**BOMBA Return to Play Protocols**

**Introduction**

The Byron Optimist Minor Baseball Association is extremely excited for a return to play in the 2021 season. While there remains some uncertainty regarding what, exactly, this season will look like, we are committed to the safety of our local baseball/softball community, the greater London baseball/softball community and Ontario’s baseball/softball community in general. While we are anxious for the return of on field baseball/softball operations, a return to play must take place within the context of the general reopening from COVID-19 closures occurring within the province. While we love baseball and softball, the health and welfare of our participants must not be compromised. This document, as it may be updated from time to time, provides guidance on how baseball and softball can return when it is deemed safe to do so by the Province of Ontario, municipal governments and public health authorities. We are setting out 3 levels of return to play based on Ontario’s most recent stages of re-opening. Additional restrictions within each stage may be applied by the Middlesex-London Health Unit and will be evaluated and communicated to our players, parents, coaches and volunteers as changes occur throughout the season.

The principal purpose of this document is to provide a framework and general recommendations for our organization based on Baseball Ontario and Softball Ontario’s recommended guidelines, during the global COVID-19 pandemic, for the safe return to baseball and softball. The framework in this document is subject to all provincial emergency orders, advice and recommendations of public health authorities, municipal by-laws or other requirements, and requirements of facility owners. Should any conflict between this framework and the requirements and regulations of other entities, the other requirements will take precedence over this framework. While we are providing our guidelines for our return to play, we are governed by the direction of Baseball, Softball Ontario, our Provincial public health authority, our local public health authority and the requirements set out by private business/premises owners.

This document will be periodically updated as the provincial situation, recommendations and guidelines continue to evolve. As revisions are made, the most current version of the document will be made available on the Byron Baseball website and our baseball/softball community will be advised of new revisions via organization wide communique and through our social media platforms.

These formalities are unfortunately required in this current climate and we will mitigate the impact they have on game play and practices as best we can. We wish nothing more than for our players and participants to have fun while staying safe.

This document shall remain in full force and effect until such time as Byron Optimist Minor Baseball Association Board of Directors rescinds its provisions.

**Who should read this document?**

All participants (players, coaches, umpires, officials, volunteers) and their parents/guardians, in the case of minors, should familiarize themselves with the requirements and recommendations contained in this document prior to their return to baseball/softball (training, practice, and competition) activities.

**Players’ Return to Activity**

Players should not return to their baseball activities without considering the harmful effects of de-training. In fact, players may be exposed to situations of early fatigue due to reduced aerobic capacity or to injuries due to impaired muscle function, which can result in being counterproductive for his/her health. When designing and carrying out physical exercise sessions, it will, therefore, be important to consider intensity, frequency, volume and method of exercise. A gradual increase is particularly important after a period of reduced training. It is essential to understand the importance of following a period of gradual re-training. A resumption of physical activity by increasing both volume and intensity, but without modulating recovery periods, could lead to excessive fatigue or, in some cases, cause muscle injury or health problems. The physical reconditioning should include a training program containing postural, stretching, core-stability and balance exercises to increase muscle tone and, at the same time, a program of endurance activities to improve aerobic capacity. Later, it would be appropriate to gradually introduce the sport’s specific movements, and in particular throwing and arm care. Until it is possible to return to full squad practices, outdoors and/or at a gym, the suggestion is to maintain an active lifestyle, by dedicating at least 45-60 minutes every day practicing activities that allow the maintenance of a good state of health combining aerobic activities with muscle strengthening and flexibility exercises. The workout intensity must vary according to individual physical and training conditions, as well as climatic conditions, possibly gradually increasing over time. We recommend a body weight only at home fitness program for our players. It is vital to their health and safety that our players prepare to return to active baseball/softball activity.

Byron Baseball has developed a return to baseball activity fitness plan which details **arm care exercises, core strengthening/stability exercises, lower body exercises and movement, general mobility, and an at home throwing program.** The fitness plan can be found on the Byron Baseball website. While these are not mandatory, it his highly recommended that all players planning on participating in the 2021 season engage in arm care, core, and mobility training.

