached should help everyone navigate each individual's responsibilities for those that do opt to return to play next week. Of course, the situation is fluid and does change frequently so we will continue to monitor things and will await further directives from Governor Hutchinson next week to see what impact that directive has on summer soccer activities. We want to return to the pitch as well, but we have to ensure that we do so within the directives set forth by Governor Hutchinson. Thank you for your continued patience and understanding, and please stay well.

Jim

Executive Director

Arkansas Soccer Association