

Boston Men's Baseball Organization COVID-19 SURVEY

REDUCING RISK TO INCREASE PLAYER SAFETY



DRAFT Prepared by Boston Men's Baseball Organization (BMBO) - July 30, 2020

For questions, email president.bmbl@gmail.com.

LEAGUE COVID Page: <http://www.bostonmabl.com/news/article/2020-covid-19-updates-and-information>

Executive Summary

Season Background

The Boston Men's Baseball Organization (BMBO) is an amateur baseball league consisting of 35+ teams, four age divisions and 700+ players who share their passion for baseball across the greater Boston and Metrowest area. The BMBO is an affiliate of the national MSBL organization.

The BMBO held off on starting its 2020 season due to COVID-19. During the quarantine months of March-June 2020, league leaders and managers held numerous meetings to walk through the season possibilities. The league also helped give back during this time by supporting the *Heal with a Meal* cause raising several thousand dollars.

With player and umpire safety paramount, the league began educating players on possible COVID-19 procedures and developed a COVID-19 page on its website. As the state of Massachusetts began to reopen on July 6, 2020, baseball became a reality as part of phase 3. The BMBO finalized its COVID-19 policy following guidance from the state of Massachusetts. After holding a leaguewide State of the Nation online session on the policies, BMBO cautiously returned to play on July 12, 2020.

Survey Goal

The goal of this survey is to get a better understanding of how our league is doing in relation to the COVID-19 virus and the accompanying rules/guidelines around the start of the season. Are players comfortable? Are players following guidelines and rules? Are changes needed to help reduce risk around COVID-19?

- **Timeframe:** The survey was conducted during the second week of the season (7/19/2020-7/24/2020) to quickly gather feedback to make any necessary changes.
- **108 respondents across 32 teams:** The respondents represent approximately 18% of the league population. Note that four additional teams have opted out of the 2020 season.
- **13 ranking and open-ended questions.** The ranking questions asked respondents to rank certain aspects of the COVID-19 policies on 1-10 scale. 8 or better is considered very good/excellent. 6 is good or better.



Key Findings

As the findings suggest, most players are aware of guidelines and are happy to be back on the field. Most are comfortable with the guidelines and are aware of key rules. However, there is room for improvement around social distancing and face coverings. Several policies were adjusted because of the survey.

The Good

- Players seem extremely happy to be playing (97% rate 8 or higher).
- 88% think the league and managers have communicated the guidelines very well (8 or higher).
- Most are comfortable with the guidelines when they are on the field (78% rate 8 or higher).
- 96% are aware of the rules around offensive players needing to wear coverings.
- 89% feel teams are doing very well by providing balls on defense to reduce risk (8 or higher).

Room for Improvement

Overall, the results are good but there is room for improvement.

- 65% of players feel players are doing a very good (or better) job of following guidelines around face coverings. 85% feel players are doing a good (or better) job.
- Three out of five players feel players are doing a very good (or better) job of social distancing. 81% feel players are doing a good (or better) job.
- There were numerous comments around players not social distancing properly, especially in dugouts.

Result

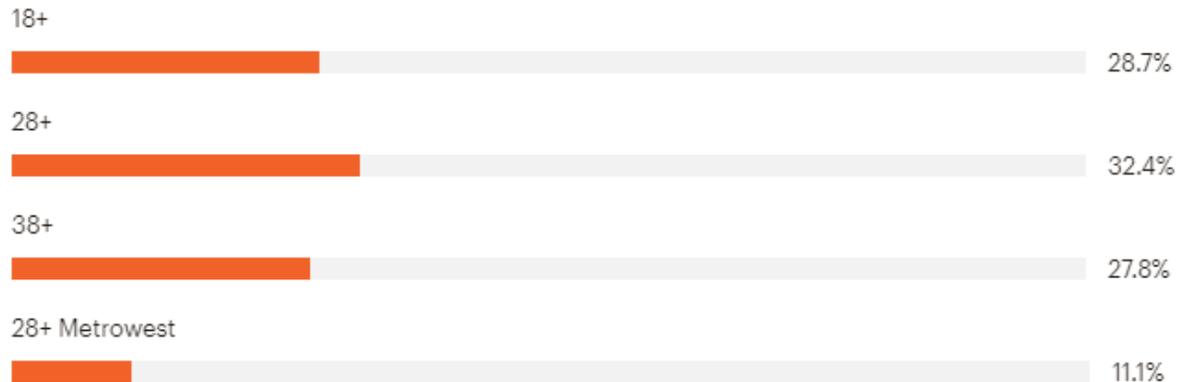
Thanks to player feedback, the survey has helped identify areas for improvement to reduce risk for all those involved.