**Staged re-opening and how it applies to Return to Sport**

The Province of Ontario has established a 3 stage re-opening plan for the gradual re-opening of the economy and return to play for sports organizations. The follow are the stages and how they will impact the return to baseball and softball operation.

1. Stage 1 – set to come into effect on June 14th IF a vaccination rate of 60% of eligible adults is achieved. In this stage, organized sports are permitted to resume in person operation using a split squad/team model. Two groups of 10 players, not including coaches, are permitted on the field but must remain separated. Additionally, two coaches are permitted per group. The groups may not interact or cross over and the coaches may not switch groups. An example of this would be a group using right field and a group using left field. Or a group using the infield and a group using the outfield. Equipment cannot be shared between the groups. If equipment must be shared, it must first be sanitized before changing groups.
2. Stage 2 – set to come into effect as early as July 5th IF a vaccination rate of 70% first dose and 20% second dose of eligible adults is achieved. In this stage of reopening, organized sports will be able to return to full team practices but no game play. Byron Baseball has a plan for our coaches to maximize practice time and will be providing multiple practice time for all of our softball and baseball teams.
3. Stage 3 – set to come into effect as early as July 26th IF a vaccination rate of 70 – 80% first dose and 25% second dose of eligible adults is achieved. In this stage or reopening full game play is permitted to return. We are, as of yet, unsure if this means a 3 or 4 team bubble is needed or if full, unrestricted, league play will be permitted to resume. In either scenario Byron Baseball is ready to deliver a 6 week season taking us to the end of August. We feel that we will be able to deliver a 12 game season over that time frame.
4. At this time there is no language specific to spectator attendance. We, at Byron Baseball, feel that the language currently set out by the government of Ontario is specific to the playing field. Meaning the area outside the playing field, beyond the fence line is a secondary outdoor area. It is our current position that 1 parent/spectator may accompany their child to a practice and observe the practice/game from a distance of 20 meters from the playing field. We recognize that this is particularly important for younger aged children! Should we receive further clarification on field designation and spectator attendance we will communicate it immediately.
5. **As the re-opening of Ontario continues to evolve we, at Byron Baseball, will be ready to immediately resume in game competition for all of our athletes. We are extremely hopeful that the provincial government accelerates the return to competition for our athletes and we will be ready to resume game play the moment we are permitted.**



**Maximizing Baseball Activity**

Byron Baseball understands that our families expect delivery of a quality baseball experience to match the financial costs associated to registering for a season of game play. While we may be restricted in our ability to deliver in game play we are committed to getting the kids on the field as much as possible during this gradual re-opening. We will be communicating with our coaches that the expectation is that they will do their very best to schedule and run 2 practices a week during stage 1 and stage 2 of reopening. This is a perfect opportunity to support proper and safe development of baseball specific skills.

We are committed to continuing to support our coaches in every way possible to help them deliver a quality experience for their teams. Byron Baseball will be setting aside two 2 hour practice time slots each week for all of our softball and baseball teams. This will include weekday and weekend time slots. Sample practice plans are in place to assist our coaches prepare the teams for the season ahead. With so many players out of action over the last season and a half we felt that it was vital to the health and safety of our players to have them attend as many practices as possible in order to safely build up their strength, especially in the throwing arm. In Stage 1 of reopening Baseball Ontario has indicated that two groups of 10 participants (coaches included) can train on the same playing field. We recommend splitting a team in half and having 4 coaches or parent volunteers able to assist run a practice. Half the team would use the right field area with the other half of the team using the left field area. Or half the team could use the infield while the other half of the team was in the outfield. Baseball Ontario has simply indicated that the two practicing groups must remain well separated for the duration of the practice. Any equipment to be shared between the two groups must first be sanitized before changing groups. Coaches are no to switch groups part way through the practice.

In Stage 2 of re-opening, our teams will be permitted to gather together fully in order to practice. Byron Baseball will continue to provide/schedule two 2 hour practice times for all our teams as they continue to develop their skills in preparation for a return to game play in mid-late July.

**Withdrawal dates, Rosters and Finances**

We are excited that we will be starting June 14th in compliance with Ontario's 'return to play' protocol.

