



# IMPORTANT AND ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

## Mass Youth Soccer's Safe Soccer Platform

### Introduction to all Adults

**Coaches, Team Managers, Board Members, Administrators, Volunteers, Etc.**

Last year Congress passed the Abuse Prevention Act and U.S. Soccer established requirements for all adults involved in youth soccer know as US Soccer's Safe Soccer Framework. In support, and collective efforts to provide the safest possible soccer environment for all players and participants, Massachusetts Youth Soccer created MA Safe Soccer.

What does this mean to you as an adult involved in your organization's soccer activities? The key elements are:

- Expansion of Background Checks, including State and National Sex Offender Searches
- Abuse Prevention Education and Training
- Concussion Training: CDC's Heads Up Coaches Course
- Use of New Membership Management System for Adult Registrations
- Adherence to new Mass Youth Soccer Player and Participant Safety Policy
- New MA Safe Soccer Platform

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### Safety Above All

Our mission, vision and belief statements stress that our youth participants' health, safety and wellbeing are driving factors in all that we do and in the services we provide to our members. From the day a young child first registers to play through their final years as a teenager, Massachusetts Youth Soccer is dedicated to providing the best possible environment.

### Massachusetts Youth Soccer Safe Soccer Statement

The MA Safe Soccer platform provides all Massachusetts Youth Soccer participants (players, coaches, referees, administrators, volunteers and parents) the tools to make their soccer experience safe, healthy and free from emotional, physical or sexual abuse.

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### There is a lot of information in this document, do I really need to read this?

It is imperative that all adults involved with youth soccer at the town, league and state levels read, understand and practice what is put forth in this document. There is a lot to understand so reading a few times may help. In addition, Mass Youth Soccer will provide webinars, newsletters, meetings and are always available by email and phone to answer questions. We appreciate how serious you take the safety and wellbeing of our children so that we can provide them the best possible soccer experience possible.

## ABUSE PREVENTION EDUCATION AND TRAINING

We all know our children derive countless benefits from playing sports. These include having fun, as well as making new friends, learning teamwork, learning how to win and lose, improving fitness, and many more. Yet, unfortunately, we know there are possible downsides to being actively involved in sports, inherent risks that potentially jeopardize our children's health and wellness. Just as we try our best to teach our children about properly warming up, playing safely and understanding the rules, there are other risks we must be prepared to mitigate.

Abuse in youth sports is more prevalent than most of us think. Abuse comes in many different forms: physical, neglect, emotional/psychological and sexual. Abuse manifests itself through acts of misconduct, including bullying, hazing, harassment (including sexual harassment), emotional misconduct, physical misconduct, and sexual misconduct. A recent study published in JAMA Pediatrics found that around 1 million children per year experience some form of abuse in a youth sports setting. Of the participants surveyed for this study, 64% reported suffering from some form of emotional and/or verbal abuse while participating in youth sports. These include being called names by adults during practice/games, having "mean things" yelled at them, being punished for their athletic performance during a game, etc. Of those who reported experiencing abuse, 6.4% also reported some kind of sexual abuse.

Education and training all adults involved in youth sports can help address and possibly thwart one of the most preventable injuries in youth sports: child abuse. By becoming more aware and learning how to become more engaged, we can all have an impact on reducing abuse rates and improve the youth soccer experience for all.

**NEW REQUIREMENTS:** Commencing with 2019, and mandatory per U.S. Soccer by September 1, 2019, all adults involved in youth soccer must take an initial Abuse Prevention Training course and then within the next calendar year, an annual refresher each year of participation. The course is offered online at no cost through the U.S. Center for SafeSport.

### ***What you will need to do?***

Adult Registration is no longer through Affinity Sports. You will register with your League, Town or Club in U. S. Soccer Connect via your organizations dedicated registration website by first creating an account. Once you complete your Adult Registration and the Registrar marks you as a confirmed participant, you will receive an email from US Soccer Connect containing the link to access the course; the link will also be available in your Adult Registration account. If you have already taken the course, you can upload your certificate and your organizations Risk Manager will mark you as Approved. After you take the initial course you must take a refresher every year thereafter.

More information about the course can be found on the Mass Youth Soccer website under MA Safe Soccer.

## BACKGROUND CHECKS

Another component to help fight child abuse is a much broader and expansive background check and screening process. Prior to this point, Mass Youth Soccer has only conducted the Commonwealth of Massachusetts required CORI check, as well as ad hoc expanded checks on certain individuals. Under the new U.S. Soccer requirements, we must conduct more extensive checks. Commencing with Fall 2019, and required per U.S. Soccer by September 1, 2019, all adults involved youth soccer will need to have appropriate background screening before being involved with our children.

U.S. Soccer has provided us with the guidance that appropriate background screening includes both state of residence and national criminal and sex offender searches and screening. To comply with this guidance, Mass Youth Soccer will require the following for all adults:

- Massachusetts Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) search and check
- Massachusetts and National Sexual Offender Record Information (SORI) search and check
- National Background search and check

Mass Youth Soccer will also screen against all necessary external databases, disqualification lists and disciplinary records.

