



YouthSoccerInsider

COMMENTARY

Should you play sports when you're sick?

by [Dr. Dev Mishra](#), Dec 21, 2017

We're in that time of year when people start sneezing and coughing all around you. It's pretty easy to catch a cold or sinus congestion to generally make you feel lousy. And at the same time your team continues to practice and play games. You want to keep playing, so should you just try to play through it or should you sit out and get better (and maybe do your teammates a favor by not getting them sick)? Here are some things to consider before deciding whether you should lay low or break a sweat.

Above the neck or below the neck. A guideline doctors have used for a long time is to see if what you're experiencing is "above the neck" (meaning sniffing, sneezing, sore throat, etc.) or "below the neck" (coughing, aches, stomach pains, etc.). If you're symptoms are above the neck then you can probably do a light workout on your own if you're feeling up to it. However, if your symptoms are below the neck, skip the workout. If you have a fever, diarrhea, nausea or vomiting, now is the time to rest because you are already at a higher risk of dehydration and taking longer to recover from your illness.

Dial it back. Even if you meet the above-the-neck guidelines, you should dial back the intensity of your workout. Perhaps a light jog, some easy weights in the gym, or maybe just a flexibility session. You'll want to be sure to stay hydrated, monitor your exertion level and keep checking in to see if what you are doing is making you feel better or worse than when you started exercising.

Be a good person and avoid your teammates. My recommendations above are really about working out on your own. But if you're thinking of doing a team practice it'll be a good idea to skip the practice. Out of consideration for your teammates, give them a break and don't take the risk of passing on what you have to them.

One "above the neck" ailment is the common cold. The common cold can be caused by a number of different viruses, but the "rhinovirus" is believed to be the main culprit.

When someone has a cold the first three days are generally when they are most capable of passing the cold virus on to someone else. The virus is passed through aerosol particles when someone sneezes, and also by contact with the skin of someone who is infected. It's incredibly easy to pass on the virus and young children seem particularly skilled at this, as any parent who's had a child in daycare can attest.

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) offers some simple tips to reduce the chance of catching a cold:

- Wash your hands with soap and water often.
- Don't touch your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid being around people who are sick (that means team practices).

Take care of yourself and take care of others by avoiding sports practices when you're sick. There'll be plenty of other training sessions where you can shine when you're feeling good.

Key Points:

- We are in the "common cold season" where many around you will be sneezing.
- If you have a cold you should avoid team practices so you don't pass the cold on to your teammates.
- However you might be able to do a light workout on your own as long as your symptoms are mild and "above the neck."

(Dr. Dev K. Mishra, a Clinical Assistant Professor of orthopedic surgery at Stanford University, is the creator of the [SidelineSportsDoc.com online injury-management course](#), now a requirement for [US Club Soccer](#) coaches and staff members. Mishra writes about injury management at [SidelineSportsDoc.com Blog](#). This article has previously appeared in the Youth Soccer Insider in 2016.)



3 comments about "Should you play sports when you're sick?".

Nick Daverese, December 21, 2017 at 4:32 p.m.

Don't go to school, don't go to practice don't go to work until your better. You don't want everyone you came in contact with to get your germs.

On cold old days if your well you can play you have to get use to playing in cold weather and in high altitude. It doesn't just happen.

My ex son in law Vito a Russian thought he was to tough to catch a cold. I gave him an Italian name because I could not remember his Russian first name. Any way he gets a flu type cold my daughter and him was living with me while his house was getting ready to move in. A few years ago I was susceptible to catching colds. I told him go to the doctor and see my doctor and I would pay for it. But no not Vito he would rather cough and spread his germs to everyone in the house. We were both up early and he decides to put the dishes in my dishwasher away. He is actually coughing on every dish he put away. I could not believe he did it. I told him Vito pack your bags and get out of my house. We are no longer related he thinks I am kidding and doesn't go. My daughter was up stairs and did not hear the commotion. So I grab him by his arm and physically removing him from my house. Them my daughter comes down I tell her Vito can no longer stay here.

Reply

frank schoon, December 21, 2017 at 4:48 p.m.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO COMMON SENSE??? This article would have been a breakthrough in the 19th century in the annals of sports....

Reply

Nick Daverese, December 22, 2017 at 8:07 a.m.

Common sense no longer matters in the time we are living in now. I liked the way it used to be as compared to now. People are jealous of others now and wonder why them and not you. When I was a kid I just thought I am going to be them someday or die trying.

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