



Attn: Premier Doug Ford
Cc: Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Ontario
Cc: Lisa MacLeod, Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries
Cc: Christine Elliot, Minister of Health

Prioritizing the safe reopening of youth sports, including tackle football

Dear Premier Ford,

For the Ontario Provincial Football League (OPFL) the outbreak of Covid 19 brought an abrupt end for all our youth football activities. Sports are well recognized as a vital benefit for the physical and mental well-being of children's development. Amendments have been made for retail, small businesses, restaurants and some activities that can occur outdoors, but for our football community, these restrictions have not eased. The prolonged shutdown of football activities and youth sports in general has begun to impact the welfare of our children, and the sustainability of the organizations that provide football programming across all age groups and playing levels in Ontario .

The psychological, developmental, and economic fallout from an unprecedented stoppage in sports that has impacted thousands of Ontario children has been discussed at length by the numerous doctors and scientists that have spoken out against the most recent restrictions. Kimberly Dow and Eddy Lau, from the board of directors of the Canadian Pediatric Society have stated in their open letter of April 17th that the closure of outdoor recreational facilities is not an evidence based measure to prevent the spread of covid-19. The Ontario Public Health's study examined the impact of COVID-19 emergency measures on child/adolescent mental health found that 67-70% of children ages 10-18 experienced deterioration in at least one of the mental health domains: depression, anxiety, irritability, attention, hyperactivity, and obsessions/compulsions. Dr. Sumon Chakrabarti, Infectious diseases specialist at Trillium Health Partners - Dr. Andrew Morris, a professor of infectious diseases at the University of Toronto and the medical director of the Antimicrobial Stewardship Program at Sinai-University Health Network - Infectious Diseases physician Dr Isaac Bogoch - Dr Peter Juni, head of Ontario's covid-19 science advisory table, and one of the most cited epidemiologists in the world ALL agree that kids should be playing sports outdoors and with safety measures that keep them socially distant from one another. Outdoor activities are vital for mental & physical health, especially with stay-at-home orders.

The Ontario Provincial Football League along with many other sports organizations have spent the last year working with government authorities to come up with sport specific protocols to allow for the safe return to sport, and have aligned these guidelines and protocols to the Ontario covid-19 framework. Different sports carry with them different risks and the leaders of the football community have worked hard to develop practical ways to reduce the risk to athletes, officials, spectators and their extended families. The current framework in Ontario makes it impossible for organizations to operate tackle football and cost prohibitive to participate for those looking to shift to a modified non-contact version of our sport, (flag football, skill training). In the Red control; zones for example, a capacity limit of 10 in a

large gym, indoor field or training facility and a capacity limit of 25 participants at an outdoor facility simply doesn't make sense from an infection control perspective and has an unintended consequence of only allowing for expensive private or semi-private instruction or practises to take place. These restrictions disproportionately affected many vulnerable youth athletes, those who need youth sports the most.

The Ontario Provincial Football League has been the pioneer within our football community in terms of player safety. With concussion prevention, we introduced protocols and processes well before the introduction of Rowan's Law, our standards are well established and ingrained in our safety culture. This year we have engaged Elite Neurokinetix to provide our coaches, players and parents an additional tool that integrates athletic performance and injury prevention into our tackle football practices and games. Our approach is no different when it comes to covid-19, in order to ensure a safe return to tackle football; the OPFL is prepared to continue to be innovative. One of the viable options we are exploring is the integration of a new piece of sports equipment: the helmet face field. These disposable/replaceable face shields, much like the face covers mandated today as part of the provincial framework, were developed to attach directly to the faceguard of a football helmet to block droplets from sweat, coughs, and sneezes. The NFL Players Association medical director Thom Mayer has stated that the use of face shield may become the new norm in playing football. If given the opportunity, the OPFL will continue to implement these types of novel solutions to ensure the safety of our members while continuing to work with our local and provincial authorities in adjusting our safety guidelines and protocol.

Therefore, we are writing to you today to request that you, along with the Science Table, re-evaluate, prioritize and amend the restrictions imposed on the football community. All of our youth's sports and activities – including tackle football - should be allowed in a safe capacity at each level of the Provincial Framework., as they provide an essential avenue for our young athletes to stay healthy and fit, with a demonstrated minimal risk of community transmission. We know from other provinces across Canada including Alberta, Quebec, Manitoba and Saskatchewan that this can be done safely, and believe it is a critical step to get kids back to football.

On behalf of our volunteers, coaches and players, we thank you in advance.

Terry Barkley, President, Ontario Provincial Football League