We will be establishing rosters, investing in equipment and ordering uniforms as of June 5th.   With this time frame in mind, our refund policy is being modified as follows:

* **Full refunds, less a $25 administration fee are available until** **June 4th, 2021 should a player wish to withdraw from participating in the season.**
* **Between June 5th, 2021 and July 5th, 2021, Byron Baseball will offer its participants a 50% percent refund (minus a $25 administration fee) should they withdraw from participation**.
* **There will be no refunds offered after July 6th, 2021**.

Following the June 4th, 2021 withdrawal deadline, all remaining players will be assigned to a roster/team and a coach will be designated. This will allow us to proceed with purchasing uniforms, speak to all our coaches, and get ourselves organized for a June 14th start.

We realize the protocol could change for better or worse but regardless, as an association, we are committed to providing as much baseball/softball as possible while following all rules and regulations.

We will be optimizing the registration fees to provide the best experience possible given the circumstances.  We are committed to giving all our players exactly what they expect when they register with Byron Baseball.

When the 2021 season is complete, the Byron Baseball Board will discuss the 'value for money' for our registrants and their families to ensure BOMBA continues our tradition of providing a quality and positive experience for the community we serve. We pride ourselves on our transparent and honest approach and this unusual season will be no different.

**Recommended Standards**

The list of protocols below set out the minimum standards for the organization of baseball events. While these guidelines will help mitigate the risk of COVID-19 infections -**they cannot eliminate it completely**. **Please be advised that participation in baseball activities may actually increase the possibility of exposure to COVID-19.** Participants, parents, coaches, and volunteers who do not feel safe in returning to baseball activities, are encouraged to refrain from doing so and will not be subject to any penalties or sanctions (aside from a forfeiting a $25 administration fee) from Byron Baseball.

1. **General (applies to all practice, competition, team meetings or other in-person team activities)**
2. Numbers

* At no point will a baseball event exceed the number of attendees (including players, coaches, umpires, association officials, volunteers, parents and other family members) noted as the maximum number by the Province of Ontario, the Provincial public health officer or the Middlesex-London Health Unit. (Stage 1 – two groups of 10 players, plus 2 coaches on the player field. Stage 2 – 25 people in an outdoor space, Stage 3 – 50 people in an outdoor space). While there is no current language specific to spectators, Byron Baseball recognizes the playing field and the area immediately beyond the fence line as 1 outdoor space. Byron Baseball supports 1 spectator/parent per player to attend a practice or game but they must remain a distance of 20 metres from the field of play and socially distanced from other spectators.
* The number of participants involved should be reviewed and kept down to the absolute essential (e.g., Team members, Officials, Umpires, Event staff, Volunteers, etc.)
* Convenors/Coaching staff will keep an attendance tracker that also doubles as a Covid-19 screener and will be available electronically through the Byron Baseball website. The attendance/screening document shall be filled out and submitted electronically for all practices, games and in-person activities including all players, coaches, umpires, parents and others in attendance, including name and contact information (e-mail or phone).
* Byron Baseball is responsible for collecting, maintaining, and disseminating attendance tracking data and screening data to the London District Baseball Association and Baseball Ontario. Collections of attendance tracking data and screening data are non-negotiable and must be completed.
* Please use the following link, also available on the Byron Baseball website https://byronbaseball.ca/, to report your attendance and complete the self-screening.  <https://forms.gle/nVAJBZuFdWUHwHhk8>
* If an attendee reports a positive test or exposure, conveners and coaching staff will use the information in the attendance tracker to notify other players/attendees of a possible exposure.

1. **Screening/Diagnosed with COVID-19/Return from COVID-19**

* Self-screening through https: //covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/ is required by all participants, volunteers and spectators prior to attending any game, practice, meeting or other in-person team activity and any individual shall not attend if they fail the screening protocol.
* A person, who is identified as part of an at-risk group, but otherwise passes the screening questions is discouraged from participating in in-person baseball activities, but they are not considered to have failed the screening protocol. Participation in baseball/softball activity is not mandatory and **all participants assume full responsibility of all inherent risks, including possible infection of COVID-19.**
* Any participant, volunteer or spectator diagnosed with COVID-19 or who has been in contact with any person having COVID-19 in the previous 14 days **MUST NOT** attend any game, practice, meeting or other in-person team activity and **MUST notify their local public health authority**.
* It is the responsibility of any participant, volunteer or spectator to notify their head coach, convenor or other Byron Baseball executive committee member of a positive COVID-19 diagnosis or of a probable case as soon as possible.
* Any participant, volunteer or spectator diagnosed with COVID-19 must be cleared by appropriate medical authorities prior to attending any in-person baseball activity. Evidence of the clearance needs to be provided to the designated Byron Baseball Representative.

