



2021 RETURN TO PARTICIPATION MANUAL



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Gopher State RTP Manual – Table of Contents



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Gopher State COVID Care Toolbox

Links to Gopher State Baseball Return to Participation documents, MDH and CDC guidance, other organizations' resources, and best practices can be found by clicking the link below.

[VIRTUAL COVID CARE TOOLBOX](#)

Introduction



These Gopher State protocols are based upon research, review, and modification of and in alignment with the requirements, recommendations, and best practices for a safe and healthy return to participation from the following organizations:

- *Minnesota Department of Health—Guidance on Youth Sports*
- *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*
- *Minnesota Department of Health Preparedness Plan Template and Instructions*
- *Minnesota State High School League—Return to Participation Guidelines for Baseball*
- *Safe Play: Back to the Diamond Guidelines for Practice & Competition*
- *Little League Baseball Season Resources*
- *National Collegiate Athletic Association*
 - ◊ *Guidance and Recommendations for Game Day Operations*
 - ◊ *Developing Standards for Practice and Competition*
- *U.S. Council for Athletes' Health—Return to Sport for Youth Sport Guidelines*

Links to the resources of the listed above organizations can be found in the [VIRTUAL GOPHER STATE COVID CARE TOOLBOX](#).

Gopher State protocols must be implemented for all Gopher State Baseball League games and Gopher State tournament games and must be maintained through the 2021 season.

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Introduction

Disclaimer

While each Association will be required to uphold the standards presented herein, no policy or requirement shall supersede the requirements established by local, state, and/or federal health agencies.

As an important safety measure, Associations are encouraged to continue to follow the recommended and most current information and directives from state government and health department officials.



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Introduction



Establishing a COVID Compliance Manager

It is in the best interest of each youth baseball association participating in MYAS/Gopher State programming to establish a COVID Compliance Manager prior to the start of the 2021 season.

The COVID Compliance Manager (CCM) will:

1. ensure their association is fostering compliance of the Gopher State Return to Participation Manual and the Safe Play: Back to the Diamond Guidelines;
2. follow the recommended steps of the “positive case process” found in the Gopher State Return to Participation Manual;
3. communicate/respond to CCMs from other Associations regarding exposures and compliance using the **Association COVID Compliance Manager (CCM) Contact List**.

The MYAS/Gopher State Baseball staff will assist in any communication necessary between association CCMs. A complete list of CCMs for each Gopher State Baseball association will be made available.

Please email baseball@myas.org for more information.

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COVID-19 Risk Assessment and Impact



COVID Transmission

As per the CDC, COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly through close contact from person to person, including between people who are physically near each other (within about 6 feet). People who are infected but do not show symptoms can also spread the virus to others. We are still learning how the virus spreads and the severity of the illness it causes. For the most up to date information on the transmission of COVID-19, please consult the CDC webpage "*How to Protect Yourself and Others*".

Links to the CDC resources can be found in the [VIRTUAL GOPHER STATE COVID CARE TOOLBOX](#).

The MYAS is committed to working with the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) to ensure participation guidelines and requirements meet the most current standards of the MDH.

Statewide Monitoring

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve in Minnesota, regions may see unanticipated spikes in cases and a reduction in overall public safety. The MYAS/Gopher State Baseball will work directly with state government and health officials to continue to monitor the pandemic and its effects on Gopher State Associations.

State Recognition

The Gopher State Return to Participation manual has been reviewed by members of the Minnesota Department of Health, who acknowledge that the Gopher State Return to Participation requirements are necessary to provide the best opportunity to sustain healthy and safe participation for Minnesota's 9u-19u summer community-based youth baseball associations for the 2021 season.

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Mitigation Strategies



For Gopher State to have successful and safe return to sport competition, each Gopher State youth baseball association is being asked to review the following mitigation strategies. Gopher State recognizes that not all of these strategies are relevant during training, practice, and competition.