Effective July 22, 2020, the COVID-19 guidelines were adjusted to require face coverings in and around the dugout while also including penalties around non-compliance with face covering rules at home plate.

As the season evolves, the league may bring on additional safety measures.

Survey Details

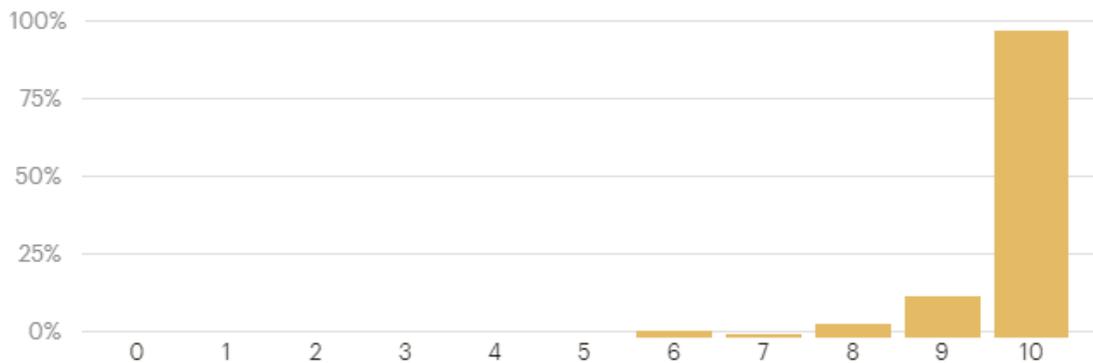
What is the primary division you play for?



Key Findings

- The survey has a relatively even spread amongst the 18+, 28+ and 38+ age divisions with lesser participation by Metrowest division.

How happy are you to be back on the ball field?



Key Findings

- Players seem extremely happy to be playing (97% rate 8 or higher).

“Great to be back out playing and for the most part it felt safe.”

“I had the feeling most people felt safe with the precautions in place. If anything, I think they went a bit overboard (no around the horn, no sharing game balls). Happy to be playing again though!”



Figure 1 - Ground rules and face coverings....baseball in 2020.

How well do you think the league/your manager has done educating players on the COVID policies?



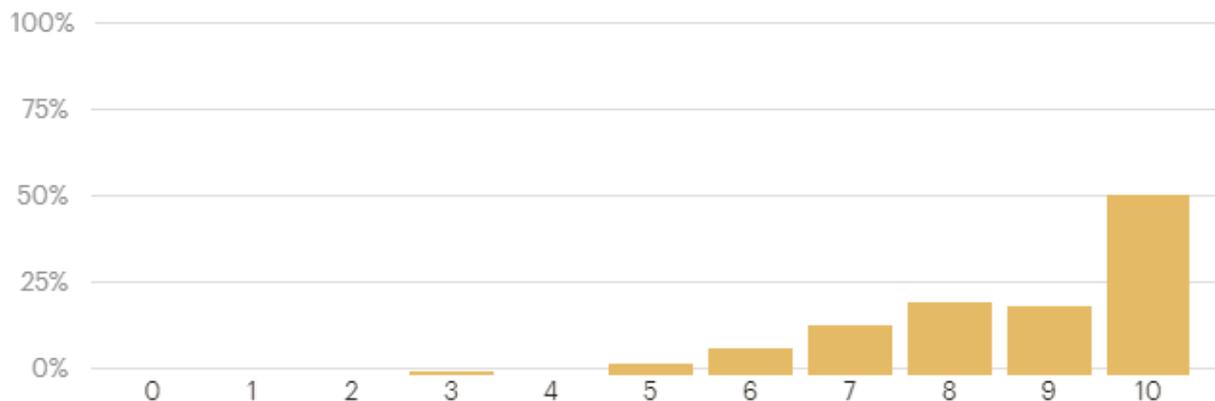
Key Findings

- 88% think the league and managers have communicated the guidelines well (8 or higher).

