

**USA
ULTIMATE**



Return to Play Guidance

v. 3.0

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Table of Contents

- [Overview](#)
- [Equity, Diversity and Inclusion](#)
- [Injury Prevention, Playing After COVID-19 Infection and Gradual Return to Activity](#)
- [State and Local Regulations](#)
- [Vaccination Against SARS-CoV-2](#)
- [Testing](#)
- [Masks](#)
- [CDC Considerations for Sports and Outdoor Events and Activities](#)
- [Local and Travel Events](#)
- [Resources](#)
- [Appendices](#)
 - [Appendix A - Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Considerations](#)
 - [Appendix B - Self-Screening Guidance](#)
 - [Appendix C - Checklist for Organizers and Coaches](#)
 - [Appendix D - Checklist for Players and Parents/Guardians](#)
 - [Appendix E - USA Ultimate Sanctioning Requirements](#)

The following considerations are provided for general informational purposes only and are not intended as, and should not be relied upon as, specific medical or legal advice. You are strongly encouraged to consult with qualified medical personnel/public health officials for medical considerations and be familiar with local, state and federal orders and/or laws for legal considerations. If you use any considerations provided for herein, you do so at your own risk, and you specifically release from any and all liability USA Ultimate and its directors, officers, employees, volunteers and agents in connection with your use of the enclosed considerations.

Overview

This document is intended to assist local disc organizations, teams, coaches, athletes, parents/guardians, event organizers and others with decision making about participating in ultimate-related activities after more than a year of impacts related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Information in this document is drawn from and provides references to guidance and regulations from the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), other public health agencies, medical professionals, other sports organizations and United States government agencies at all levels.

Since the initial release of this guidance document in June 2020 and updates made in February 2021, circumstances in the United States and around much of the world have changed significantly for the better. The improvement has primarily been a function of the widespread distribution of vaccines that have proven to be both safe and effective at preventing serious illness and the spread of COVID-19 for most of the population.



In May 2021, the CDC issued specific [guidance for individuals who have been fully vaccinated](#) against SARS-CoV-2. As a result, and as vaccines have become more widely available and vaccination rates have increased, authorities at the federal, state and local levels have removed or decreased restrictions on a variety of activities. States, counties, cities and towns continue to assess and manage risks in a variety of ways, based on local conditions and by monitoring metrics such as infection incidence, percent positivity testing rates and hospitalizations.

Return to Activities

As the country has begun its shift towards more normal pre-pandemic activities, sports such as ultimate are once again becoming an option for people in many communities. It is worth noting that the benefits of sports, exercise and outdoor activities have become more apparent than ever over the past year. As the world moved to slow the spread of the virus, activity levels for adults and youth had to be severely restricted, with corresponding negative impacts on individuals' physical and mental health, especially for youth. As we continue to move forward with cautious optimism, it is important that individuals and communities consider ways to engage in or provide opportunities for physical activity, including ultimate-related activity, whenever possible.

This document and other referenced resources outline guidance to assist with making decisions about organizing or participating in ultimate-related activities. Local organizers and individuals will need to assess circumstances in their respective areas and in their own personal lives in order to determine when and under what circumstances various activities might be engaged in based on relevant risk factors, risk tolerance and the ability to implement risk mitigation measures.

Community Focus

Given the pandemic's global scope and its ability to move quickly through and between communities, **it is especially important to consider the impact of contracting or spreading the virus beyond any one individual or small group.** Each individual is part of a community and bears a share of the responsibility for helping to protect other members of their community, including those more vulnerable to significant negative health impacts. This means paying special attention to how activities might impact or be connected to members of higher-risk populations, including populations who have not yet had access to vaccines, older individuals, those with compromised immune systems or others with underlying health issues.

Ultimate is a sport that emphasizes and highlights character and community and one that is guided by the ethos of Spirit of the Game, including principles such as personal responsibility, communication and adherence to the rules. This situation provides a unique opportunity for the ultimate community to practice those principles in a new context, both on and off the field of play. Together, as a national ultimate community and as part of various state and local communities, we can be part of the solution to this unprecedented global challenge by making informed decisions that prioritize the health and safety of participants in the coming months and into the future.