1. **Cleaning/Sanitization (the following apply where the guidelines refer to cleaning, sanitizing, disinfecting, wiping or similar terms)**

* Teams are to have soap and water or 70% (or higher) alcohol hand sanitizer (to be provide by Byron Baseball) and disinfectant wipes (or acceptable option) readily available at all times. A list of recommended disinfectants is available on the Health Canada website: [https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid19/list.html](about:blank)
* General cleaning shall be done with microfiber cloths and appropriate cleaning products from the previous bullet.
* General cleaning shall take place upon arrival to, and prior to departure from, any given complex, park or diamond using different cleaning cloths for each type of object/surface (i.e. doors, tables, chairs, benches, fence gate handles leading into the field of play).
* All cleaning personnel (not including those individuals who work for the municipality or facility owner, who shall follow whatever guidelines are established by their employer) shall be protected appropriately with face mask and protective gloves at a minimum. This applies to the cleaning of facilities and/or equipment in accordance with the requirements of this document.
* At 15U and below, only adults shall perform cleaning/sanitization functions. At 16U and above, players and adults may perform cleaning/sanitization functions.
* Those not involved in the cleaning/sanitization shall stay a minimum of 2 metres away from the cleaning/sanitization activities.
* Cleaning/sanitization products will not be used by or stored within access of young children.
* Where this document requires the use of protective gloves, this shall mean PPE gloves and not batting gloves or baseball mitts.

1. **Implementation of Safe Physical Distance**

* Maintain minimum of 2 metres distancing during physical activity, including warmups, pre-game and post-game activities, wherever possible.
* Use of dugouts/bench areas are permitted only if a distance of 2m can be maintained between players and coaches. **Byron Baseball does not recommend the use of the dugouts or bench areas for players. The dugout/bench area should be reserved for use by the coaches during game play and to facilitate entry to, and exit from, the field of play.**
* As an alternative to using the dugouts/bench area, players will bring with them their own chair. The chair will be set up behind the dugout/bench area and along the fence line using 2 metre spacing. This will serve as the “bench” area for players and thus must be avoided by spectators.
* Use as much space as required outside the dugout (but in safe areas outside of the field of play) to maintain adequate physical distance.
* Avoid congestion at points of entry to the diamond (i.e., gates, dugout doors, etc.) to allow maintenance of 2 metres distancing among participants. Masks are required when walking to and from a venue.
* If spectators are in attendance, specific spectator measures for physical distancing shall be set as required/recommended by the Middlesex-London Health Unit.

1. **Masks**

* Masks are mandatory for both participant and spectator while walking to and from a complex or baseball diamond where physical distancing cannot be maintained due to congestion points.
* The Byron Optimist Sports Complex has 4 entry/exit points. These are points of congestions where physical distancing may become challenging at times and thus masks will be mandatory while entering and exiting the complex.
* As a best practice, spectators should wear a mask at all times.
* Players and participants will be permitted to remove their masks once they arrive at the field of play and while maintaining 2 metre physical distancing. **However, Softball Ontario has set out a different policy for their participants. All PWSA/CSL softball players, coaches, umpires and spectators must wear a mask or face covering at all times when attending games or practices.**
* Players who are sitting out an inning, or during the offensive half of the inning, it is recommended that all players don a mask while sitting on the sidelines.

1. **Establishment of Hygiene Standards**

* Clean hands at least every inning for games or every 30 minutes or after handling shared equipment at practices.
* Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with your hands.
* Sneeze and/or cough in a tissue or the internal crease of the elbow. Avoid contact of hands with personal respiratory points.
* All potentially infected waste (i.e. disposable tissues, masks, protective gloves, etc.), hygiene material, rubbish, debris, etc., in all shared spaces (diamonds, dugouts, washrooms, change rooms, etc.) shall be disposed of safely at the end of the in-person baseball activity.

