

Recommendations for a Safe Return to Tennis – Facility Guidelines

Tennis is a unique sport with many health benefits. The Ontario Tennis Association is dedicated to encouraging participation in the sport and guiding member clubs or facilities on ways to provide players with a safe and enjoyable environment. With the unprecedented situation brought on by the emergence of **COVID-19**, the organization has developed **recommendations** for tennis facilities to adopt that could help facilitate a safe return to play. It has been developed keeping in mind that the situation is fluid and recommendations could change, based on the latest best-practices released by medical experts and levels of government.

With respect to public facilities, all recommendations can be implemented only if, and when, the appropriate government jurisdiction(s) have approved facility openings and clubs adhere to their regulations.

The guidelines below provide suggestions on how outdoor courts could remain open for use, to help ensure people remain active subject to strict social distancing and hygiene practices being implemented at the time of opening.

Tennis clubs, coaches and operators across the province are all unique and might operate in different ways. They are also independent organisations. Making an assessment of whether a safe environment can be provided depends on a range of factors which could apply differently at each venue – it is the responsibility of each club, operator and/or coach to make that assessment based on their local environment.

Further; based on the overall social and medical environment at the time of opening, clubs might want to consider adopting any or all of the following recommendations, using a careful “staged” opening, ramping up club activities in increments looking to government-established guidelines as a guide.

SOCIAL/PHYSICAL DISTANCING

- Players must practice physical distancing; staying a minimum of 2 metres away from others at any time. Handshakes, high-fives and/or elbow taps are not recommended. A simple thumbs up from a distance is a recommended alternative.
- Clubs could consider implementing a 15-minute buffer between scheduled court times to ensure equipment/common surfaces can be cleaned.
- For singles play, clubs could consider instructing players to bring their own uniquely marked balls so that, for example, Player A can be instructed to only pick up balls by hand that are assigned to him and Player B only picks up balls by hand that are assigned to her when they are playing together. When returning balls to a partner, or if balls travel to another court, players could be instructed to return them using only their racquet - never their hands. This could be applicable to doubles only if there are 4 unique sets of balls.

CLEANLINESS & HYGIENE STRATEGIES

It is estimated that the virus responsible for COVID-19 can be transmitted through the sharing and handling of tennis balls, door handles, benches, the net and possibly the court itself. Players are urged to take extra precautions before, during and after their time on the court:

- All individuals should be encouraged to thoroughly wash their hands and bring plenty of hand sanitizer with them to sterilize their hands often and avoid touching their face.
- Players should be reminded to be vigilant about coughing or sneezing into a tissue or into the crook of their elbow and to immediately dispose of any used tissue; then wash their hands (or use sanitizer if soap and water is not readily available).
- For extra protection, clubs can recommend that players wear a glove on the hand that tosses the ball during their serve, noting that, even wearing a glove is not safe if a player touches their face with it. Alternately, players should be encouraged to use hand sanitizer often - between points and/or during changeovers.
- Players should be instructed to refrain from touching benches, nets and net posts. To minimize this risk, clubs could remove chairs and benches they normally leave on the courts for players to sit during their match.
- Players should be reminded to refrain from sharing racquets, water bottles, towels and other personal items with their playing partners.
- Upon returning home, it is recommended that players be encouraged to sanitize the bottom of their court shoes (prior to entering the home) and then washing their hands.
- Players should be told that they must refrain from playing and to stay home if they:
 - are not feeling well or are exhibiting flu-like symptoms, or any known coronavirus symptoms, (incl. fever, cough, difficulty breathing, etc.).
 - have been in contact with someone with COVID-19 and/or flu-like symptoms in the previous 14 days.
 - have been overseas in the previous 14 days.
 - are considered vulnerable or at risk (elderly individuals, immunosuppressed persons and/or individuals suffering from serious health problems - notably high blood pressure, pulmonary diseases, diabetes, obesity and asthma).

ORGANIZING TENNIS ACTIVITIES

- Where possible, clubs could secure facility entry points, (i.e. gates, access doors) in an open position during club hours.

- If available, divider nets should be maintained in the “closed” position to reduce the frequency of errant balls entering another court and to help prevent players from entering adjacent courts.
- Players should be instructed to arrive at the club as close as possible to when they need to be there and leave immediately after finishing play.
- Where possible, only one parent/guardian should be permitted to accompany younger children.
- Clubs should keep a record of all who visit the club so they can be contacted if needed.
- Other common-sense steps should be taken to minimize risk to others. This includes limiting play to singles or doubles (only for family members); no larger group activities or spectators and social gatherings on the court or patio.
- For everyone's safety, smaller clubs should consider minimizing or eliminating staffing for the summer; leaving it up to members to self-regulate their time on court. Clubs can implement whatever court policy they wish (i.e. a limit of 1 hour of play if others are waiting).
- Club staff should avoid handling cash - payments could be made online if possible.
- Clubs with Clubhouses could keep them closed for the season. Remaining open creates increased potential exposure of the virus to staff and members and would require special cleaning and physical distancing measures to operate effectively. This means members would have no access to washrooms while at the club. Players should be instructed in advance to plan their visits accordingly.
- If a decision is made to open a clubhouse or facility, clubs could consider allowing staff access only and should clean it regularly according to public space guidelines and with social distancing maintained. If a club chooses to open and has a retail space, recommended retail operating guidelines should be put in place.
- Ball machines should only be used if they are properly sanitized after each use.
- Any court equipment should also be sanitized after each use and, to offer further protection, clubs could consider using it on a 48-hour rotation, i.e. Monday/Wednesday/Friday for ball carts, court sweepers, lawn equipment, etc.
- If Club Pros are permitted to offer private or group lessons, it is recommended that the group size be kept to a maximum of 4 people, and no more than 2 players on either side of the court. Ball pick-up should be done without using hands, i.e. pick-up tubes, hoppers, etc. Errant balls on court during play should be cleared using racquet or foot. Additionally, a club may require that only the pro handles the balls.
- Clubs could consider canceling or restricting their programming for the summer to avoid situations that will make it more difficult to maintain physical distancing requirements. This includes activities such as leagues and mixers, social events, junior camps, etc.