Evolving Situation

Finally, it is critical to understand that the COVID-19 situation remains fluid. Children and some other populations lag behind others in their ability to get vaccinated. It is also unclear what the national and local vaccination rates will be once vaccines have been made available to everyone who wants one. The relative populations of unvaccinated and vaccinated individuals will be one of the most important factors influencing the spread of the virus and the ability to mitigate its impact. Additionally, new variants of SARS-CoV-2 continue to evolve and spread in ways that create uncertainty and may create additional risks to navigate.

An important consideration is the emergence of the Delta variant, a more transmissible and more severe form of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. As of June 2021, scientific evidence and expert consensus is that the vaccines used in the United States offer protection against the Delta variant. However, in some countries with high vaccination rates, outbreaks of the Delta variant have emerged. As scientists and healthcare professionals learn more, and as public health and government officials make new recommendations and decisions, USA Ultimate will continue to monitor these factors, adjust its health and safety policies and practices, and rely on local ultimate organizations and participants to do the same.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated societal inequities that underserved communities endure on a daily basis. These inequities limit or deny access to opportunity and basic freedoms, rights and services for traditionally marginalized groups of people, including those with diverse racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and LGBTQ+ backgrounds. Nowhere is the impact more severe than with accessing support in areas such as employment, healthcare and educational and childcare options for families.

Sports, including ultimate, are not immune to these inequities. Barriers that prevent marginalized people from equitably returning to play are likely to be exacerbated as playing opportunities are reintroduced with special guidelines and requirements put in place to help mitigate the risk of infection and viral spread.

As ultimate organizers, coaches and other decision makers begin reintroducing ultimate activity, based on the recommendations in this document and by following state and local regulations, it is critical they pay special attention to how procedures may disproportionately affect or marginalize any group or groups of people. Areas where underserved and marginalized communities could face potential challenges include the following:

- Vaccination rates
- Healthcare
- Access to transportation
- Safe equipment
- Technology
- Playing space and location
- Adult supervision



- Language barriers
- Childcare options
- Financial assistance
- Insurance
- Food and housing insecurity

Challenges and strategies to address inequities will differ based on local factors, some related to COVID-19 conditions, some related to pre-existing inequalities and some related to the local circumstances of each community. Spend time thinking about how to mitigate those challenges, while still keeping the individuals and the community as safe as possible, and incorporate inclusion strategies into your plans (see Appendix A).

Injury Prevention, Playing After COVID-19 Infection and Gradual Return to Activity

It is important to recognize that since the spring of 2020, many individuals' activity levels have changed. Even if activity has been maintained, it is unlikely ultimate players will be fully prepared to resume activities at the same level where they left off.

With that in mind, a phased approach to reintroducing activity is important to decrease the risk of injury with adequate incremental physical training. It is important to follow a gradual plan for reintroducing activity in stages related to the duration and intensity of activity. In general, it is recommended that ultimate training sessions be limited to around **60 minutes** for the first 10-14 days and that physical exertion be **low-to-moderate** intensity depending on individual fitness levels. After a 10-14 day initial training period, duration and intensity of activity should increase gradually with respect to each individual's level of fitness. In all stages of activity reintroduction, proper warm-up is essential to prevent injury.

Additionally, there will be athletes hoping to return to playing ultimate or other activities who have contracted COVID-19 over the past year. While current data is limited, there is evidence that health risks, including potential cardiac risks, persist even after recovering from the infection. *Health experts recommend that any athlete who has tested positive for COVID-19 or experienced COVID-19 symptoms or is concerned about possible long-term effects of COVID-19 should consult with a physician before returning to exercise.* Protocols for post-infection, gradual return to exercise and eventual return to competition have been developed and can be referenced at the following links.

- [American Academy for Pediatrics](#)
- [American Medical Society for Sports Medicine \(flowchart\)](#)



State and Local Regulations

USA Ultimate cannot support activities that do not comply with federal, state and local health department mandates. State and local regulations will provide key guidance about if, when and under what conditions sports and other activities may resume. State and local health departments are important resources and partners in making decisions about returning to ultimate or disc-sport-related activities, creating plans for mitigating risks in the local community and dealing with issues as they arise. Local organizers are expected to understand and follow state and local health department guidance and regulations when returning to activity and should expect to do so in a phased, incremental fashion. Even given local guidance, it is important to note there will still be risks associated with any activity, and risk tolerances and decisions on whether to host or participate in authorized activities will vary across organizations and individuals.