Some of the mitigation strategies are **required** while others are **highly recommended**. For the mitigation strategies that are not required but are highly recommended, we encourage each Association to adopt these strategies including those strategies that stretch outside training, practice, and competition. *For example, to reduce close contact risks, carpooling to and from practices and games is discouraged.*

Each Gopher State association is placing trust in their Gopher State partners' assurance that everyone is doing their part to decrease the risk for virus transmission.

Symptom Screening - Required Through Association

Every youth athlete, coach, official, and league/tournament event staff should practice daily self-evaluations before participating in any in-person activities. The following are examples of daily screening tools available to assist with monitoring if desired, but such tools are not required:

- **Recommended Daily Screening Options**

- ♦ [USCAH COVID Care Package Education and GameDay Ready App](#) (endorsed by MYAS)
 - ♦ From specialized COVID-19 education and a Game Day Ready App, to tailored support & consultation from USCAH experts, USCAH is dedicated to providing customized solutions to youth sports associations.
 - ♦ The Game Day Ready App provides your institution the ability to screen every individual involved in your association with daily screening at your fingertips.
 - ♦ Game Day Ready—a simple measure aimed at ensuring staff, coaches, and athletes are safe and healthy.
 - ♦ With the touch of a device, an administrator can ensure all participants have completed the assessment and are cleared for the daily activities and events.
- ♦ Sports Engine Education and Screening App
- ♦ Team Snap Education and Screening App
- ♦ League Athletics
- Consideration should be given to daily screening platforms that also provide attendance tracking.

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Mitigation Strategies

Education - Highly Recommended

Education of our youth athletes, coaches, youth baseball association board members, and league and event staff will play an integral role in keeping our programs safe. For education to truly be considered a mitigation strategy, it needs to be ongoing with continual reinforcement. Gopher State Baseball recommends every Gopher State Association evaluate their ability to deliver ongoing education and seek alternative options for content and delivery that meets their unique and specific needs.

Masks/Face Coverings

The use of masks/face coverings is required whenever youth athletes, coaches, officials, spectators, and event staff are at the facility for practices/competition.

- *Required*

- ◇ Youth athletes- Masks are not required ***if*** athletes can stay at least six feet away from others; athletes are required to wear a mask when around others (dugout/bench area) and not actively playing/training .
- ◇ Coaches, Umpires and Spectators: masks are not required ***if*** and when six feet of distance from others can be consistently maintained
- ◇ Masks/face coverings must be worn at the venue, ***if*** six feet of distance from others, cannot be consistently maintained.

- *Highly Recommended*

- ◇ Whenever feasible away from the facility, especially when travelling or gathering for team meetings, mask/face coverings should be worn.

[MDH COVID-19 Organized Sports Practice and Games Guidance for Youth Sports](#)

Should state executive orders or guidance change on masks/face coverings during youth baseball activities, the MYAS will communicate and provide updates to any changes that are made.

Physical Distancing and Facility Access - Required

- Physical distancing is expected and encouraged whenever possible.
- Only essential team personnel, including youth athletes, coaches (3), team manager, and medical personnel (when present) will have access to team spaces.
- When spectators attend practices/competitions, they are always required to wear a mask/face covering (when six feet of distance from others outside their household cannot be consistently maintained), and stay at least 6 feet away from other spectators and dugout areas.



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Mitigation Strategies

Proper Hygiene - Required

Ensuring proper hygiene requirements are practiced is a shared responsibility of participation. These strategies reduce the risk of exposure and must be followed at each facility.

- *Required*

- ♦ No touch rule—players must refrain from high fives, handshake line, and any other physical contact with teammates, opposing players, coaches, umpires, and spectators. A “tip of the cap” will be used as a salute to the opposing team to promote sportsmanship following the game.
- ♦ Each team must provide their own balls when they are the fielding team.
- ♦ Cough and sneeze etiquette will be routinely emphasized and reinforced.
- ♦ If you are sick, stay home!

