



Return to Sport Plan

Response to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) at USA Climbing events

[This contains updates from the last published version from March 9, 2021]

This "Return to Sport" document is published by USA Climbing in the interest of providing an opportunity for continued competition while protecting and preserving the health and safety of those attending relevant events during the current global pandemic. As policy and practice rules, this "Return to Sport" document is envisioned by Rule 3.3.5 of the USA Climbing Rulebook. As such, and also being safety rules, competition officers at relevant USA Climbing Sanctioned Events have the authority to enforce these rules.

1. INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (**COVID-19**) is a respiratory disease caused by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (**SARS-CoV-2**). SARS-CoV-2 is highly contagious and spreads primarily through respiratory droplets from infected individuals, including those who are not exhibiting symptoms or "asymptomatic" persons. People with COVID-19 may have a wide range of signs and symptoms.

For the purposes of this document, we will use the term "SARS-CoV-2" when referring to the virus and testing, and "COVID-19" when referring to disease or symptoms of disease.

1.1. The primary method of prevention of SARS-CoV-2 infection is through behavioral modifications including and not limited to:

- maintaining at least 6 feet of physical distancing;
- practicing routine and thorough hand-washing or hand sanitizing;
- practicing personal hygiene measures when coughing and sneezing;
- wearing appropriate personal protective equipment protecting one's eyes, nose, and mouth;
- avoidance of sharing equipment, food, or drink;
- enhancing thorough cleaning procedures of shared or common-use surfaces;

- identifying infected individuals and all persons exposed through contact tracing;
- appropriate isolation of infected individuals and appropriate quarantining of exposed individuals per local and CDC guidelines.

Vaccinations are now available against SAR-CoV-2 and are strongly encouraged as a prevention strategy in addition to the modifications listed above.

1.2. USA Climbing's primary objective with this document is to identify and adopt strategies that mitigate SARS-CoV-2 transmission at live ("in-person") USA Climbing events, including competition environments. This document is subject to change as the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic evolves.

"Virtual" format competitions started in the Fall of 2020 and may be used in the future. In those situations, mitigation efforts and guidelines for such virtual format events will be based solely on local Host Facility protocols in conjunction with USA Climbing.

All participants of USA Climbing events acknowledge, accept, and agree that the sport of climbing and related fitness activities of USA Climbing events involve inherent risks, and understand that no amount of care, caution, instruction, or expertise can eliminate the inherent dangers including infectious diseases associated with these and other activities within a USA Climbing event.

Exposure to SARS-CoV-2 is a risk in any public place where people gather. This document aims to limit and mitigate SARS-CoV-2 exposure in a USA Climbing event, but USA Climbing cannot prevent event attendees from becoming exposed to, contracting, or spreading SARS-CoV-2 while participating in its events.

1.3. The information provided in this document does not, and is not intended to constitute legal or medical advice. All information, content, and materials available in this document are for general informational purposes. Entities should contact their attorney to obtain advice with respect to any legal matters, and their designated licensed healthcare professionals with respect to any medical matters. Entities should not act or refrain from acting on the basis of information in this document without first seeking legal advice from counsel in the relevant jurisdiction or medical advice from their healthcare professionals.

2. GENERAL INFORMATION

2.1. Initial Event Planning & Preparation

- ❑ 2.1.1. All USA Climbing sanctioned events shall adhere to local, state, and federal guidance/regulations regarding COVID-19 mitigation measures and other public health requirements. If local, state, or federal guidance/regulations should be in conflict around an aspect of COVID-19 mitigation, USA Climbing events should comply with the most stringent or restrictive of the guidance.
- ❑ 2.1.2. For each event, a localized evaluation of the COVID-19 situation will be conducted and an analysis of the pandemic's status will be performed and discussed by USA Climbing and the Host Facility throughout the preparation and execution of the event.
- ❑ 2.1.3. Event planning will cater to these localized evaluations as well as considerations including, but not limited to: the latest guidelines from the CDC, local governmental regulations, Host Facility regulations, current recognized best practices (respiratory etiquette, hand hygiene, physical distancing, etc.), Host Facility square footage, COVID-19-mitigation appropriate occupancy, Host Facility's quality of air filtration & circulation, etc.
- ❑ 2.1.4. USA Climbing and Host Facility in cooperation with the local health department will mutually confirm the event's actuality, barring any force majeure, no later than 30 days prior to the first competition date.