The CDC provides a [directory for state and territory, city and county, and tribal health departments](#) on its website. Please use this resource to access information from all relevant public health authorities in your area and create plans for your events and activities based on this guidance.

Vaccination Against SARS-CoV-2

Several vaccines have been authorized for emergency use by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) that have been demonstrated to be safe and are effective at reducing the incidence, mortality and spread of COVID-19. There are additional vaccines used internationally that have been authorized for emergency use by the World Health Organization (WHO). The widespread global roll-out of vaccines has drastically altered the course of the pandemic, sharply reducing the volume and severity of cases among vaccinated populations. The following considerations are noteworthy as of this update:

1. Vaccines are currently authorized for use in people ages 12 and above. Activities for unvaccinated youth should be mindful of all relevant guidelines. The CDC and local health care providers are excellent sources of information about the vaccine roll-out for ages 0-11.
2. Many questions remain unanswered regarding the impact of vaccination in individuals and communities on safe return to activity, including sports activities. We can expect new data and recommendations to emerge throughout 2021, and we will update this guidance document to reflect new data and new public health guidance regarding the impact of vaccine programs on safe return to activity.
3. USA Ultimate and its Medical Advisory Working Group recognize that currently available vaccines are an effective tool to protect individuals and communities from severe infection and illness and to help end the COVID-19 pandemic. Individuals are encouraged to consult with their healthcare provider to understand their own health situation and their options for getting vaccinated.

More information about vaccines and where to access them can be found [here](#).



Testing

Tests to detect COVID-19 infection are an important tool to help reduce spread of the virus. Many businesses, including sports organizations, have incorporated testing into their safety protocols as testing becomes faster, more reliable and more accessible. USA Ultimate and its Medical Advisory Working Group encourage the use of testing for individuals showing COVID-19 symptoms or who have been in close contact with infected individuals, as well as for unvaccinated individuals prior to engaging in certain interactions or activities, such as travel and competition.

Masks

Mask wearing continues to be an important strategy to slow the spread of COVID-19, especially in unvaccinated individuals, in indoor settings and anywhere six feet of distance cannot be maintained. The CDC has provided masking guidance for [unvaccinated](#) and [vaccinated](#) individuals in various settings, and local, state and federal authorities have a variety of regulations in place that the ultimate community should be aware of and follow, both locally and while traveling.

USA Ultimate's [policy on wearing masks](#) at events continues to evolve, with special attention being paid to potentially higher-risk interactions associated with ultimate events and activities. The current policy can be viewed on the USA Ultimate website.

CDC Considerations for Sports and Outdoor Events and Activities

The CDC's [Considerations for Youth Sports Administrators](#) guidance document and the accompanying [Sports Program FAQ's](#) are currently being used as resources complementary to its more recently updated [Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated Individuals](#). This more recent set of recommendations describes increased flexibility for **vaccinated** individuals to participate in activities such as sports and events. Much of the prior guidance continues to serve as an important reference point for **unvaccinated** individuals and households or communities where there is a mixture of vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals.

Organizers and participants should access these CDC documents directly and should read and understand the detailed information that serves as a basis for the recommendations in this document and for federal, state and local health and safety guidelines.

Local and Travel Events

Ultimate organizers and participants should continue to remain aware of important differences between local events and events requiring travel. Different parts of the country, even at the county and city levels, may have different COVID-19 risks as well as different health and safety regulations. It is important to be aware of the spectrum of both risks and requirements that exist when traveling for ultimate activities.



At events requiring travel and events that involve bringing together participants from a range of locations, additional precautions may be warranted, depending on the vaccination status of the participants and the local community. It is also important to recognize that isolation and quarantine requirements will be more difficult to adhere to the further a participant travels from home. Preventative measures and flexible planning are especially important in these situations.

Additional guidance for organizers and participants at events can be found in Appendices [C](#) and [D](#).

