

memo



DATE: March 14, 2021

TO: Honorable Sharon Quirk-Silva, Chair
Members of Committee

FROM: Mike McAtee, Executive Director
USA Boxing's Local Boxing Committees
Northern California, President David Hartman
Central California, President Frank Aleman
Southern California, President Joe Zanders
California Border, President Andrew Moreno

RE: **Informational Hearing-Safe and Equitable Reopening of Sport**

Safety is a top priority for USA Boxing.

USA Boxing provides a safe haven for thousands of youths in this country, while helping them gain self-recognition and a positive self-image. Amateur Olympic-style boxing is one of the safest, most highly regulated sports of all amateur athletics. Amateur boxing is not about knocking your opponent out and in fact, almost all boxing matches are won by points.

As a National Governing Body for an Olympic sport, certified by the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee, USA Boxing has countless precautions and rules to protect boxers. There are inevitable risks involved with any sport or activity and this is why USA Boxing has placed such a great importance on following strict guidelines for safety in training and competition during its over 43-year history. A well-run, highly supervised, structured boxing program is the best athletic endeavor any male or female can pursue. Regardless of gender, age, race, size, social or financial status, boxing offers a level playing field and an accepting environment.

USA Boxing has been recognized as the amateur Olympic-style delegation of the California State Athletic Commission (CSAC). As the delegation of amateur boxing, USA Boxing aligns with CSAC 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.



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While focusing on health and safety of all youth and adult boxers, coaches, and officials, the obligation to be reasonable citizens has always been 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” in a safe and equitable manner to support the mental and physical health of youth amateur boxers.

Medical Principles:

The United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee’s (USOPC) Sports Medicine Department, USA Boxing’s 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 have allowed 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. However, as we approach a year since amateur boxing was stopped and/or reduced, it is 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 effective because they have become stale and are not evidence or consensus-based to enhance the totality of the health and safety of youth and adult participants. The mandates were passed based on caution and the best information at the beginning of the pandemic. These initial mandates did not achieve beneficence (have the research with clear evidence) and 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, the 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...*”



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Additionally, the fourth principle of medical ethics, autonomy, relates to the informed consent of the risks of the 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 in USA Boxing's [Back to Boxing Guide](#). USA Boxing members 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 to help mitigate Covid-19 spread. Current policies require all USA Boxing members be mandated to provide personal medical information prior to entering the boxing gym or sanctioned event, follow Covid-19 mitigation protocols and acknowledge and sign a hold harmless waiver of the potential risks of participation.

Current:

On December 31, 2020, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a Considerations for Youth Sports Administrators for youth sport organizers. The considerations are used as a guide to assess risk, "...The way sports are played and the way equipment is shared can influence (positively or negatively) the spread of COVID-19 among players..." ([Considerations for Youth Sports Administrators](#))

USA Boxing has acknowledged and addressed the risks factors of Covid-19 spread:

- **Community levels of COVID-19:** High or increasing levels of COVID-19 cases in the local community increase the risk of infection and spread among youth athletes, coaches, and families.
 - ✓ As of March 12, 2021, the infection rate for the State of California is 2.3% well below the 5% rate recommendation.
 - ✓ Over 11,000,000 Californians have received COVID-19 vaccinations.
- **Physical closeness of players.** Sports that require contact or close proximity (within 6 feet) between players may make it more difficult to maintain physical distancing, compared to sports where players are not close to each other. For close-contact sports (e.g., wrestling, basketball), play may be modified to safely increase distance between players.
 - ✓ This consideration is incorporated in the Back to Boxing Guide.
- **Level of intensity of activity.** Activities that are high intensity or require a high level of exertion (such as full competition) present a higher level of risk of getting and spreading COVID-19 than lower intensity activities, particularly when indoors. Higher intensity activities are safer when done outdoors.
 - ✓ This consideration is incorporated in the Back to Boxing Guide.



