

# Let Them Play Water Polo

A summary of COVID-19 risks



8 February, 2021

The Honorable Governor Gavin Newsom

## SUBJ: RETURN WATER POLO TO CALIFORNIA POOLS

Dear Governor Newsom:

More water polo players hail from California than the other 49 states combined. Each year, California hosts the world's largest youth tournament, the Junior Olympics. California is home to all of U.S. national water polo teams, from youth to Olympians. California's ban on water polo has a unique national impact.

Water polo combines swimming with physical contact. California placed it in a risky category, erasing the 2020 girls, boys and national team seasons. Its misclassification threatens 2021. Water polo players play mostly submerged in heavily chlorinated water. Their faces are thoroughly doused every few seconds, and are often underwater. Evidence from other states and abroad demonstrates that **COVID-19 is highly unlikely to be transmitted during games.**

1. **Experiences in Other High Risk States** High school seasons were played in Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Texas, mostly in smaller *indoor* pools and tighter facilities than California's. Nationwide, tens of thousands of athletes have played water polo without a single reported transmission. As a result, Illinois and Ohio will permit water polo for spring *indoor* seasons.
2. **International Scientific Studies.** Italy was hardest hit by COVID's initial impact. Its oldest technical university, Polytechnic Institute of Turin, issued a 400-page study of 387 sports. Water polo was the safest team sport. Similarly, the Spanish Swimming Federation issued a technical paper arguing that "a well-maintained swimming pool is sanitary safe" from COVID-19. The Dutch University Medical center of Utrecht provided evidence that chlorine inactivated COVID-19. Swimming Canada tracked over 282,000 individual mostly indoor swim training sessions without a single reported pool transmission.
3. **CDC Guidance.** "There is no evidence that COVID-19 can be spread to humans through the use of swimming pools...or aquatic play areas."
4. **WHO Guidance.** "There is limited risk of significant microbial contamination and illness in a well-managed pool or similar environment with an adequate residual disinfectant concentration."
5. **Chlorine Gas.** The effect of chlorine is not limited to the water. Droplets and gas disinfect the surface of the water column, according to the *British Sports Medicine Journal* and *National Institute of Health*.
6. **Travel Tournaments.** *Indoor* youth tournaments in Utah and Texas have hosted over five thousand athletes this winter with no reported transmissions. California was the most represented state.

Along with football and soccer, water polo may not be played in California until daily COVID cases drop below 4 per 100,000 residents. Nationwide in-season flu rates are almost ten times as high. Other states and countries have concluded that youth sport games are uncorrelated to COVID hospitalizations. **The risks are outside the water.** Governor Newsom, if you open the sport, operational risks will be mitigated, the looming destruction of California's aquatic ecosystem can be avoided, and our mentally exhausted, isolated athletes will return to thrive in home waters.

## LET THEM PLAY WATER POLO ADVISOR BOARD

### Senior Advisor

Tony Azevedo  
5-time Olympian

### Advisors

Guy Baker  
3-time Olympic coach

Peter Hudnut  
2-time Olympian

### Youth Advisors

Claire Eusey

Sacred Heart Prep 2022 Boys