Resources

The following resources were used to create the guidance provided in this document or are provided as a way to access more detailed, supplemental information about COVID-19 and related health and safety policies and procedures.

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
 - [Health Department Directories](#)
 - [COVID-19 Cases in the U.S.](#)
 - [When You've Been Fully Vaccinated](#)
 - [Playing Sports: Guidance for Unvaccinated People](#)
 - [Guidance for Operating Youth Camps](#)
 - [Guidance for Administrators in Parks and Recreational Facilities](#)
 - [Symptoms of Coronavirus](#)
 - [If You Are Sick or Caring for Someone](#)
 - [Public Health Recommendations for Community-Related Exposure](#)
 - [Quarantine and Isolation](#)
 - [People Who Are at Higher Risk for Severe Illness](#)
 - [When and How to Wash Your Hands](#)
 - [Cleaning, Disinfecting, and Ventilation](#)
 - [Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2 \(Environmental Protection Agency\)](#)
 - [Social Distancing: Guidance for Unvaccinated People](#)
 - [Cloth Face Coverings - Your Guide to Masks \(for unvaccinated people\)](#)
 - [Coronavirus in the United States - Considerations for Travelers](#)
 - [Videos \(English/Spanish\) \(searchable\) - includes presentations on youth programs/sports](#)
 - [Public Service Announcements \(English/Spanish\) \(audio/transcripts\) - includes general COVID-19 info, high risk individuals, travel](#)
 - [Guidance Documents \(searchable\)](#)
 - [Infographics and Print Resources \(searchable\)](#)
 - [Events and Gatherings: Readiness and Planning Tool](#)
 - [Youth Programs and Camps Readiness and Planning Tool](#)
 - [Checklist for Coaches](#)
 - [Keep Youth Athletes Safe \(Poster\)](#)
 - [Youth Sports Game Plan \(Assess Your Risk\)](#)



- [Letter Template for Sports Administrators and Coaches](#)
- [How to Protect Yourself and Others](#)
- [Stop the Spread of Germs](#)
- [Face Covering Do's and Don'ts](#)
- [American Academy of Pediatrics - COVID-19 Interim Guidance: Return to Sports](#)
- USA Ultimate Staff Contacts
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 - Questions about USA Ultimate competition divisions and related events, medical working group, rules/SOTG, national teams
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 - [Other USA Ultimate Staff Contacts](#)
- USA Ultimate Medical Advisory Working Group
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Appendix A - Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Considerations

[En Español - Apéndice A: Las Consideraciones de Equidad, Diversidad e Inclusión](#)

- Vaccination Rates
 - The steps required to get vaccinated, including access to information about vaccine availability and safety, as well as the time, technology and transportation resources needed to make a vaccination appointment, present barriers that can and do disproportionately impact marginalized groups. It's important to recognize that differences in access to vaccines and a corresponding difference in risk tolerance may exist within teams and across a broader environment that may cover a school district, city or state.
- Access to Transportation
 - Some players may have relied on public transportation to get to and from team activities, but those means of transportation may be unavailable or too risky during this time.
 - When coordinating practice sessions and cohort groups, stay conscious of the impact limited access to transportation may have on some of your players' abilities to attend and participate in team activities.
- Playing Space and Location
 - Available space may be limited due to multiple organizations looking to restart playing activities.
 - Some of your players may have trouble accessing previously used playing spaces and locations due to limited transportation.
- Safe Equipment
 - Refrain from making it a requirement for players to bring their own disc and cleaning/disinfecting materials (i.e., hand sanitizer) as not everyone may have access to them. Also, be mindful that not every player has access to their own mask or cloth face covering. If possible, provide new or sanitized cloth face coverings or masks that the participant can keep. Do not collect, clean and reuse cloth face coverings or masks for participants.
 - While you may make it a requirement for participants to bring their own water bottle, as a general rule, pay attention to participants who may have difficulty meeting that requirement. Consider solutions such as providing a new or sanitized water bottle for them to keep.
- Technology
 - When sending out communication to your players, don't assume all of them and their families have access to a cell phone or internet. You should be aware of any adjustments players have had to make due to the impact of COVID-19, and be prepared to make accommodations for those whose means of sending and receiving communication have changed.
- Language Barriers
 - If possible, have a local contact who would be open to the idea of translating documents or assist with lowering the language barrier for any players and their families where English isn't their first language.



