

memo



DATE: February 25, 2021
TO: California State Athletic Commission
Andy Foster, Executive Director
FROM: Mike McAtee, Executive Director
RE: Support for USA Boxing “Back to Boxing”

The missions of the California State Athletic Commission (CSAC) and USA Boxing align to regulate and support amateur Olympic-style boxing by supervising and supporting boxers, coaches and officials. CSAC and USA Boxing are dedicated to the health and safety of all participants as they train and compete in USA Boxing sanctioned boxing events.

While focusing on health and safety of all athletes/boxers, coaches, officials, and the obligation to be reasonable, citizens shall always be the primary factor in determining the best course of action. The current COVID-19 world-wide pandemic should not deter us from our stated missions. By balancing the lessons learned to mitigate Covid-19 and using reasonable standards to mitigate Covid-19 infections we can accomplish “back to boxing” to support the mental and physical health of amateur boxers.

Medical Principles:

United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee’s (USOPC) Sports Medicine Department, the USA Boxing Medical Advisory Board, and the Louisiana State University’s (LSU) School of Sports Medicine have been instrumental in the development of USA Boxing’s “Back to Boxing” training and competition protocols. These protocols allow USA Boxing to safely resume training and competition by mitigating Covid-19 risk and its potential spread. USA Boxing’s Medical Advisory Board member, Debra Light, MD has noted in the past that medical requirements that limit participation in athletics should ideally be evidence-based or at least consensus-based and should be scientifically expected to enhance the safety of the participants. Such an approach would be in keeping with the four core principles of medical ethics: beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, and autonomy.

USA Boxing understands and fully agreed with the State of California’s initial regulations limiting participation in a combat sport such as amateur boxing at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. As we approach a year since amateur boxing was stopped and/or reduced, it is



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time we now reassess our actions so we can get “Back to Boxing.” As the country has established clear Covid-19 mitigating protocols to include: vaccines, wearing masks, washing hands, health surveys and social distancing; the State of California’s mandates are no longer valid because they are not evidence or consensus-based. The mandates were passed based upon the best information at the beginning of the pandemic out of an abundance of caution. The initial mandates do not achieve beneficence (have the research with clear evidence) in fact now the evidence shows that denying social and athlete participation is severely hurtful, for juveniles and adults, to their mental and physical health caused by lockdowns. As of February 19, 2021, California Department of Public Health (CDPH)’s State Update Guidance for Youth and Recreational Adult Sports states, “...*Youth sports are important to our children's physical and mental health, and our public health approach has worked to balance those benefits against COVID-19 risks,*” said Dr. Tomás Aragón, CDPH Director and State Public Health Officer. “*With case rates and hospitalizations declining across California, we are allowing outdoor competition to resume, with modifications and steps to reduce risk, in counties where case rates are lower...*”

Additionally, the fourth principle of medical ethics, autonomy, relates to informed consent of the risks of sport, and the boxers, their parents, coaches, and officials’ decision to participate if they decide that the benefits outweigh the risks. USA Boxing members have utilized our Back to Boxing policies and procedures, tested them out and seen the benefits of adhering to the Covid-19 mitigation protocols found therein. They realize the importance of providing honest and truthful medical information as they participate in training at USA Boxing registered boxing gyms and competition at sanctioned events. Current policies require all USA Boxing members be mandated to provide personal medical information prior to entering the boxing gym or sanctioned event and acknowledge and sign a hold harmless waiver of the potential risks of participation.

Current:

The CDC (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) modified its policy regarding who is considered a “Close Contact” on October 21, 2020. These changes are referencing the time and distance necessary for Covid-19 transmission. The current definition of a “Close Contact” is “...someone who was within six feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period...” ([CDC Definitions](#))

This is critical information when applied to amateur Olympic-style boxing. In USA Boxing’s National Rule Book section 7.3, the maximum length of any bout is three, 3-minute rounds, totaling nine minutes. With even shorter rounds for the younger boxers. This is important information because the maximum length of any bout is 11 minutes including two rest periods.



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Furthermore, the boxers are not within six feet of each other the entire length of the bout. As you know boxers are in opposite corners of the ring, at least 16 feet apart during the two, one-minute rest periods between each round. In fact, USA Boxing sparring protocols are that no two boxers should spar more than three rounds with the same sparring partner during any given 24-hour period. There may be a lack of knowledge of the difference between amateur and professional boxing, and therefore, some state and city officials may lump the two sports together and assume amateur boxing, high-contact sport, may be like "...Football, rugby and water polo are high-contact sports that are likely to be played unmasked, with close, face-to-face contact exceeding 15 minutes¹..."

