

Playing Tennis Safely: Player Tips and Recommendations

The USTA recognizes that the coronavirus has been affecting different parts of the country in different ways and with different timing. We therefore believe it will be possible for people to return to playing tennis safely in some cities and states sooner than in others.

The Federal Government issued guidelines on April 16 for “Opening Up America Again” at [WhiteHouse.gov/OpeningAmerica](https://www.whitehouse.gov/opening-america). By following these guidelines as well as those of local governments and health agencies, facilities and players will be able to make informed decisions as to when play can recommence.

If you live in a community where stay-at-home or shelter-in-place orders have been lifted or modified, and if your locality meets the standards in the Federal Guidelines, then tennis, if played properly, can be a great opportunity for you to relieve stress, socialize with others and provide much-needed exercise. Of primary importance is taking every precaution to help keep all participants safe.

Because tennis does not require any direct person-to-person contact, players can enjoy the many physical and mental benefits that tennis offers so long as you practice physical distancing by keeping six feet apart from other players to ensure you are in a safe exercise environment and follow other safety recommendations included here.

Although there is no specific evidence that tennis balls can spread COVID-19, we know that contamination by respiratory droplets from an infected person can potentially survive on hard surfaces up to three days. If you choose to play tennis, be sure to practice these safety tips and recommendations.

BEFORE YOU PLAY

- Make sure that your state and region allow tennis play, satisfy the Federal Government’s gating criteria (as outlined in the “Opening Up America Again” guidelines) and has been designated an essential business and/or has entered Phase One of the Phased Comeback.
- States and regions with no evidence of a rebound and that satisfy the gating criteria a second time may proceed to Phase Two of the Phased Comeback, in which all individuals, when in public recreation areas, should maximize physical distance from others.

- Be aware that although restrictions are eased when your state and region move from Phase One to Phase Two or Phase Three of the Phased Comeback, safety precautions must remain in place until there is a universal vaccine or effective treatment for the coronavirus.
- The USTA Medical Advisory Group highly recommends competitive players ease their way back into play prior to competition. Given the layoff from competing, players will be more susceptible to under-training, over-use and other injuries. The USTA strongly recommends at least three weeks of on court and off court conditioning before competition begins.
- Arrange to play only with family members or others who live in your household or with individuals who are considered to be low risk.
- Do not play if any of you:
 - Are exhibiting any symptoms of the coronavirus. According to the CDC, people with COVID-19 have had a wide range of symptoms reported—ranging from mild symptoms to severe illness. These symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus: fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell.
 - Have been in contact with someone with COVID-19 in the last 14 days.
 - Are a vulnerable individual and your state and region is in Phase One or Phase Two. A vulnerable individual is an elderly individual and/or an individual with serious underlying health conditions, including high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma and those whose immune system is compromised such as by chemotherapy for cancer and other conditions requiring such therapy. (For states and regions in Phase Three, a vulnerable individual can resume public interactions, including playing tennis, but should practice physical distancing.)

PREPARING TO PLAY

- Protect against infections:
 - Wash your hands with a disinfectant soap and water (for 20 seconds or longer), or use a hand sanitizer if soap and water are not readily available, before going to the court.
 - Clean and wipe down your equipment, including racquets and water bottles. Do not share racquets or any other equipment such as wristbands, grips, hats and towels.
 - Bring a full water bottle to avoid touching a tap or water fountain handle.
 - Use new balls and a new grip, if possible.
 - Consider taking extra precautions such as wearing gloves.
 - If you need to sneeze or cough, do so into a tissue or upper sleeve.
 - Arrive as close as possible to when you need to be there.
 - Avoid touching court gates, fences, benches, etc. if you can.

WHEN PLAYING

- Try to stay at least six feet apart from other players. Do not make physical contact with them (such as shaking hands or a high five).
- When playing doubles, coordinate with your partner to maintain physical distancing.
- Avoid touching your face after handling a ball, racquet or other equipment. Wash your hands promptly if you have touched your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Avoid sharing food, drinks or towels.
- Use your racquet/foot to pick up balls and hit them to your opponent. Avoid using your hands to pick up the balls.
- Maintain physical distancing if changing ends of the court.
- Remain apart from other players when taking a break.
- If a ball from another court comes to you, send it back with a kick or with your racquet.

AFTER PLAYING

- Leave the court as soon as reasonably possible.
- Wash your hands thoroughly or use a hand sanitizer after coming off the court.
- Do not use the locker room or changing area. Shower at home.
- No extra-curricular or social activity should take place. No congregation after playing.
- All players should leave the facility immediately after play.

USE FOUR BALLS OR SIX BALLS

Although unlikely, it's possible that a tennis ball can transmit the COVID-19 virus, as virtually any hard surface can transmit the disease. So here is an extra precaution you can take to keep safe when playing tennis:

- Open two cans of tennis balls that do not share the same number on the ball.
- Take one set of numbered balls, and have your playing partner take a set of balls from the other can.
- Proceed with play, making sure to pick up your set of numbered balls only. Should a ball with the other number wind up on your side of the court, do not touch the ball with your hands. Use your racquet head or feet to advance the ball to the other side of the court.

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