

Hat-tips, disinfecting balls and masked umpers if Murphy lets baseball, softball resume

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By [Rob Jennings](#) | [NJ Advance Media for NJ.com](#)

Youth baseball and softball businesses are pitching a “responsible restart” to Gov. Phil Murphy in which practices would resume next week, with coaches and umpires wearing face coverings when games begin in mid-June.

Players keeping at least 6 feet apart when not on the field, baseballs being disinfected between every inning and ‘hat-tips’ replacing post-game handshakes are among the precautions in the two-page proposal provided Wednesday to NJ Advance Media.

The New Jersey Baseball Coalition submitted its proposal to Murphy on Tuesday, six days after [launching an online petition](#) endorsed by more than 100 organizations and expanded in recent days to include softball, lead organizer Brian Delahant said. “The rules and guidelines, in my opinion, are above and beyond what is basically needed, but if this is what is needed to get the kids outside and away from the video games, computer and TV, I think we would all accept that outcome,” Delahant said.

Delahant is president of the New Jersey-based [U.S. Amateur Baseball League](#), which cancelled its spring season and at least 15 tournaments — including a Memorial Day weekend tournament involving 600 teams — due to the [coronavirus](#) pandemic. Murphy’s office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

In response to the petition last week, his spokesperson told NJ Advance Media on May 14 that the governor appreciates youth sports but, in the interest of public health, is [not ready](#) to allow baseball — or any other organized and contact sports — to proceed. The proposal is entitled, “Responsible Restart: NJ Baseball and Softball,” and spells out potentially dire consequences to baseball businesses — including training academies, travel teams, and sporting equipment and apparel vendors — if Murphy keeps players off the field.

“Small businesses are trying to manage their employees, vendors and customers with no plan. Owners need to know how much longer this storm - during the heart of our season - will last,” it reads.

“How much longer can we support our employees? How much longer can we continue to put food on our families’ tables,” it reads, concluding, “We have a chance to save the game that attracts 100,000+ youth players and supports thousands of small businesses in New Jersey before it’s too late.”

It spells out numerous steps aimed at promoting social distancing and public health. While written for baseball, the same procedures would apply to softball, Delahant said.

Players, coaches and umpires would conduct “daily symptom self-evaluation assessments” and anybody experiencing symptoms or living with somebody experiencing symptoms must stay home, according to the proposal.

It states that each team would supply baseballs to be used exclusively for their team in the field, in an effort to reduce the number of players using the same ball. Between innings, coaches would sanitize baseballs with disinfectant.

The home plate umpire would call balls and strikes while standing behind the mound, 6 feet from the pitcher.

When a team is batting, the dugout would be limited to one head coach and the next three players in the batting order, with other players staying 6 feet apart behind the dugout or along the foul line.

Hat-tips would replace the customary post-game handshakes among players and coaches, with high-fives and other contact prohibited under a ‘no-touch rule.’

Moreover, in addition to the previously-reported ban on spitting and chewing seeds, players would not be allowed to share equipment. Spectators would sit six feet apart. Lineup cards would not be presented to umpires.

Players would be encouraged, but not required, to wear face coverings when not in the field.

The proposal also spells out a timeline for resuming play.

Single-team practices, with up to 12 players and 3 coaches, would begin as soon as May 25. From June 6 to June 12, individual league and scrimmage games would be permitted.

Then starting June 13, all organized games would return to leagues and tournaments.

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