1. **Venues**

* Scheduling of diamonds must allow for a minimum of 45 minutes between the conclusion of the prior event and the start of the subsequent event to allow for: (1) the team(s) involved in the prior event to clean/sanitize equipment, dispose of garbage from common areas, and have all team members vacate the facility BEFORE (2) the team(s) involved in the subsequent event enter the facility and clean/sanitize common areas; without crossover between the teams participating in the two events.
* In order to prevent delays in the start times of subsequent games, teams, spectators, umpires, and volunteers are asked to vacate the playing field and diamond within 15 minutes of the conclusion of their game. This will allow arriving teams 30 minutes to properly warm up before the beginning of their game. As a result, it may be necessary to alter the time limits on games that start at 6pm. This will affect games that take place at the Byron Sport Complex during the week and on weekends and other city fields on weekends only.
* Participants, volunteers and spectators for a subsequent event shall remain in their motor vehicle in the parking lot until participants, volunteers and spectators from the prior event have returned to their motor vehicles. For participants and spectators not arriving by motor vehicle, designated waiting areas will be identified at the Byron Optimist Sports Complex. For the Riverbend diamond, Whisperwood diamond, Jorgensen Park diamond, and the Byron Southwood diamonds, designated waiting areas will be selected and communicated at a later date.
* For games, both the home team and the visiting team are responsible for cleaning/sanitizing their dugout before and after games.
* Washrooms are to be open and accessible only at the discretion and direction of the municipality or facility owner where the venue is located.
* Snack Bars/Concessions/Canteens are permitted to operate under the discretion of the owner/facility in which there are located. Strict mask wearing and social distancing to be followed for anyone in line at, or working in, the snack bar/concessions/canteen
* Under no circumstances will local acceptable usage limits established by facility owners (i.e. accessing off limits areas of parks or other facilities etc.) be violated.
* Thorough disinfection of common spaces before/after use including:
* Frequently touched areas of dugouts, including aluminum benches, bat racks and helmet racks
* Door handles, fence/gate latches
* Any other spaces that come into frequent touch
* Establishment of sanitation stations with soap and water and/or alcohol-based hand sanitizers at all entrances/exits to Byron Optimist Sport Complex.

**Byron Optimist Complex Specific Regulations**

* Designated entrance and exit gates depending on diamond being played on
* Volunteers will be needed to work “GATES” to ensure that everyone entering has filled out their screening
* **NO WASHROOM FACILITIES AVAILABLE**

1. **Spectators**

* **1 spectator per player** will be permitted to attend practices and games but must remain at a distance of 20 metres from the field of play.
* Ensure physical distance from participants and between spectators.
* Spectators are being asked to utilize the area beyond the outfield fence while at the Byron Optimist Sports Complex. For our other local fields, spectators are asked to move down the fence line into the outfield area to view the game as players/participants will be utilizing the area behind the bench and along the first/third base lines to set a chair and their equipment.
* Spectators are not permitted near the “bench” area where the participants are seated.
* Spectators are encouraged to bring their own chairs for personal use or bring disinfectant wipes to clean the area where they sit. Municipalities and/or facility owners may or may not be cleaning bleachers on a regular basis.
* Spectators are encouraged not to wander to other areas of the park in which the diamond is located.

1. **Thunderstorms**:

* If a baseball event is interrupted by thunder, participants, volunteers and spectators are to return to their motor vehicles until the baseball event is cancelled or able to resume. If someone does not have a motor vehicle, they may shelter in a safe location but must maintain a minimum of 2 metres distancing from others, if possible.

1. **Practice (applicable to practices and games)**

Practice or training is a more controlled environment than the game environment. Practice can also accommodate fewer numbers of participants than games. Accordingly, it is envisioned that return to practice will likely occur prior to return to play. The protocols listed under General also apply to Practice. Below are some practice specific protocols to be implemented.

