



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 as of January 6, 2022]

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 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. Spread occurs through any combination of inhalation of virus-containing very fine respiratory droplets and aerosol particles, eye/nose/mouth exposure, and mucous membrane contact with virus-containing particles. Transmission occurs from infected individuals as well as those who are not exhibiting symptoms or "asymptomatic" persons. People with COVID-19 may have a wide range of signs and symptoms.

Definitions:

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.
- Use the term "physical distancing" to mean maintaining 6 feet of physical separation as much as can be accommodated.
- Use the term "Close contact" to mean 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).
- Use the term "fully vaccinated" outlined by the current CDC definitions pertaining to COVID-19 vaccination status.

- Use the term “unvaccinated” to strictly refer to an individual having received no approved vaccination against COVID-19.
- Use the term “Day 0” as defined by the CDC for consideration of symptom onset and timing for isolation or quarantine.

1.1. The primary method of prevention of SARS-CoV-2 infection is through widely available vaccinations and booster shots which are strongly encouraged. Behavioral modifications including but not limited to the following contribute to mitigating the spread of the virus:

- maintaining physical distancing;
- practicing routine and thorough hand-washing or hand sanitizing;
- practicing personal hygiene measures when coughing and sneezing;
- wearing an appropriate mask covering one’s nose, and mouth;
- avoidance of sharing equipment, food, or drink;
- enhancing thorough cleaning procedures of shared or common-use surfaces;
- identifying infected individuals and close contacts through contact tracing;
- appropriate isolation of infected individuals and appropriate quarantining of close contacts per local and CDC guidelines.

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.

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 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 will mutually confirm the event's actuality, barring any force majeure, as soon as is feasible with a target of within 30 days of the event.

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).
- ❑ 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. This acknowledgement may occur in digital/electronic format via USA Climbing event registration attestations. Host Facility health screening attestations may be in addition to those required by USA Climbing.

2.3 COVID Symptoms, Confirmed Cases, and Exposed Cases

- ❑ 2.3.1. COVID-19 infection may include, but is not limited to, the following signs and symptoms:
 - ❑ Fever (100.4°F or higher)
 - ❑ Chills
 - ❑ Sore throat
 - ❑ Headache
 - ❑ 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

- ❑ 2.3.2. It is the responsibility of the all event attendees who intend to participate in a USA climbing event (athletes and USA Climbing event staff and support staff) to truthfully disclose:
 - ❑ If you have tested positive for COVID-19 OR have had close contact to a known COVID-19 case within the 5 days preceding the start of an event.
 - ❑ **USA Climbing will require appropriate isolation or quarantine measures per CDC and local health department guidelines and will follow whichever set of guidelines is more stringent.**
 - ❑ Disclosure should be made to USA Climbing at medicalquestions@usaclimbing.org

- ❑ **2.3.3 IF YOU HAVE TESTED POSITIVE FOR COVID-19:** (Applies to EVERYONE, regardless of vaccination status):
 - ❑ A. If you test positive for COVID-19 and are **asymptomatic**
 - ❑ Isolate for 5 days from your positive test (Day 0).
 - ❑ If you continue to be asymptomatic after 5 days, isolation can be discontinued, and you can attend the event as soon as day 6.
 - ❑ Once isolation is discontinued, you must wear a mask for a minimum of 5 additional days in all public indoor settings.
 - ❑ B. If you test positive for COVID-19 and you have **symptoms**
 - ❑ Isolate for 5 days from symptom onset (Day 0).

- ❑ Isolation can be discontinued after 5 days, and you can attend the event as soon as day 6 **IF** you have been fever-free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication and your other symptoms are resolving.
 - ❑ Once isolation is discontinued, you must wear a mask for a minimum of 5 additional days in all public indoor settings.

- ❑ **2.3.4 IF YOU HAVE CLOSE CONTACT WITH SOMEONE WITH COVID-19 AND:**
 - ❑ You are fully vaccinated **AND** have received your booster shot **OR**
 - ❑ You have completed the primary series of Pfizer or Moderna vaccine within the last 6 months **OR**
 - ❑ You are 5-17 years old and you have completed a 2 dose primary series of the Pfizer vaccine **OR**
 - ❑ You have completed the primary series of J&J vaccine within the last 2 months
 - ❑ **Then follow all of these instructions**
 - ❑ The date of last contact is considered Day 0.
 - ❑ Wear a mask in all public indoor settings for a minimum of 10 days.
 - ❑ Test on day 5, if possible (strongly encouraged).
 - ❑ If you develop symptoms, get tested and stay home.