- Childcare Options
 - With many childcare options (schools, daycares, camps, etc.) closed down or limited in their hours and capacity, be mindful of your players' abilities to attend and participate in team activities if they have a child, younger sibling or other family member to look after.
- Adult Supervision
 - Similar to childcare options, you may face a situation where you have fewer chaperones or adult volunteers available to assist with different group activities. Take this into account when deciding what type of activities to offer your players.
- Financial Assistance
 - There is a likelihood some players' and their families' income streams have been impacted by COVID-19. Be sensitive to this reality when asking for team fees to compete in activities.
- Healthcare and Insurance
 - Avoid making assumptions about the level of access to healthcare of participants or their families as disparities in access to healthcare, which existed before the pandemic, are now exacerbated. Some families will have lost their employer-sponsored health insurance and may or may not be able to register for Medicaid or other alternative insurance options.
 - In addition, accessible COVID-19 testing isn't available in all communities.
 - Healthcare considerations may not impact specific activities or decisions you make for your group, but it may impact how you communicate with individuals or families if there is an incident that requires healthcare for a participant.
- Food and Housing Insecurity
 - Some players and their families may be experiencing food and/or housing insecurity. Take the time to check in with players to see if major changes are taking place in their home lives. While food should not be shared, consider providing individual wrapped snacks and, if possible, identifying local service organizations that may be able to assist families with food and shelter.



Appendix B - Self-Screening

It is important for individuals, whether vaccinated or unvaccinated, to screen themselves before coming into contact with others and especially before participating in group activities. The purpose of this screening is to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission between sick and healthy individuals*. Self-screening may help reduce risk by having individuals make responsible choices to limit interactions with others.

**Note: A certain percentage of individuals infected with the COVID-19 coronavirus will have no symptoms or entirely non-respiratory symptoms.*

Self-screening should be done no sooner than the morning of the planned activity and should be completed on each day of a multi-day activity. The screening involves a check of symptoms and an assessment of recent close contact with infected individuals. The CDC provides a web page with [information about symptoms and a link to a self-screening tool](#).

Organizers should remind participants and attendees that they should not attend the event if they are sick. They may include a link to the self-screening page as part of that reminder.

Symptoms

Fever (>100°F) or feeling feverish (such as chills, sweating)

Cough (more than usual)

Mild or moderate difficulty breathing (breathing slightly faster than normal; feeling like you can't inhale or exhale; wheezing, especially during exhaling or breathing out)

Sore throat

Muscle aches or body aches (not due to exercise)

Unusual fatigue

Headache

New loss of taste or smell

Congestion or runny nose (more than usual)

Nausea or vomiting

Diarrhea

Follow the guidance in the CDC self-screener. It is recommended that sick individuals not participate in group activities and that they get a COVID-19 test to determine additional necessary measures.

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Appendix C - Checklist for Organizers and Coaches

[En Español - Apéndice G: Lista de Control para los Organizadores y Entrenadores](#) (PDF - February 2021)

- [Word document En Español](#)

- Follow all relevant federal, state, local, facility and other applicable regulations.
- Use USA Ultimate's Return to Play guidelines as a decision-making tool for activities.
- Make informed decisions that prioritize the health and safety of participants.
- Communicate, implement and enforce mask-wearing requirements for participants, coaches, staff and spectators, based on local regulations and [USA Ultimate guidelines](#) for local and travel events.
- Consider having your event sanctioned by USA Ultimate in order to utilize vaccination-tracking and test-tracking tools.
- Designate a coach, organizer or other adult to be the point of contact for COVID-19-related concerns and communications.
- Ensure effective communication systems to disseminate information about safety measures and compliance with local regulations, including through pre-event communications, on-site signage and on-site announcements.
- Ensure training on safety protocols and applicable regulations are understood and implemented by all coaches and other relevant staff.
- Ensure effective planning to handle and report a sick participant or a known exposure.
- Create flexible staffing policies and backup staffing plans to account for sickness, exposure to COVID-19 or other risk factors.
- Educate organizers, volunteers, coaches, participants and families about when to stay home and when it is OK to return to activity.
- Establish expectations for self-screening procedures.
- Teach and encourage important hygiene practices, including requiring hand cleaning, prohibiting spitting and encouraging coughing/sneezing into tissues that are disposed properly.
- Ensure adequate supplies for hygiene are available, especially in and around bathrooms, water stations and other common areas.
- Create awareness of and flexibility for participants at greater risk.
- Limit group size and makeup based on local regulations.
- Implement physical distancing measures on and off the field based on local regulations and applicable USA Ultimate policies. This may include creating designated spaces for teams and spectators to more easily remain distanced.
- Implement equipment management, cleaning and disinfecting protocols based on local regulations.
- Modify activities and rules to accomplish goals in each area of risk.
- Use a phased approach to reintroducing activity to decrease the risk of injury.
- Consider how new procedures may disproportionately affect or marginalize any group or groups of people, and work to mitigate negative impacts, while maintaining health and safety.



