

The COVID-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented halt to athletic activities. Athletes, coaches and parents across the nation are looking for guidance in this difficult time.

A team of orthopedic surgeons, physical therapists, athletic trainers, strength and conditioning coaches, and sports science researchers at Sanford Health have released several resources for athletes and coaches to utilize at home during this extended break. Athletes everywhere are working out from home, but even the most complete at-home workout cannot replicate the demands of sport. Athletes returning from this extended break will be deconditioned and more susceptible to injury, heat illness and sudden cardiac death.

Consider these statistics:

- 240% increase in Achilles tendon ruptures following the lockout of the 2011 NFL season.
- 50% of all ACL injuries occur in pre-season (NFL).
- 62% of all UCL injuries occur during the first three months of the MLB season.
- Most heat-related deaths in high school and college football occur in the first four days of practice, with the first two days having the highest risk.

Coaches have the most important role in managing the safe return of athletes to sport. Our team of experts at Sanford Sports is here to support you throughout the process. We have developed a four-phased plan to guide coaches as you prepare your athletes to return to competition. Each phase is designed to build upon the previous phase.

The plan does not replace a coach's good judgment. Modifications to this plan will likely be necessary based on the individual athlete and ever-changing guidelines from governing bodies.

If you have more specific needs and questions, please reach out to a provider in your area via this web site: <https://www.sanfordhealth.org/medical-services/orthopedics-and-sports-medicine/orthopedics>

Overview

Phase 1: Preparation

- Goals
 - Recover from prior injuries and reduce risk of future injury
 - Establish a base level of overall fitness
 - Develop and maintain proper self-care habits including sleep, nutrition and hydration

Phase 2: Transition

- Goals
 - Build and maintain a base of fitness, strength, and power
 - Prepare for sport specific skill work

Phase 3: Modified Sport Specific

- Goals
 - Reintroduce individual and limited team based skill work
 - Monitored amounts of full contact and game speed activity

Phase 4: Full return

References:

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ACL Tears

Hansen, D. NFL ACL tears: a critical review of the trends. SimpliFaster 2020.

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