- ❑ **2.3.5 IF YOU HAVE CLOSE CONTACT WITH SOMEONE WITH COVID-19 AND:**
 - ❑ You completed the primary series of Pfizer or Moderna vaccine more than 6 months ago and are NOT BOOSTED **OR**
 - ❑ You completed the primary series of J&J vaccine more than 2 months ago and are NOT BOOSTED **OR**
 - ❑ You are UNVACCINATED
 - ❑ **Then follow all of these instructions:**
 - ❑ The date of last contact is considered Day 0.
 - ❑ QUARANTINE at home for 5 days. After that, wear a mask in all public indoor settings for a minimum of 5 additional days.
 - ❑ Test on day 5, if possible (strongly encouraged).
 - ❑ If you develop symptoms, get tested and stay at home.

2.4. Protocol in Case of Suspected COVID-19 During an Event

- ❑ 2.4.1. In the case that a non-competing individual exhibits symptoms consistent with COVID-19 infection etiology during an event, 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.

- ❑ 2.4.2. In the case that a competitor exhibits symptoms consistent with COVID-19 infection etiology during an event, the competitor should be evaluated by the Designated

Medical Professional, and removed from the Host Facility and appropriate transmission mitigation and contact tracing procedures performed.

- ❑ 2.4.3. 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 that may include but is 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.

2.5. Protective Equipment & Supplies

- ❑ 2.5.1. USA Climbing will confirm that adequate quantities of personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies are provided for the event.
- ❑ 2.5.2. 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, sport facial masks, and N95 and KN95 masks. Masks not acceptable during competition include: Leon Paul Face Mask Shields, Neck/face sleeves or gaiters, and 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.
 - ❑ 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 are encouraged to sanitize hands immediately before and after each climber.
- ❑ 2.5.3. 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.
- ❑ 2.5.4. At national events, USA Climbing will confirm contactless thermometers are available for temperature checks in the event of a medical condition involving event personnel, competitors, or attendees.

2.6. 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:

- ❑ 2.6.1. 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.
- ❑ 2.6.2. A virtual technical meeting.
- ❑ 2.6.3. Starting lists / running orders.
- ❑ 2.6.4. Results: contactless scoring and verification by competitors.
- ❑ 2.6.5. Qualification route demonstrations.

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

3.1. By Group

3.1.1. All Attendees

- A. Any attendee experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 immediately before or during an event are encouraged to leave the venue or not attend the event.
- B. Mask wearing (see Section [2.5.2. Masks](#)) using an appropriate mask is required.
- C. At all times while in the facility, attendees are strongly recommended to physically distance themselves.
- D. 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.
- E. 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.

3.1.2. USA Climbing & Host Facility Personnel

- A. Any USA Climbing staff or volunteer and any Host Facility Personnel experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 immediately before or during an event are encouraged to leave the venue or not attend the event.
- B. Belayers and Rope Handlers should wear appropriate masks and full coverage belay gloves (see Section [2.5.2. 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. Any USA Competitor or coach or team staff experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 immediately before or during an event are encouraged to leave the venue or not attend the event.
- 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_Conflicts_of_Interest.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.
- H. Competitors are required to have their own (personal) masks as appropriate (see Section [2.5.2. 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 physical distancing as much as is 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. Any spectator experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 immediately before or during an event are encouraged to leave the venue or not attend the event.
- C. 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.

- ❑ D.. 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 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 is required at all times.
- ❑ B. Physical distancing is recommended at all times.
- ❑ C. 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).

3.2.2. Isolation Area

- ❑ A. If possible and space allows, the Isolation area should be separate from the Warm-up area. This is to be determined after a walkthrough of the Host Facility.
- ❑ B. The Isolation area should accommodate physical distancing. Based on capacity, the number of coaching / team support staff in the isolation area may be limited.
- ❑ C. Upon entry to the Isolation area, Competitors must sanitize their hands with a provided hand sanitizing/hand washing station in this area.
- ❑ D. All individuals in the isolation area must wear masks at all times while in the Isolation Area.
- ❑ E. Competitors are only permitted to warm-up with their own personal equipment (this equipment cannot be shared).

3.2.3. Warm-Up Area(s)

- A. If possible and space allows, the Warm-up area should be separate from the designated Isolation area. This is to be determined after a walkthrough of the Host Facility.
- B. Competitors should adhere to physical distancing guidelines. Based on capacity, the number of coaching / team support staff in the warm-up area may be limited.
- C. Competitors are required to wear a mask at all times in the Warm-up area.

3.2.4. Field of Play

- A. Competitors are strongly encouraged to sanitize their hands upon entry to the field of play 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.
- 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. Congratulations are encouraged but physical contact should be minimized.

3.3. By Discipline

3.3.1. Lead Climbing

- A. Use of a Team rope or individual rope for lead climbing is strongly recommended but must be inspected and approved by appropriate designated event and/or Host Facility organizers.

- ❑ 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.

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 Host 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 aides 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 must wear a mask at all times.

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 permitted?

YES. Rope-biting is technically allowed, as competitors are currently being asked to bring their own ropes or a team rope, but it 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.