- *Highly Recommended*

- ♦ Hand washing stations and other sanitization supplies are to be widely available and their utilization must be routinely emphasized and reinforced.
- ♦ Whenever possible, equipment and personal items should have proper sanitation and should not be shared. If equipment must be shared, proper sanitation should be administered between users.
- ♦ Batting gloves should be worn whenever possible, especially when handling a bat.



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The Gopher State Return to Participation Manual identifies the requirements, recommendations, and best practices for safe and healthy return to participation.

Any item identified as “Required” is mandatory, and failure to comply with any mandatory requirement can result in a penalty or suspension. Each non-compliant situation will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the Gopher State Health and Safety Compliance Committee (representatives from U.S. Council for Athletes’ Health, members of the Gopher State Baseball Board of Advisors and MYAS staff).

Examples of non-compliance include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Players are crowded on a bench, not leaving proper space, and/or not wearing masks.
- Allowing a player with a confirmed positive COVID-19 test result to participate in a game, prior to their isolation period expiring.
- Failure to promote COVID-19 requirements throughout the remainder of the season by an association.

Anonymous Compliance Reporting

Gopher State has established an anonymous reporting page for health and safety compliance. The U.S. Council for Athletes’ Health has partnered with the MYAS to provide an external, independent, and unbiased health and safety compliance reporting process. USCAH staff will work with MYAS staff to review and resolve health and safety compliance concerns.

The site can be found in the [VIRTUAL GOPHER STATE COVID CARE TOOLBOX](#).

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Emergency Executive Orders

Emergency Executive Order 20-103 requires mandatory training and compliance with the COVID-19 Return to Participation Preparedness Plan. The following is a summary of Emergency Executive Orders 20-99 and 20-103.

Organized youth sport associations and organizations must adhere to the following requirements, including development and implementation of a COVID-19 Preparedness Plan, in accordance with applicable guidance for youth sports available on the Stay Safe Minnesota website.

COVID-19 Preparedness Plans must be distributed and available for review by participants and their parents or guardians.

Coaches and trainers must understand and follow the Association's COVID-19 Preparedness Plan.

Training: Each youth sport organization must ensure that training is provided to youth athletes, coaches, and event staff on the contents of the Association's COVID-19 Preparedness Plan and required procedures, so that all youth athletes, coaches, and event staff understand and are able to perform the precautions necessary to protect themselves and others.

- This training should be easy to understand and available to all.
- The Association should take steps to supervise youth athletes and coaches to ensure they understand and adhere to the necessary precautions to prevent COVID-19 transmission.
- Documentation demonstrating compliance with this training requirement must be maintained and made available to regulatory authorities, public safety officers, including DLI, upon request.

Compliance: Youth athletes, coaches, and event staff must work together to ensure compliance with the COVID-19 Preparedness Plan; implement all protocols, policies, and procedures; and create a safe and healthy participation environment.

COVID-19 Preparedness Plan Content: At a minimum, each COVID-19 Preparedness Plan must adequately address the following areas:

- Ensure those that are sick stay home: plans must establish policies and procedures, including health screenings, that prevent sick individuals from entering the athletic facility.
- Social Distancing: plans must establish social distancing policies and procedures.
- Hygiene and Source Control: plans must establish hygiene and source control policies for all youth athletes, coaches, and event staff.
- Cleaning, disinfection, and ventilation protocols: plans must establish cleaning, disinfection, and ventilation protocols for areas within the athletic facility.

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Positive Case Process – Steps



The next sections will walk you through the responsibilities of participants and associations when there is a positive case of COVID -19 in your program, along with explaining the tools and resources available to associations for completing the necessary steps.

One important component of the Preparedness Guide is the designation of an Association COVID Compliance Manager (CCM) by each association. The CCM will ensure their association is fostering compliance of the RTP Manual and Safe Play: Back to the Diamond Guidelines by following the recommended steps of the positive case process; having open communication with other CCMs regarding exposure and compliance; and tracking and reporting the positive cases and close contacts within their association.