When comparing these facts, it becomes clear that even when a Covid-19 positive boxer is involved in a competitive bout or sparring, their opponent does not fit the definition of a "Close Contact" as defined by the CDC. For example, boxer A has Covid-19 and enters a bout or sparring session with boxer B and the bout or sparring session lasts three rounds of 3-minutes each, boxer B will not need to isolate, quarantine, or take a Covid-19 PCR test because he/she has not had "close contact" because CDC recommendations acknowledge that there is a very small percentage chance that boxer B would be exposed to Covid-19.

Mental Health in Youth Sport:

Andrew Watson and Jennifer Koontz wrote an editorial entitled *Youth sports in the wake of COVID-19: a call for change*. In this editorial they reference that "...in 2019 the United States Surgeon General released the National Youth Sports Strategy. This initiative is a nationwide call to increase access to organized sports for all American children..." ([National Youth Sports Strategy](#)).

This initiative "...encourages opportunities for children to participate in sports as measured public health priority and lays out interventions to guide policy makers, families, communities and youth sports organizations to achieve these goals. With widespread loss of physical activities during the Covid-19 pandemic, these recommendations have never been more relevant. We urge decision makers in all countries to consider these priorities and invest in mechanisms that promote universal access to sports for children..."

The editorial also contains a study regarding youth who are experiencing anxiety and depression amidst the pandemic. They surveyed "over 13,000 adolescent athletes throughout the country during the COVID-19 restrictions in May 2020 and found that 40% reported moderate to severe depression symptoms and 37% reported moderate to severe anxiety.

¹ CDPH's State Updates Guidance for Youth and Recreational Adult Sports



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The burden of Covid-19 has disproportionately affected low income and minority children, and unfortunately this appears to be true in youth sports as well... USA Boxing and its member gyms and coaches work tirelessly to make sure these at-risk children have a safe structured place to grow and develop their character. Unfortunately, local and state restrictions severely limit access to these services with marginalized and at-risk youth suffering from the fallout.

Return to Boxing

Since July 11, 2020 USA Boxing, in accordance with state and local health departments has hosted over 100 events nationwide.

Sparring Matches	Competitive Matches	Boxers	Coaches	Officials	Physicians	Audience	Staff
165	1,375	2,444	2,083	680	89	5,987	636

This totals 11,919 individuals who attended and participated in events across the country with zero confirmed transmissions of Covid-19, from July 11, 2020 through February 25, 2021. This is due in part to USA Boxing's development of a [Back to Boxing Guide](#) outlining what is required for strict Covid-19 mitigation protocols at registered gyms and events. Protocols such as, health screening upon entry, mask adherence, sanitizing the ring between bouts, appointment of a health and safety task force, Pre-event checklists, Risk Assessment, After-Action reports and the creation of training "pods." USA Boxing recommended gym training "pods" for workouts and sparring create separation between groups, such as, youth from adults, to limit cross contamination and reduce the number of boxers training at any one time.

Over the last 14-days, the state of California's positivity rate is 3.7% which is well below the CDC recommendation of 5% positivity rate regarding reopening.

California Positivity Rates last 14 days

	Positivity Rates
State of California ²	3.7%
San Diego County	5.3%
Los Angeles County	1.7%
Fresno County	8.4%
Sacramento County	5.4%

² Covid19.ca.gov website on February 25, 2021; <https://covid19.ca.gov/state-dashboard/>



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Conclusion:

The time for state-mandated limited use of amateur Olympic style boxing gyms and competitive boxing matches based on other factors more than our original assumptions of Covid-19 and the “health and safety” of boxers has passed. As noted by Dr. Light, “...medical requirements that limit participation in athletics should ideally be evidence-based or at least consensus-based, and should be scientifically expected to enhance the safety of the participants...”

Over the last eleven months the State of California, the United States of America and the world have learned to reduce the negative impact of Covid-19 on society. With evidence based information and for the mental and physical health of USA Boxing’s boxers, coaches and officials, most of who are marginalized communities and/or at-risk populations, USA Boxing requests the California State Athletic Commission recommend and/or support USA Boxing’s “Back to Boxing” protocols and allow training, sparring and USA Boxing sanctioned events in the State of California by following USA Boxing’s Back to Boxing’s Guidelines.



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