1. **Equipment**:

* Sharing of equipment such as batting helmets, catchers’ masks, or other equipment likely to have been exposed to respiratory droplets should be avoided. Each player should have his/her own bat, helmet, baseball glove(s)/mitt(s), batting gloves, rosin bags, etc. and store these items inside their personal bag when not in use.
* Equipment that must be shared must be cleaned/sanitized between players' use.
* Avoid personal clothing, equipment or electronics etc. being left in common places. Store inside personal bag always.
* PPE may be worn at the discretion of the participant (recommended that it not be white or grey). **All softball players and coaches must wear a mask or face covering.**
* Rules of acceptable behaviour cannot be contravened.
* General equipment (e.g., L-screens, field maintenance equipment, bases) must be wiped down between groups if it must be shared.

1. **Participants**

* Participation by those in high-risk demographics (elderly and those with chronic conditions or who are immune compromised) are discouraged but not prohibited.
* No spitting, including tobacco and other products.
* No sunflower seeds or chewing gum.
* No sharing of water/sport drink bottles or food.
* No shared water jugs, coolers or drink dispensers.
* No handshakes, fist or chest bumps, high fives, hugs, kisses, etc.
* Physical distancing should be maintained, if possible, during practices.

1. **Indoor Practices**

* Byron Baseball is not supporting the hosting of practices indoors at this time. If a team, coach, or players from a team choose to book an indoor workout at an indoor venue they do so at their own risk and are subject to all the rules, restrictions and regulation set out by the Middlesex-London Health Unit and the owner/operator of the indoor facility.

1. **Competition**

Sports activity and life in general have been significantly affected by COVID-19 prevention measures in place across the globe. Although baseball is moderate in contact, there are several factors that will need to be evaluated. Our traditional ways of competing will need to be altered in many instances to allow us to be back on the field of play while minimizing the risk of infection. The protocols listed under General and Practice also apply to Competition. Below are some competition specific protocols to be implemented.

1. **Pre-game**

* Except as noted in the following bullet point, the two teams may share the field for pre-game warm up provided physical distancing is maintained. Each team shall stay in the outfield area on its side of the field. Hitting whiffle balls in the outfield is not considered BP for purposes of the following bullet point.
* Only one team shall be on the field at a time for BP (on the diamond), and Infield or infield/outfield practice.
* Avoid pre-game ceremonies (i.e., anthems, first pitch ceremonies, etc.)
* Minimum physical distance of 2 metres at Home Plate meeting.
* Line up cards must be prepared but will not be physically shared - photos may be taken by scorekeepers etc. and the lineup card must be made available to show the umpire when requested.
* Coaches must don a mask when approaching to speak with the opposing team coach, umpire, or other participant.

1. **Baseballs**

* Ball prep (mud rubbing) to be done by one appointed personnel with protective gloves. No use of saliva in preparing balls.
* Players/participants are **NOT** permitted to go to their mouth when handling a baseball. If this is violated the umpire or coach must stop play, have the player sanitize their hands, sanitize the ball and, if possible, introduce a new ball into play.
* **Specific to** **softball, the defensive team must maintain custody of the balls to be used for game play. When the defensive team takes the field for game play they will use balls provided by them. Once the half inning is complete, the defensive team will bring the ball off the field with them. At no time is an offensive player permitted to touch a ball. For foul balls or balls out of play, a representative/player from the defensive team will retrieve the ball.**

1. **Bats**:

* No bat boys/girls permitted.
* If batter is not able to retrieve his/her own bat, a team representative of at least 16 years of age shall pick-up the bat wearing protective gloves. Team representative shall apply hand sanitizer and/or wash hands upon conclusion of the half inning.
* It is recommended that all players have and use their own bat. If this is not possible and a bat must be shared it shall be sanitized before and after its use by a player/participant.

1. **Other Equipment**

* Masks worn by pitchers, when/if they so choose, will be assessed as per existing rules regarding distracting colours, etc. (recommended that it not be white or grey). Rules of acceptable behaviour cannot be contravened.
* No sharing of catcher's masks in warming up pitchers. If no catcher's mask is readily available, warm up pitches may be thrown to a player/coach who is standing, but not squatting.
* A safety base may be used at first base. It is not mandatory to use it. The home team will determine if it is to be used for a particular game.
* At 8U/9U, the circle to be used around the pitching machine shall be a circle with 12' diameter instead of the 8' diameter circle specified in the 8U/9U rules.
* At 8U/9U, the offensive team coach feeding the pitching machine shall sanitize/clean their hands after every offensive inning.