“I'm glad to be playing ball again and I think the COVID guidelines are spot-on.”

“During the game everything was fine, especially on the field.”

How comfortable do you feel at the ballpark with these new guidelines and policies?



Key Findings

- Most are comfortable with the guidelines when they are on the field (78% rate 8 or higher).

“Reasonably safe and reasonably comfortable.”

“All in all, I feel safe with these rules as long as they are being followed. Our team did so as much as possible.”

“I’m personally not overly concerned about the disease because we’re all outdoors and pretty far apart most of the time.”

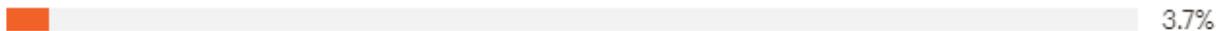


Are you aware that you must wear a face covering at the plate and when you can't socially distance?

Yes



No



Key Findings

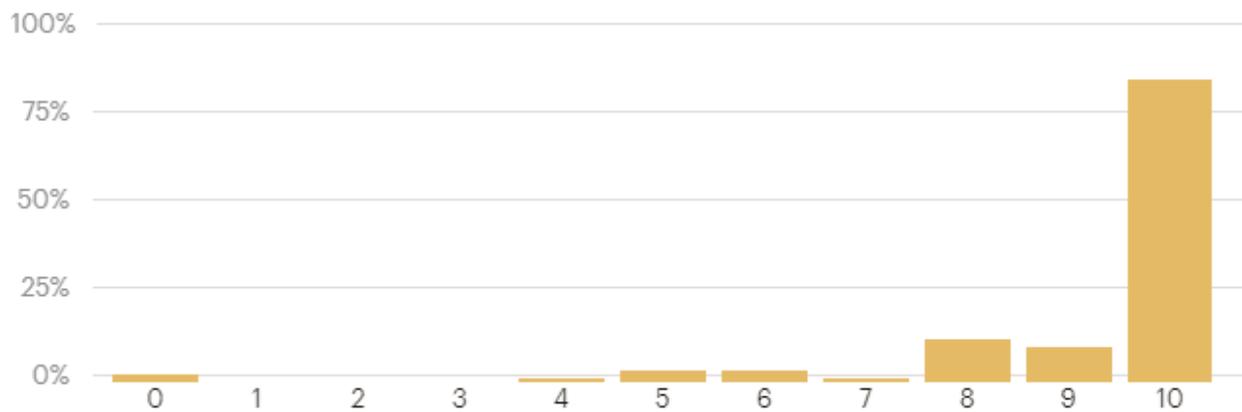
- Excellent awareness. 96% are aware of the rules around offensive players needing to wear coverings.
- This mandatory rule is designed to help reduce risk among the batter, umpire and the catcher. The batter and catcher are required to wear face coverings. It is strongly recommended, but not required, that catchers wear face coverings (due to safety concerns, face coverings could impact visibility while wearing catchers gear, also heat exhaustion concerns).
- For those who don't follow this mandatory rule, penalties now apply as of July 22, 2020.

“Hitters not wearing masks is unacceptable at that close distance.”

“I’ve been at a game where players from a team wouldn’t wear a covering while hitting or running the bases. It wasn’t the whole team but just a few individuals who felt that these safety measures don’t apply to them.”

“I would say only half the players wear masks while batting.”

How well do you think teams have followed guidelines around the defense providing balls?