2.2. Emergency Preparedness

- ❑ 2.2.1. Prior to the event, USA Climbing will require all expected attendees to be familiar with the mitigation protocol(s) of SARS-CoV-2 transmission while in the host city and Host Facility.
- ❑ 2.2.2. USA Climbing will verify appropriate on-site medical team(s) and first-aid station(s) for the event to the standard of local governing authorities. All ancillary services (e.g. physical therapist, massage therapist, team trainer) need to be cleared with USA Climbing and the Host Facility. If capacity permits and ancillary support staff are permitted on site, ancillary support staff need to confirm they are equipped with personal protective equipment (PPE) including gloves, masks, face shields.
- ❑ 2.2.3. Each attendee is acknowledging they are fully informed of the event's rules and protocol with special consideration given to SARS-CoV-2 transmission mitigation.

- ❑ 2.2.4. Each attendee agrees to disclose truthfully and completely all COVID-19/ SARS-CoV-2 screening criteria required to enter Host Facility. Criteria for entry should include but not limited to:

- ❑ A. Temperature check at Host Facility-designated point of entry to confirm <100.4°F (38°C).

- ❑ B. Disclosing whether presently or within the last 24 hours, the attendee has experienced any of the following including and not limited to:

- ❑ Fever (100.4°F or higher) and/or chills in the past 24 hours
- ❑ Sore throat
- ❑ NEW cough (for anyone with chronic allergies/asthma, a change from your baseline)
- ❑ Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- ❑ NEW onset headache (for anyone with migraines or other chronic headache syndrome, a change from your baseline)
- ❑ NEW Fatigue, muscle or body aches (associated with any other symptoms on this list)
- ❑ Congestion and/or runny nose (for anyone with chronic allergies, a change from your baseline)
- ❑ Diarrhea, nausea or vomiting
- ❑ NEW loss of taste or smell
- ❑ Having a positive COVID-19 test for active virus in the past 10 days
- ❑ If within the past 14 days you have had close personal contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 (this excludes individuals who work in a health care setting wearing appropriate, required personal protective equipment).

Close contact is defined as being within 6 feet for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period with a person with confirmed COVID-19 (starting 2 days before the infected person's symptoms started or, for asymptomatic infected persons, 2 days before their positive test).

- ❑ C. Disclosure should be made to USA Climbing at least 72 hours prior to the competition at medicalquestions@usacimbing.org for the following:
 - ❑ If within the last 14 days the attendee has had any known close contact with a person confirmed or suspected to have COVID-19, or
 - ❑ If the attendee is currently waiting on the results of a COVID-19 test or has a positive COVID-19 test within the last 10 days.

2.3. Protocol in Case of Suspected Positivity

- ❑ 2.3.1. Any attendee who has a new confirmed positive COVID-19/SARS-CoV-2 test (Polymerase Chain Reaction/PCR or antigen-based) within 10 days of the event is not allowed to physically participate in any manner in the event.
- ❑ 2.3.2. In the case that a non-competing individual exhibits symptoms consistent with COVID-19 infection etiology, the non-competing individual should be evaluated by the Designated Licensed Medical Professional, and when appropriate, removed from the Host Facility. If such a non-competing individual is in a supportive role or is a designated competition official (such as a judge, coach, regional coordinator, or belayer), a comparable alternative substitute is permitted.
- ❑ 2.3.3. In the case that a competitor exhibits symptoms consistent with COVID-19 infection etiology, the competitor should be evaluated by the Designated Medical Professional, and when appropriate removed from the Host Facility and appropriate transmission mitigation and contact tracing procedures performed.
- ❑ 2.3.4. In the case of identification of an individual exhibiting symptoms consistent with COVID-19 infection etiology at any time during a USA Climbing event, event suspension, postponement, or cancellation are possibilities. The appropriate event outcome will be determined by personnel including and not limited to: Designated Licensed Medical Professional, event Jury President, USA Climbing CEO, USA Climbing VP of Sport, Host Facility and the local health department.