Appendix D - Checklist for Players and Parents/Guardians

[En Español - Apéndice H: La Lista de Control para los Jugadores y Los Padres/Tutores](#) (PDF - February 2021)

- [Word Document En Español](#)

- Follow all relevant state, local, facility and other applicable regulations.
- Use USA Ultimate's Return to Play guidelines to inform decisions about participation in local and travel events.
- If vaccinated, upload your vaccination card to your USA Ultimate account.
- Bring and wear your own cloth face covering, in accordance with [CDC guidelines for vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals](#) and [USA Ultimate's masking policies](#).
- Make informed decisions that prioritize the health and safety of participants.
- Be aware of CDC guidance, risk factors and behaviors that increase or decrease risk.
- Check with your local organization or team about how to reach their point of contact for COVID-19-related concerns and communications.
- Follow self-screening procedures, and make responsible decisions about not participating when sick or after close contact with anyone infected with COVID-19.
- Notify activity's COVID-19 contact if you or your child are sick, have COVID-19 symptoms, have tested positive for COVID-19 or have had contact with a person with COVID-19.
- Understand if you or your child are at [higher risk for infection or severe illness](#). Communicate as appropriate with organizers and make informed decisions about participation.
- Follow guidelines set by local activity organizers, in compliance with local regulations.
- Perform hand hygiene regularly throughout activity, especially after contacting shared equipment (e.g., after a drill) or if there is concern about contamination by respiratory secretions (e.g., after close proximity between individuals), and before bringing hands to the mouth or nose. Refrain from spitting. Cough/sneeze into tissues and dispose of them properly.
- Bring your own hand sanitizer, if available.
- Bring your own water bottle and other equipment or clothing as directed.
- Follow distancing rules and rules modifications as instructed, on and off the field.
- Follow rules about sharing and cleaning of equipment.
- Follow rules about pick-up and drop-off for activities, as well as limits on additional spectators, parents or other personnel.
- Communicate with organizers about issues or concerns.
- Consider differing regulations and risks associated with travel and interactions outside the local area.
- Use a phased approach to reintroducing activity to decrease the risk of injury.
- Consider how new procedures may disproportionately affect or marginalize any group or groups of people and how you might help to mitigate negative impacts, while maintaining health and safety.



Appendix E - USA Ultimate Sanctioning Requirements

The following steps are required in order to receive approval for sanctioning by USA Ultimate.

1. Organizers must check all applicable national, state and local health and safety regulations and ensure their event or activity will be in compliance.
2. Organizers must contact the facility and any applicable local authorities to get pre-approval for their event or activity.
3. Organizers must submit a complete sanctioning application to USA Ultimate within the required timeframe, along with any relevant sources of state and local health regulations. In their application, organizers must agree to adhere to any and all applicable health and safety regulations in effect at the time their event takes place.
4. Organizers must agree to follow USA Ultimate Return to Play Guidelines, including the most recent [masking policies](#).
5. USA Ultimate will review the application and may communicate with organizers to verify plans to adhere to applicable regulations.
6. If the organizer meets all health and safety requirements, as well as other requirements for sanctioning, the event will be approved for sanctioning.

All sanctioned event participants are required to sign USA Ultimate's infectious diseases waiver, as well as the general liability waiver, through their member accounts.