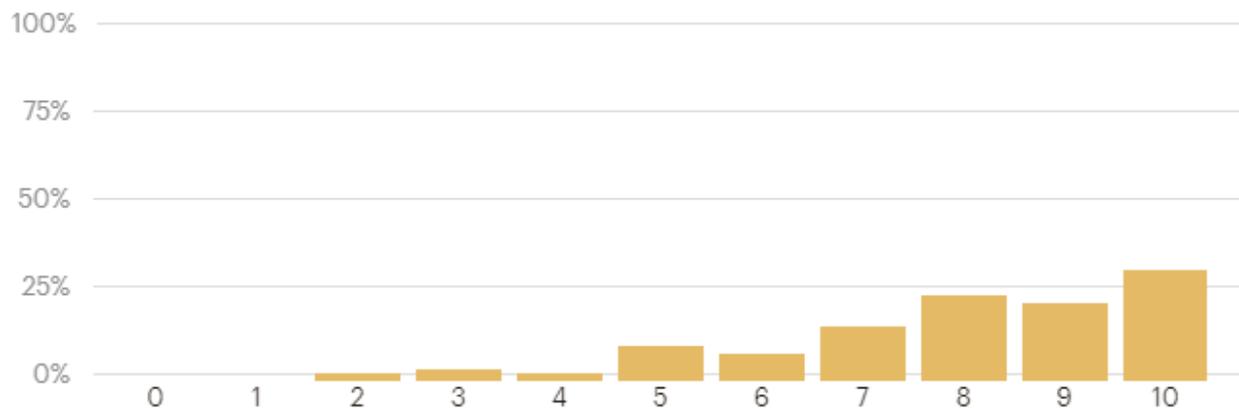


Key Findings

- Excellent adoption. 89% feel teams are doing well by providing balls on defense to reduce risk (8 or higher).
- This rule is designed to help reduce unnecessary touches of the baseball to reduce possible COVID-19 contact transmission.

“Re-iterate the defensive team baseball rule. Offensive team kept grabbing our balls during the game.”

How well do you think players have followed guidelines around face coverings?



Key Findings

- 65% of players feel players are doing a very good (or better) job of following guidelines around face coverings. 85% feel players are doing a good (or better) job.
- Improvement is needed in this area which is why additional measures were added to the rules after this survey.
- The survey generated some of the most comments on this specific topic. A sampling includes:

“It's about being smart with hand washing/sanitizing and wearing masks when possible to ensure nothing spreads

“Players not as vigilant as games continue. By 5th-6th 7th guys are hot/uncomfortable and drop the mask at times.”

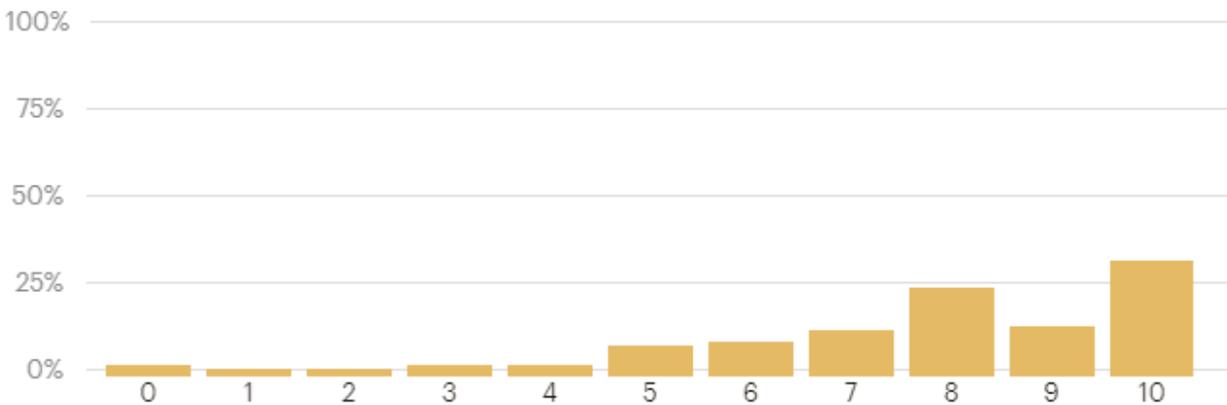
“Many players not wearing masks at all.”