2.4. Protective Equipment & Supplies

- ❑ 2.4.1. USA Climbing will confirm that adequate quantities of personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies including but not limited to: masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, aerosolized disinfectant spray (ex. Lysol), disinfectant wipes (ex. Clorox), etc are provided for the event.
- ❑ 2.4.2. MASKS: Facial masks shall cover the nose and mouth and extend below the chin. Acceptable masks for use during competition include: two-layer cloth masks, surgical masks, and sport facial masks. Masks not acceptable during competition include: N95 masks, Leon Paul Face Mask Shields, Neck/face sleeves or gaiters, masks with one-way valves. Single-use masks will be provided should an individual's mask be deemed inappropriate by USAC personnel.
 - ❑ A. Belayers and rope handlers are encouraged to wear Face Shields and/or Full Coverage Eye Goggles. Belay glove use is encouraged and should cover the hand and all fingers completely.

- ❑ B. When wearing belay gloves, hands should be sanitized prior to donning belay gloves and immediately after removing belay gloves. Belay gloves shall not be worn or used at any other time or for any purpose other than actual belaying. If belay gloves are not used, belayers shall sanitize hands immediately before and after each climber.

- ❑ 2.4.3. In addition to existing hand washing areas in the Host Facility at local, regional, and divisional events, freestanding hand sanitizing/hand-washing stations shall be visibly distributed throughout the event space.

- ❑ 2.4.4. At national events, USA Climbing will confirm contactless thermometers are available for temperature checks of event personnel, attendees, and competitors.

2.5. General Event Details

As much as feasible, virtual management will be provided for logistical and operational components of the event including and not limited to:

- ❑ 2.5.1. An event information document containing details related to the specific virus transmission mitigation protocol organized for the event, as well as general event details such as format, rules, etc.

- ❑ 2.5.2. A virtual technical meeting.

- ❑ 2.5.3. Starting lists / running orders.

- ❑ 2.5.4. Results: contactless scoring and verification by competitors.

- ❑ 2.5.5. Qualification route demonstrations.

3. SARS-COV-2 TRANSMISSION MITIGATION CONSIDERATIONS & PROCEDURES

3.1. By Group

3.1.1. All Attendees

- ❑ A. Temperature checks will be required of every individual prior to entering the facility. Individuals with a temperature $\geq 100.4^{\circ}\text{F}$ (38°C) will not be permitted inside the facility.
- ❑ B. At all times while in the facility, attendees are required to maintain physical distancing of at least 6 feet from other attendees.
- ❑ C. Upon entry into the Host Facility, all attendees are required to disinfect with hand sanitizer or a hand washing station. Thereafter, it is strongly encouraged that within the event space attendees disinfect at provided hand sanitizing/hand washing stations.
- ❑ D. No common food or drink will be provided at the venue. Attendees should provide their own food and drink and should not offer/accept food or drink to/from others.
- ❑ E. Appropriate Masks (see Section [2.4.2. Masks](#)) and a minimum of 6-foot physical distancing are required at all physical, in-person meetings or gatherings.

3.1.2. USA Climbing & Host Facility Personnel

- ❑ A. A completed and signed COVID-19 Screening questionnaire is required daily for entry into the host facility for participating volunteers and USA staff working the event. If under the age of 18, a parent or legal guardian signature is needed.
- ❑ B. Belayers and Rope Handlers should wear appropriate masks and full coverage belay gloves (see Section [2.4.2.A and B](#)) at all times while on duty.
- ❑ C. All USA Climbing staff, judges, scorekeepers and volunteers must wear a mask at all times while on duty or while attending USA competitions.
- ❑ D. USA Climbing judges and scorekeepers are strongly encouraged to sanitize their hands before exchanging handled items (i.e. scoring tablets, score cards)
- ❑ F. USA Climbing Judges will show competitors their score on a device (tablet, laptop, etc.) upon conclusion of each problem/route.

3.1.3. Competitors & Coaches

- ❑ A. Competitors will be required to complete Host Facility waiver(s) prior to entry to the competition.
- ❑ B. A completed and signed COVID-19 Screening questionnaire is required daily for entry into the host facility for participating athletes. If under the age of 18, a parent or legal guardian signature is needed.
- ❑ C. Competitors agree to the USA Climbing Waiver and USA Climbing Code of Ethics http://www.usaclimbing.org/Resources/Codes_of_Conduct_and_Policies/USA_Climbing_Waiver.htm and http://www.usaclimbing.org/Resources/Codes_of_Conduct_and_Policies/Code_of_Ethics.htm
- ❑ D. Hand sanitizing at check-in, and subsequent hand sanitizing or washing hands with soap and water after bathroom visits will be required by all competitors.
- ❑ E. Use of liquid chalk or a chalk ball is strongly encouraged.
- ❑ F.. Personal fans (including but not limited to electric or manual) are prohibited.
- ❑ G. Competitors must use the brush designated to the route(s)/problem(s).
- ❑ H. Competitors are required to have their own (personal) masks as appropriate (see Section [2.4.2. Masks](#))
- ❑ I. Competitors must carry all personal belongings with them through each part of the competition. Personal belongings are not permitted to be left in Isolation or Warm-up areas.
- ❑ J. Competitors must wear a mask at all times including during climbing, and maintain 6-foot physical distance as much as feasible.