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- **Length of time that players are close to each other or to staff.** Activities that last longer pose more risk than shorter activities. Being within 6 feet of someone who has COVID-19 for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more in a 24-hour period greatly increases the risk of catching the virus and requires [quarantine](#). Limit the time players spend in [close contact](#) to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread.
 - ✓ Pre-COVID-19 and standing USA Boxing's Rulebook do not allow two boxers to compete more than nine minutes in a 24-hour period. This consideration is incorporated in the Back to Boxing Guide.
- **Setting of the sporting event or activity.** Indoor activities pose more risk than outdoor activities. Minimize the amount of time spent indoors. If it is necessary to be inside, ensure the facility has proper [ventilation and filtration systems](#) and open windows and doors to increase airflow throughout the space.
 - ✓ This consideration is incorporated in the Back to Boxing Guide.
- **Amount of necessary touching of shared equipment and gear (e.g., protective gear, balls, bats, racquets, mats, or water bottles).** Minimize equipment sharing, and clean and disinfect shared equipment between use by different people to reduce the risk of Covid-19 spread.
 - ✓ This consideration is incorporated in the Back to Boxing Guide.
- **Ability to engage in physical distancing while not actively engaged in play (e.g., during practice, on the sideline, or in the dugout).** During times when players are not actively participating in practice or competition, attention should be given to maintaining [physical distancing](#) by increasing space between players on the sideline, dugout, or bench.
 - ✓ This consideration is incorporated in the Back to Boxing Guide.
- **Age of the player.** Older youth might be better able to follow directions for physical distancing and take other protective actions like not sharing water bottles.
 - ✓ This consideration is incorporated in the Back to Boxing Guide.
- **Players at higher risk of developing severe illness.** Parents and coaches should assess level of risk based on individual players on the team who may be at [higher risk for severe illness](#), such as children who may have asthma, diabetes, or other health problems.
 - ✓ This consideration is incorporated in the USA Boxing guidelines.
- **Size of the team.** Sports with a large number of players on a team may increase the likelihood of spread, compared to sports with fewer team members. Consider decreasing team sizes, as feasible.



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- ✓ Boxing is an individual sport of one against one opponent at a time. This consideration is incorporated in the Back to Boxing Guide.
- **Nonessential visitors, spectators, volunteers.** Limit any nonessential visitors, spectators, volunteers, and activities involving external groups or organizations.
 - ✓ This consideration is incorporated in the Back to Boxing Guide.
- **Travel outside of the local community.** **Traveling** outside of the local community may increase the chances of exposing players, coaches, and fans to COVID-19, or unknowingly spreading it to others.
 - ✓ This consideration is incorporated in USA Boxing guidelines.
- **Behavior of the athletes off the field.** Athletes who do not consistently adhere to **social distancing** (staying at least 6 feet apart), **mask wearing**, **handwashing**, and other prevention behaviors pose more risk to the team than those who consistently practiced these safety measures.
 - ✓ This consideration is incorporated in the Back to Boxing Guide.

The CDC 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.

Furthermore, the boxers are not within six feet of each other for 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. Additionally, USA Boxing gym sparing 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...”

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



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When comparing these facts, it becomes clear that even when a Covid-19 positive boxer is involved in a competitive bout or gym 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 would 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. 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 have severely limited access to safe haven boxing gyms and competition which limit positive mental and physical actions of marginalized and at-risk youth, which is proportionally higher in amateur boxing compared to more mainstream youth sports.

Return to Boxing

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



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USA Boxing Sanctioned Boxing Events									
	Sparring Matches	Official Bouts	Boxers	Coaches	Officials	Physicians	Limited Audience	Staff	Totals
2020	165	1,464	2,851	2,376	767	106	7,007	728	13,835
2021	5	487	976	736	251	31	4,056	315	6,365

This totals 20,200 individuals who attended and participated in boxing events in 32 states² across the country with zero confirmed transmissions of Covid-19, from July 11, 2020 through March 12, 2021, with 43 additional events scheduled in 18 states. This is due in part to USA Boxing's use of our [Back to Boxing Guide](#) protocols that require 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."

Over the last 7-days, the state of California's positivity rate is 2.3% which is well below the CDC recommendation of 5% positivity rate regarding reopening.

California Positivity Rates last 7 days

Positivity Rates	
State of California ³	2.3%
San Diego County	2.5%
Los Angeles County	2.2%
Fresno County	4.9%
Sacramento County	3.1%

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..." The limited participation of Olympic-style boxing

² Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, Mississippi, Montana, North Carolina, Nebraska, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Wisconsin, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

³ Covid19.ca.gov website on March 12, 2021; <https://covid19.ca.gov/state-dashboard/>



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opportunities for youth boxers is not enhancing “...the safety of participants...”, in fact it is negatively impacting the mental and physical health of California youth and adults.

Over the last twelve 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 from marginalized communities and/or at-risk populations, USA Boxing has a proven track record of self-policing the protocols in the Back to Boxing Guide. This combined with working with CSAC, who has a proven track record of holding safe boxing events, will provide safe Olympic-style amateur boxing during the Covid-19 era.

USA Boxing requests that the State of California recognizes the importance of the mental and physical health of our youth and adult boxers, coaches and officials and allows participation in Olympic-style boxing in USA Boxing registered gyms and sanctioned events. USA Boxing will continue to follow the Back to Boxing Guidelines and practices and continue to report to the California State Athletic Commission.



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