1. **Umpires**

* If a plate umpire is used, the plate umpire calling balls/strikes shall don PPE. Otherwise the umpire may call the game from 2 metres behind the pitcher.
* Umpires shall sanitize their hands at the end of every half inning.
* Umpires in the field may wear PPE at their discretion, but it is highly encouraged.
* Baseball Ontario permits umpires to handle and keep carriage of baseballs. Byron Baseball recommends that this be discussed at the beginning of the game and if each team elects to maintain custody of their own baseballs for game play, they may do so.
* **Specific to softball, umpires shall not handle baseballs. The defensive team is responsible for maintaining custody of their own softballs for game play and must ensure they are in a playable condition.**

1. **Score Keepers/Pitch Counters**

* Should always work from a restricted area and keep safe distance from others and from each other.
* Avoid paper scoring/pitch counting when possible. Prioritize electronic scoring programs as alternative if possible.

1. **In-Game**

* Players shall not lick their fingers, blow on their hands or otherwise go to their mouth. If a player violates this, the umpire shall stop the game, have the player sanitize their hands and replace the game ball.
* Lead offs and holding runners on base is permitted, however, the defensive player holding the runner on shall don a face mask or face covering.
* Tag plays are allowed, but the defensive player should vacate the area as soon as reasonably practicable following the tag.
* Defensive teams may throw the ball around following an out.

1. **Coaches**

* Team meetings, including pitching visits, shall maintain physical distance of minimum 2 metres. A maximum of 1 person (coach or player) and the pitcher may be included in a pitching visit. Masks shall be worn by the coach.
* Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) (visor or mask, gloves) must be used by trainers (or persons performing trainer function) when assessing an injury.
* If a coach must approach an umpire, physical distancing of at least 2 metres must be maintained. Failure to do so may result in ejection. Masks shall be worn by the coach.
* While on offence, base coaches must always stay within their box, except to avoid a play being made in the coach's box. Any discussions between coaches and players (eg. batter visiting 3rd base coach; coach talking to runners, etc.) must maintain physical distancing of at least 2 metres.
* Pitchers, catchers, spotters and bullpen coaches must always maintain a physical distance of 2 metres while pitchers are warming up in the bullpen.
* As a best practice, all coaches should wear a mask if speaking with or interacting with a player.
* **Specific to softball, all coaches and players shall wear a mask at all times.**

**Best Practices**

The following, while not mandatory requirements, are suggested best practices with respect to in-person baseball activities:

* Drills should be run with players in groups of 3 to 4 (maintain groups throughout all practices to minimize number of interactions)
* Consider split squad (half the team) practices with no physical cross-over between sessions during stage 1 re-opening.
* Each player to have their own portable chair that is not shared.
* Minimize number of coaches in order to maximize players.
* Distribute practice plan in advance to reduce the need for huddles / close communication. This should be accomplished electronically with practice plans available on the Byron Baseball website under the coaches section.
* Group rotation in one direction (i.e. clockwise around field).
* Use of protective gloves and personal face masks by all event personnel, participants (where feasible), and spectators.
* Encourage good handwashing.
* Encourage proper mask usage.

**Enforcement**

It is the expectation of the Byron Optimist Minor Baseball Association that all coaches, participants, volunteers, spectators and directors will respect these protocols and adhere to them not only for their own safety, but for the safety of all participants. Failure to abide by these rules will come with repercussions. Except where a protocol identifies a specific sanction or penalty, enforcement will be by way of a warning against the violator and then a request to leave the in-person activity in the case of repeated violation. Should violations continue to occur the matter will be discussed by the Byron Optimist Minor Baseball Association board of directors and further sanctions will be considered including suspension, removal from coaching duties, and/or being issued a ban for attending any future games, practices or other sanctioned events. It is Baseball Ontario’s position that organizations not following these protocols may result in discipline for the Member Organization, up to and including, expulsion from Baseball Ontario.