

Field of play inspection guidelines

Read these guidelines to understand how to identify unsafe fields of play and make them safer.

Overview

The field of play inspection guidelines were developed in response to recommendations made by the [Rowan's Law Advisory Committee](#). These field of play inspection guidelines are not mandatory but are available for sport organizations to help identify unsafe fields of play and to make them safer. The guidelines support Ontario's sport organizations in developing field of play inspection guidelines specific to their sport.

This information is for sport organizations in Ontario.

Disclaimer

The following document is not a substitute for legal advice. Sport organizations should seek independent legal advice to clarify obligations under [Rowan's Law \(Concussion Safety\)](#).

Modifications

Sport organizations may modify these guidelines to address specific requirements for each sport, including considerations for:

- whether it is played indoors or outdoors
- the type of facility used
- any specialized safety or game equipment used in the sport

Sport organizations are encouraged to work with facility operators and/or owners to ensure fields of play are maintained and deficiencies are addressed.

Field of play

A field of play is the area on which participants train for, practise and/or compete in their sport.

A field of play includes any surface or facility used for a sport, both indoor and outdoor, such as grass, artificial turf, ice rinks, basketball courts, pools or gymnasiums, and includes surrounding areas like changerooms and spectator viewing areas.

Sport specific field of play guidelines should include the following components:

General field of play inspection guidelines

- The field of play should be free from hazards and obstacles that could cause injuries. Any obstacles on the field of play (such as balls, bottles or towels) should be removed.
- Identify a person (such as a coach, assistant coach, trainer or official) who will be responsible for inspecting the field of play at the practice or game. This person should:
 - conduct a thorough inspection of the field of play before every practice or game to ensure it is safe
 - confirm playing surfaces conform to the technical specifications established by the National Sport Organization or International Federation for the sport being played when possible
 - develop a protocol to follow if problems are identified with the field of play (for example, delay the start of the practice or competition until the problem is resolved or postpone/cancel the event)

Equipment check

- Check that all equipment is safe for use and meets current safety standards for the sport.

- Check that emergency first aid equipment is available, accessible and operational (such as and automated external defibrillator (AED) device), spinal board or first aid kit).
- Ensure that any free-standing structures (such as goal posts) are secure.

Spectators

- Ensure that benches and bleachers are stable and secure.
- Move benches, chairs and other seating away from where participants will be training, practising and/or competing.
- Ensure that spectator areas are a safe distance from the field of play and spectator boundaries are clearly marked and/or visible (such as with a painted line or barrier).

Indoor venues

- Ensure change rooms are free of objects that may create a hazard (such as tables or chairs) and floors are not slippery or wet.
- Inspect entrances and exits to ensure they are free of obstructions, that exit signs work and that there are no doorknobs or other protruding handles on the side of the door facing the field of play. Communicate any issues to the facility operator.
- Ensure the floors are clean and dry and provide good traction.
- Check that sockets are covered and flush with the floor and in good condition.
- Ensure stairs for bleachers are clear of obstacles, and railings are secure and free of protruding nails, cracks or splinters.
- Ensure outlets, switches, registers, and other hazardous wall fixtures are padded or flush with the wall surface and that there are covers on fire alarm stations.

- Check walls are free of protruding hooks, nails or other hazards.
- Ensure wall mats are properly secured and in good condition.

Outdoor venues

- Inspect for holes, hazards (such as glass, rocks, sprinkler head, sewer grates or exposed roots) and severely uneven and hard surfaces.
- Fence posts and trees near the field of play should be properly cushioned or protected, and always designated as “out of play” areas. All out-of-play areas should be cushioned or fenced off or marked by paint, cones or chalk lines.
- Check for surface slip risk due to moisture or frost and check for puddles that can make play unpredictable.
- Check for clearly visible field lines and markers to ensure participants understand the area to be used as the field of play.
- Ensure fencing is secure and free of sharp edges.
- Ensure stairs for bleachers are clear of obstacles, and railings are secure and free of protruding nails, cracks and splinters.
- Portable goals should be properly installed and fixed in place as per the manufacturer’s instructions.
- Ensure change rooms are free of objects that may create a hazard (such as tables or chairs) and floors are not slippery or wet.

Environmental considerations

- Ensure that a severe weather management policy or protocol is in place.
- Identify the nearest shelter from the field of play in the event of inclement weather or other emergency conditions.

- Ensure that conditions are safe for play, including temperatures, air quality, lightning and wind.

Awareness and training

- Sport organizations should work to enhance the capacity of coaches and officials to identify and address potential field-of-play issues to reduce the potential for injuries, including concussions.
- Sport participants should be encouraged to raise safety concerns with officials, coaches or trainers about the field of play.

Additional resources

Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (Ophea) has developed [guidelines and tools](#) to help ensure the physical sport environment is safe for participants.

The tools include sample safety checklists for gymnasium facilities, gymnasium equipment and outdoor facilities.