Youth Baseball Participants Responsibilities

- It is a requirement that a parent/guardian report any positive case or close contact exposure (for their child who is a player in a youth baseball association) to the association's COVID Compliance Manager (CCM) and their child's school district.
- It is a requirement that a coach for an association report any positive case or close contact exposure (for themselves) to the association's COVID Compliance Manager (CCM).
- Many children who test positive for COVID-19 are asymptomatic or have mild symptoms. Some children have experienced significant medical issues during or after their COVID-19 illness. ***If a Minnesota high school athlete has been diagnosed with or has tested positive for COVID-19, medical evaluation by a qualified medical provider is highly recommended by the Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL) prior to returning to physical activity and team training.*** Parents of youth athletes should consult with their child's medical provider to determine if they feel this is necessary for their child.

To aid parents and families in reporting positive cases and close contact exposures to their association, it is recommended that the association create a "form" that can be submitted. This could be done by creating a "\$0 registration" in the registration system or using a survey website. Data submission should be done in a manner so that each submitter cannot see information submitted by others.

The recommended information to collect from families (in addition to contact information) is shown in the "COVID forms" link on the [VIRTUAL GOPHER STATE COVID CARE TOOLBOX](#). One form can be used to report symptoms, positive cases, or close contact exposure.

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Positive Case Process – Steps



Actions and Notifications for a Positive Case

When a youth athlete or coach tests positive for COVID-19, appropriate isolation measures must be taken for that individual. Local public health officials should contact the individual if contact tracing protocols should be implemented. Further, in conjunction with local public health officials and contact tracers, member Associations must follow the mandatory reporting protocols for notifying other Associations should a youth athlete or coach from one team:

- develop symptoms within 48 hours after a competition with another team and then subsequently test positive; OR
- take a COVID-19 test within 48 hours after competition with another team and receive a positive test result (even if asymptomatic).

Details regarding actions and notifications are available in the and the [Decision Tree for People in Schools, Youth and Child Care Programs](#), [MDH Guidance for Close Contacts and Tracing: COVID-19](#), [Quarantine Guidance for COVID-19](#), and [MDH Sports Quarantine Clarification](#).

High level steps include the following:

1. The CCM should remind the parent/guardian to notify the child's school (including the child's name).
2. The CCM is strongly encouraged to notify the MDH of a positive case via Red Cap Case Reporting.

[MDH COVID-19 Red Cap Case Reporting Form](#)

3. The CCM should refer to the links above to determine the appropriate quarantine measures for the positive case individual and communicate it to that individual (or their parents). The CCM can work with MDH, the school district, and local health officials if the situation is unclear.
4. The CCM must also provide notification to individuals who are determined to be close contact to the positive case (see below)
 - The “Standard Messages” link found in the [VIRTUAL GOPHER STATE COVID CARE TOOLBOX](#) includes notification templates you can use for a variety of notification situations.

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Positive Case Process – Steps

Contact Tracing and Identifying Close Contacts to the Positive Case

Effective contact tracing is critical in breaking the chain of transmission and limiting the spread of infection for infectious diseases such as COVID-19.

Concurrent to the necessary actions and notifications for the positive case, the CCM must also identify the individuals who were in close contact to that positive case through youth baseball events (contact tracing) from within your own association as well as identifying opposing teams (from your own association or other associations) that are in close contact.

For youth baseball situations, close contact among participants is defined on page 15 of this manual.



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Positive Case Process – Steps



Close Contact Definition* Within Youth Baseball Events

In a practice:

- Only team members and coaches within regular, close proximity with the positive case would be considered close contacts.

In a game:

- All players within regular, close proximity with the positive case would be considered close contacts.
- Coaches within regular, close proximity with the positive case would be considered close contacts.

Note: Each close contact situation may be reviewed on a case-by-case basis under consultation and thorough interview with MDH.

