

November 13, 2020

Dear Dr. Niehoff,

On behalf of the nearly 200 high school teams, and 15,000 youth lacrosse US Lacrosse members in the state of Connecticut, we want to thank you for your leadership in directing the public health response for high school sports to COVID-19. **We are writing to you to express our disappointment in the NFHS's position that classifies boys' lacrosse as a high contact risk sport for COVID-19 transmission, without providing any evidence of science based rationale for doing so – and we are imploring you to revise your position to classify lacrosse (for both genders) a moderate-risk sport, for COVID-19 transmission.**

When the NFHS first released its “Guidance for Opening Up High School Athletics and Activities” in May, our nation was still learning about COVID-19 and the ways that we could work to mitigate risks of transmission in our communities. Many other national organizations have since established their own guidance for returning to sport, and that included our sport's national governing body, US Lacrosse, which published its “Return to Play (RTP) Recommendations for Lacrosse” <https://www.uslacrosse.org/return-to-play> in June to provide sport-specific guidance to mitigate infection risks as lacrosse competition returned. The US Lacrosse Sport Science & Safety Committee oversaw the development of these recommendations. All five stages of the US Lacrosse recommendations emphasize adherence to local public health guidelines and confirmation of the mental and physical health of athletes is paramount before proceeding with any lacrosse activities. Over 25 US Lacrosse sanctioned tournament operators utilized the guidance at nearly 100 youth events that occurred throughout the country during the summer and fall, in addition to numerous community lacrosse programs around the fall resuming activity.

While both boys' and girls' lacrosse allow varying degrees of contact, US Lacrosse has concluded that these differences do not place boys at a greater risk of COVID-19 exposure than girls. **The US Lacrosse Sport Science & Safety committee has classified both versions of lacrosse as presenting a moderate risk for COVID-19** infection because both disciplines are played outdoors, the games are fast moving, players don't handle the ball with their bare hands, no equipment is shared and, even when athletes are within close proximity to one another, movement is constant. Additionally, infrequent periods of extended closeness can be easily adjusted through rule modifications.

With state and local public health administrators, such as those in the state of Connecticut, looking to the NFHS for leadership during these times, **it is imperative that the guidance provided by the NFHS on matters related to health and safety of young people, be backed by actual health and safety-derived data.** The current criteria established for the NFHS's risk classification list is lacking any such data or rationale, and as states decide to mirror NFHS' guidance – this position is preventing thousands of boys from being able to play lacrosse this fall and winter at the youth levels, in states and regions where COVID-19 positivity rates were low enough to allow for other sports like soccer, baseball and even football to return.

We couldn't agree more with the sentiments you expressed in your column earlier this summer in the NFHS Voice, where you emphatically shared that: “With safety measures in place, students need sports and performing arts for mental and emotional wellness.” Lacrosse has always provided an outlet for our children to have fun, maintain physical fitness and build critical life skills that help them with relationship and balance the stresses and conflicts of life, and these days, more than ever – our children need lacrosse in their lives. The lacrosse community values the leadership provided by the NFHS to minimize the risk of COVID-19 infection and the recognition that as new health data emerges, you will adapt your approaches to how you lead our high school sports community through the pandemic. **It is in that spirit of informed decision making, that the Connecticut lacrosse community and US Lacrosse are requesting that the NFHS modify its classification for lacrosse by removing "boy's lacrosse" from the high-risk category list and adding boys' and girls' lacrosse to the moderate-risk section.** This adaptation acknowledges the sport-specific risk classifications made by US Lacrosse medical experts and creates consistency with other states that have classified both disciplines as a moderate risk.

Best regards,