3.1.4. Spectators

- ❑ A. Spectators may or may not be permitted at the competition. This will be determined by the aforementioned “localized evaluation” (Section 2.1.2.) which will occur during initial event preparations, and local regulations (Section 2.1.3.) at the time of the event. With the evolving nature of the pandemic and its geographic inconsistency, USA Climbing cannot provide certainty on this subject.

- ❑ B. If spectating is permitted at the event, USA Climbing will adhere to local regulations of occupancy limits. Spectators will follow local recommended health mandates and Host Facility safety protocols in addition to required mask-wearing and physical distancing procedures described in this document.
- ❑ C. USA Climbing (for National events) and the Host Facility (for local, regional, and divisional events) will confirm effective management of disinfection and sanitization in spectator areas.

3.1.5. Media (livestream, broadcast, photographers, videographers, etc.)

- ❑ A. A specific area will be designated for all accredited media personnel.
- ❑ B. Media personnel must wear a mask at all times and adhere to 6-foot minimum physical distancing practices unless another mitigation strategy that is approved by the CDC and USA Climbing is used.

3.2. By Area

3.2.1. All Areas

- ❑ A. Mask-wearing and practicing 6-foot physical distance are required at all times. Personal fans (including but not limited to electric or manual) are prohibited.
- ❑ B. At the end of each round event personnel are encouraged to clean/sanitize areas of frequent contact (including but not limited to mats, chairs, doors, rails).
- ❑ C. If any person in any event area develops any symptoms consistent with Section [2.2.4.B](#) refer to [2.3. Protocol in Case of Suspected Positivity](#).

3.2.2. Isolation Area

- ❑ A. The Isolation area should try to be separate from the Warm-up area. No climbing can take place in the Isolation area. If climbing walls are present, they must be made “off limits”.
- ❑ B. The Isolation area must accommodate for at least 6 feet physical distancing per individual occupying this area. Based on capacity, the number of coaching / team support staff in the isolation area may be limited.
- ❑ C. If the isolation area entrance of the Host Facility is different from the main entrance (such as a separate entrance for competitors and coaches), all individuals who have not

been previously screened entering the isolation area must be screened according to Section [2.2.4.A, B, C](#).

- D. Upon entry, Competitors must sanitize their hands with a provided hand sanitizing/hand washing station in this area.
- E. All individuals in the isolation area must wear masks at all times and practice \geq 6-foot physical distancing.
- F. Competitors are only permitted to warm-up with their own personal equipment (this equipment cannot be shared). Personal fans (including but not limited to electric or manual) are prohibited.

3.2.3. Warm-Up Area(s)

- A. The Warm-up area must be in a space separate from the designated Isolation area.
- B. Competitors are required to maintain physical distancing of at least 6 feet. Based on capacity, the number of coaching / team support staff in the warm-up area may be limited.
- C. Competitors will rotate into and out of the warm-up area according to the running order with 45 minutes allotted to each competitor for warm-up.
- D. Competitors are required to wear a mask at all times in the Warm-up area.

3.2.4. Field of Play

- A. Hand sanitizing/hand washing stations will be provided at the entrance to the field of play and at each of the routes or problems in the area. Competitors are strongly encouraged to sanitize their hands upon entry to the field of play, in transition to the sequential problems/routes, and upon departure from the field of play.
- B. Competitors are required to bring all of their personal belongings with them through each transition of the competition (including but not limited to bags, shoes, chalk). Personal belongings cannot be left behind. Personal fans (including but not limited to electric or manual) are prohibited.
- C. Non-competitors must wear a mask at all times while in the field of play.
- D. Competitors are required to wear a mask at all times in the field of play.

3.2.5. Award Ceremony Area

- ❑ A. Competitors are required to wear masks during the awards ceremony unless another mitigation strategy that is approved by the CDC and USA Climbing is used.
- ❑ B. Award Presenters are required to wear masks unless another mitigation strategy that is approved by the CDC and USA Climbing is used.
- ❑ C. Awards (including but not limited to medals, trophies, ribbons, flowers) will be directly picked up from a tray by the competitors.
- ❑ D. Handshakes, hugs, kissing, and any other forms of physical form of congratulations are strictly prohibited.