- ♦ **Note:** The timing for a close contact exposure includes contact after the positive case has developed symptoms or taken the COVID-19 test, as well as in the 48 hours prior to the onset of symptoms (symptomatic) or in the 48 hours prior to the time the test is taken (if asymptomatic or if symptoms develop after being tested).

To ensure that all potential close contacts can be accurately identified, coaches are required to keep an attendance record for all players and coaches for all practices, games, and baseball events. A sports team app that allows for attendance recording can serve this purpose or there is a template in the “Attendance Tracker – Coach.”

To simplify the identification of close contacts on opposing teams, it is recommended to keep a record of the league games and tournaments in which all of your association’s teams participate.

*** Close Contact Definition has been updated by MDH on 4/10/2021.**

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Positive Case Process – Steps

Actions and Notifications for the Close Contacts

- After identifying close contacts to the positive case, the CCM should follow the MDH Guidance found on page 13 of this manual to determine the appropriate actions and notifications for the individuals who were close contact to the positive case. Main Reference: [MDH COVID-19 Decision Tree](#)
 - ♦ All individuals who have been identified as having close contact exposure to a positive case should be placed in quarantine per [MDH Guidance](#) & [CDC Guidance](#).
 - ♦ **NEW [MDH Quarantine Clarification for Youth Sports](#)**
 - a. When the MDH and CDH update the length of time spent in isolation for an identified close contact, the MYAS will contact all Gopher State Associations. Additionally, Gopher State will support updated recommendations from local county health departments.
 - b. Consult with MDH if a close contact has already had a positive case within the last 90 days to determine if quarantine is necessary.

Email health.sports.covid19@state.mn.us

- The CCM should notify the parent/guardian of the close contacts to a positive case. **Note:** The parent/guardian needs to notify their child's school.
- To ensure you have immediate access in case you need to provide exposure notification to teams in your own association, it is recommended to save player and coach contact information for your own association (a sample template is included in the “Player Contact Info” link in the [VIRTUAL GOPHER STATE COVID CARE TOOLBOX](#)). To protect privacy, the CCM from an opposing team’s association is only informed that a member of a specific team may have exposed their team to the virus, they are not told the identity of the individual who may have exposed their team to the virus.

Record Keeping Details for Positive Cases and Close Contacts

The CCM must keep a record of the details of positive cases and close contact exposures for player and coaches within their association.

- A template for recording this information for all cases in your association is available in the “Case Tracking” link in the [VIRTUAL GOPHER STATE COVID CARE TOOLBOX](#).
- Given the personal information collected in the “Case Tracking” file, access to it should be limited to the association’s COVID response team.



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Positive Case Process – Steps



Notifications Summary

The positive participant (coach or parent of player) is responsible for notifying:

- the CCM from their own association;
- their child's school.

When health department officials call, please answer.

The CCM for the association with the positive case is responsible for notifying:

- teammates and coaches of the positive case;
- [MDH via Red Cap Reporting](#);
- CCM from other associations, if applicable;
- CCM from hosting tournament/league game, if applicable.

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Facilities and Game Operations – Best Practices



Several sample guidelines and best practices from Gopher State associations and the MYAS are provided to best ensure facilities for practices and games meet the local, state, and federal regulations and requirements.

Items to consider include:

- Safe Play: Back to the Diamond
- Facility layout map for teams and spectators

The above resources can be found in the [VIRTUAL GOPHER STATE COVID CARE TOOLBOX](#).

Facilities may have requirements that are more restrictive than those found in the guides above. In those situations, the facility requirements must be applied.

Communication

Every youth athlete, coach, official, and event staff should practice daily self-health evaluations before participating in any aspect of in-person activities.