*“I had the feeling most people felt safe with the
precautions in place.”*



Figure 2 - Always wear face coverings when not socially distant.

How well do you think players have followed guidelines around social distancing in the dugout?



Key Findings

- Three out of five players feel players are doing a very good (or better) job of social distancing. 81% feel players are doing a good (or better) job.
- There is room for improvement here which is why it became mandatory to social distance AND wear a face covering in the dugout area after this survey.

“Too many people are sitting next to each other in the dugout. Other than that, things are going reasonably well and I'm happy to be out there.”

“A couple players did not have masks on in the dugout.”

“Agree that we need to be better about masks and distancing in the dugouts.”



Figure 3 - Stay distant and wear coverings around the dugout.



Figure 4 - Spread out down the line.

Enforcement

Although not asked, the survey generated feedback on enforcement of guidelines and rules. As with the rest of society, enforcement of COVID-19 rules is a hotly contested debate.

As adults, players need to self-police with the guidance and direction of their managers and umpires, but it's ultimately the player's responsibility to do the right thing. There is no paid COVID-19 task force assigned to enforce rules in our league. Managers, players and umpires are all responsible to one another to do their part to reduce transmission risk.

Above being noted, these are enforcement areas that BMBO looks to improve.

- Players should look to their managers and umpires for any guidance at games. Managers and umpires should be setting the example. Umpires may help enforce but their primary responsibility is to call the game.
- League officials may make spot checks to games throughout the season. This has already been happening.
- As of July 22, 2020, the league has instituted a penalty for non-compliance of face coverings while hitting. Further penalties for other infractions may be instituted.
- Blatant disregard for the rules reported to the league will be addressed as needed. Report to your league commissioner and/or president.bmbl@gmail.com.
- The real penalty that nobody wants: Any team outbreaks would likely mean the end of the season for our league. More importantly, we would have sick players.

"We need to have better accountability."

"Individual players will feel differently about the league guidelines, but it would be nice to have someone who is responsible - the manager I assume - for enforcing them across the board."

"Just 'who' is supposed to be enforcing the rules?"

"Can umps reinforce more the mask use?"

Other Comments

"Let's play ball."

"I am no denier. This COVID thing is real and deadly. That said, we need a bit more common sense."

"Seeing other leagues operate differently and more relaxed around some of this, leads me to ask:

Do we really need masks for running the bases? (Junior leagues don't require a mask for anyone on the field including hitters and runners)."

"Umps in both games so far were aware of the rules and helpful in keeping us safe."

Conclusion

COVID-19 is a serious virus that is impacting the world. The BMBO, its players and umpires take the virus very seriously.

As this survey suggests, many players are excited to be back on the field and most are as comfortable with the COVID-19 policies. Yet, some improvement is needed with social distancing and the use of face coverings.

Thanks to player feedback, the league made some immediate tweaks to the *2020 COVID-19 Safety Plan and Guidelines* to reduce risk. These include:

1) All players must wear coverings while in and around the bench/dugout areas.

We have seen instances where players are having challenges socially distancing and not wearing coverings when around others, especially in and around the dugouts/benches. The survey reinforced these observations. This requirement is designed to reinforce that coverings are needed in those situations.

2) Penalty for not wearing a face covering to plate. A strike.

According to the survey, 96% of players are aware of this rule but we've seen several examples where this mandatory rule wasn't followed. This should be a simple rule to follow like wearing a helmet.

Those who do not follow this requirement may be assigned a strike (first offense) or may be ejected (second offense).

Final Thoughts

As of this writing, the state of Massachusetts is doing extremely well keeping its COVID-19 numbers down (Under 2% positivity rate). As long as those trends continue and the league continues to do its part, we're opportunistic to finish out the 2020 season.

Let's play some ball, have some fun and do our part to stop the spread.