3.3. By Discipline

3.3.1. Lead Climbing

- ❑ A. “Rope-biting” is strongly discouraged and may be prohibited by some event organizers/host facilities. In events where lead rope-biting is prohibited and the rope is bitten, the affected rope may be removed for disinfection.
- ❑ B. If lead-climbing supportive equipment is not supplied by Host Facility or USA Climbing, volunteers shall have their own personal lead-climbing supportive equipment available (including but not limited to belay devices, personal harness, and full-coverage belay gloves), subject to approval by the Host Facility and/or USA Climbing.

3.3.2. Bouldering

- ❑ A. Competitors must use the brush designated to the route(s)/problem(s).

4. PARACLIMBING

4.1. Competitions

- ❑ 4.1.1. Will be held in such a way to allow for adequate social distancing at all times during attempts. Number of competitors per session and number of separate sessions to be determined based on registration numbers and facility considerations.
- ❑ 4.1.2. Only competitors, coaches and pre-approved aides will be allowed in the competition or isolation area during the competition of the climbing event. No spectators or other persons will be allowed in the waiting area in order to ensure social distancing measures.
- ❑ 4.1.3. Competitors shall sanitize hands immediately upon entry to the event. Thereafter competitors are strongly encouraged to hand sanitize before and after climbing.

4.2. Assistance

- ❑ 4.2.1. Due to the need to ensure social distancing, other competitors at the event are not allowed to provide assistance to competitors with mobility or other activities. Each competitor may bring one personal aide to the event if assistance is needed. USA Climbing must be informed of the identity of the aide prior to the event.
- ❑ 4.2.2. All COVID-19 mitigation precautions apply to aid as to competitors and event staff. The aide must remain socially distanced from other competitors at all times and may not provide assistance to two separate competitors, unless from the same household. The aide must wear a mask at all times and follow other infection mitigation precautions as outlined in this document.

4.3. Special consideration for callers for VI group competitors

- ❑ 4.3.1. In order to decrease the chance of spreading of aerosols all callers must be masked at all times, and are strongly encouraged to wear eye protection. All callers and VI teams are encouraged to use a 2-way radio communication to decrease the need for shouting or loud verbalization. Callers will be expected to stay socially distanced at all times during their time of competition and during waiting times.

4.4. Equipment

- ❑ 4.4.1. All assistive equipment that is not used during the competition event will be placed in a specified area in the competition zone by the athlete, their personal aide or a specified event volunteer. The volunteer will wear PPE including a mask, eye protection and gloves as they will not be able to comply with social distancing when assisting with equipment.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

Are chalk balls/sock permitted?

Chalk balls/socks are permitted, as these physically constrain loose chalk and prevent chalk dust and debris dispersing in the air. Loose chalk is irritating to the respiratory tract, and can increase behaviors such as eye-rubbing and mask-touching that can potentially result in increased risk of viral infection. Alcohol-based liquid chalk may help decrease contamination of hands with infectious particles. For this reason, the USA Climbing Medical Committee encourages the use of alcohol-based liquid chalk and minimizing chalk dust and debris in the competition venue.

Can water bottles and pre-packaged foods/snacks be provided?

Water bottles and prepackaged food may be provided at the event for officials and volunteers if provisions adhere to COVID-19 mitigation guidelines (including social distancing, specific areas for eating, no sharing of eating items/utensils).

Water or snacks for competitors are not permitted at this time to reduce unnecessary eating or socializing at the event, and to prevent avoidable vectors of infection. All competitors should bring their own water bottles and snacks.

Is there a reason for the temperature to be set at 100.4F and not lower?

A fever is a good indicator for COVID-19 when combined with other symptoms. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) cut-off for a fever is 100.4F, which is adopted by USA Climbing Medical Committee's guidance so as not to disqualify athletes who may exhibit slightly higher-than-normal temperatures without any other symptoms of COVID-19.

Is rope-biting still strongly discouraged even if (biting through) a mask?

YES. Rope biting is strongly discouraged even if done through a mask. Saliva could soak through the mask and contaminate the rope. Biting through a mask can potentially shift the mask from its appropriate fitting position over the nose and chin area.