Personnel

Establish detailed job descriptions for all volunteer positions. Please see the COVID Care Toolbox to review some of the personnel options like those below you may consider for your tournaments and special events:

- Site Supervisor
- Temperature Checker (*this is a recommendation*)
- Spectator/Participant flow
- Waivers
- Ushers
- Field Monitors

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Facilities and Game Operations

Physical Distancing/PPE/Masks/Face Coverings

The following represent the mandatory requirements:

- All participants and spectators (players, coaches, umpires, staff, spectators, and game personnel) will be required to wear masks/face coverings when not on the field of play, **if** six feet of distance cannot be consistently maintained from others. Disposable masks/face coverings should be available if needed for unique circumstances; otherwise, a person without a masks/face covering is responsible for locating one before being admitted into the facility.
 - ◇ Please refer to **page 8** of this manual for details
 - ◇ Reference [MDH COVID-19 Organized Sports Practice and Games Guidance for Youth Sports](#) and the [VIRTUAL GOPHER STATE COVID CARE TOOLBOX](#) for more information

Cleaning and Disinfecting

Please following the guidelines identified in the Safe Play: Back to Diamond—General COVID Safety found in the [VIRTUAL GOPHER STATE COVID CARE TOOLBOX](#).

Hydration

Each youth athlete, coach, umpire, league/tournament worker, or attendee is responsible to bring their own water and/or water bottle.

Team Bench/Dugout Layout

Bench areas will be extended behind the dugout for players and coaches only to maintain a social distance from their team. Please see the field map found in the [VIRTUAL GOPHER STATE COVID CARE TOOLBOX](#) for more information on this set up.



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Facilities and Game Operations



Handling Equipment

- Teams should provide their own baseballs and only use their own baseballs to minimize the contact between teams.
- Players are highly recommended to not share equipment.
- If equipment must be shared, it should be sanitized when possible.
- It is recommended to wear batting gloves at all times to keep touch points down.

More information can be found in the [VIRTUAL GOPHER STATE COVID CARE TOOLBOX](#).

Competition Site Protocols

The following are examples demonstrating protocols that should be considered for the competition site.

- All participating teams and spectators must wait outside facility until the teams from the previous games or session have left the facility.
- A coach or team manager may come into the facility and meet the tournament director (when applicable) to collect their team's wristbands and must distribute them to their team's spectators (parents).
- Tournament Director/representative will notify the head coach verbally, by text, or via tournament app, when they are ready for the coaches and players to enter the facility.
- A designated "staging" area will be made available outside or around the facility, where players may warm up.
- The team will be notified when they may proceed to their designated field. At that time, the head coach will notify the spectators, when allowed, that they are allowed to enter the facility.
- Prior to the tournament, participating teams should set up a text string or some way to communicate or correspond to all members of the team and parents, while participating in a competition.
- All attendees, when allowed, must leave the facility immediately, once their team completes their scheduled game(s) for the day. No post game meetings inside the facility are allowed.

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Facilities and Game Operations



Concessions/Drinking Fountains

- Concessions are not recommended
- If concessions are to be offered, they must follow all appropriate guidance.
 - ♦ Eliminate gatherings
 - ♦ Have a COVID-19 Preparedness Plan

[Minnesota Food Code Minnesota Food Rules 4626](#)

Entering and Exiting

- Whenever possible, a designated entrance and exit should be set up to control the flow of spectators at the facility.

Team Rosters and Waiver

- Provide an electronic waiver to be submitted prior to the event.
- Site/Facility protocol must be followed in order to satisfy their occupancy waiver requirements.

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Facilities and Game Operations

Team Rosters and Waiver

- Provide an electronic waiver to be submitted prior to the event.
- Site/Facility protocol must be followed in order to satisfy their occupancy waiver requirements.
- Here are samples of an electronic waiver:
 - ♦ [MYAS General Waiver](#)

Umpires

- General protocols for game officials can be found in the Safe Play: Back to the Diamond—COVID-19 Competition Safety Requirements and Recommendations document found in the [VIRTUAL GOPHER STATE COVID CARE TOOLBOX](#).



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