**NEW REQUIREMENTS:** Commencing with Fall 2019, all adults will have background checks and searches as noted above conducted every 3 to 4 years or less if circumstances warrant.

### ***What you need to know?***

All checks and searches will be conducted in a streamlined and simple process. One questionnaire will be used for all background checks and searches. All searches will have a common expiration date, lessening the need for multiple registration dates. These will all be accomplished with the information the adult provides upon their completion of their annual Adult Registration.

More information about Background Checks can be found on the Mass Youth Soccer website under MA Safe Soccer.

## CONCUSSION TRAINING: CDC'S HEADS UP COACHES COURSE

Concussions are a serious health concern in youth sports. Massachusetts Youth Soccer is committed to the safety of our players and to educate our players, parents, coaches, referees and administrators in the dangers of concussion-related injuries.

Massachusetts Youth Soccer will continue to provide our entire Membership with tools and resources to educate them on the extreme dangers of concussions, on how we can prepare for and protect against concussions, to understand what causes concussions, how to recognize symptoms of a concussive injury and to detail how important proper medical assessment is in determining when a player can safely return to the game.

All adults, not just coaches, must now take the free Center for Disease Control (CDC) Concussion Training Course as it can only help to best serve the children of Massachusetts. By taking this free, online course and using what you learn, you will be well positioned to improve the culture of concussion. Your actions can help create a safe environment for young athletes so that they can stay healthy, active, and thrive - both on and off the playing field.

**NEW REQUIREMENTS:** Several years ago, the Mass Youth Soccer Board of Directors passed a concussion training requirement for all coaches. The Board left the management of this requirement up to the towns, clubs and leagues. Now, with the introduction of MA Safe Soccer and the use of more sophisticated technology the oversight will shift to the state to manage the taking of the CDC Course. Also, with the heightened concern for overall player safety, and the efforts from US Soccer, Mass Youth Soccer is requiring all registered adults to take the CDC Heads UP Coaching course.

### ***What you will need to do?***

The CDC Heads Up Coach training course is similar to the Abuse Prevention Training course, it is accessed through the new US Soccer Connect system from Stack Sports. Once you complete your Adult Registration and the Registrar marks you as a confirmed participant, you will receive an email from US Soccer Connect containing the link to access the course; the link will also be available in your Adult Registration account. If you have already taken the course, you can upload your certificate and your organizations Risk Manager will mark you as Approved. Adults will need to take this course every two years; unless your Club or League requirement is yearly.

More information about Concussion awareness and courses can be found on the Mass Youth Soccer website under MA Safe Soccer.

## NEW MEMBERSHIP MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

How do we expect you and ourselves to handle this? Your Mass Youth Soccer state support staff have been contemplating this very question since the Federal Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse and Safe Sport Authorization Act of 2017 (the “SafeSport Act”) was passed in February of 2018. Now that U.S. Soccer has thoroughly reviewed the act and established the norms and standards for us to follow, we have decided to move from our current Membership Management Service (MMS) provider to **Stack Sports**, the same provider being used directly by U.S. Soccer.

The MMS from Stack Sports is **U.S. Soccer Connect**. This service will now be used for all Adult Registrations and new CORI/SORI/Background Check processing along with Abuse Prevention and Concussion training monitoring, and as the system for player registration uploads managed by your town/club Registrar. Every member organization will be provided free access to the U.S. Soccer Connect – Club Connect system to help manage this process.

The Club Connect system (part of US Soccer Connect) will have all the tools needed for your league/town/club Registrar and Risk Manager (formerly CORI Submitter) to manage every adult’s risk management requirements and credential need.

**IMPORTANT:** Stack Sports will be contacting all member organizations to help with all steps necessary to get the Club Connect system up and working and then provide training at every phase. All Adult Registrations are completed through a link on your town/club’s unique web site. Every member organization will have their own URL for their unique US Soccer Connect website. If your town/club leadership has not set up your organization’s web site with Stack Sports, you will not be able to register. Also, if you are affiliated with more than one organization you will need to complete a separate registration via each organization’s unique registration website. Once you establish your initial account you will use the same account for all registrations.

**NEW REQUIREMENTS:** As noted above, all adults will be required to complete an annual Adult Registration. The completion of the annual registration will provide Mass Youth Soccer with all the necessary information to run all Background checks and searches as scheduled.

### ***What you will need to do?***

Enter the Adult Registration portal using your town/club’s unique US Soccer Connect from Stack Sports web address (URL). Your town/club’s Registrar and/or Risk Manager will have this information for you. You can also access this information from a master list of all member organizations as found on our web site under Administration/Adult Registrations. Your US Soccer Connect account will be your personal portal to managing your registration information, status of your background checks, and links to Abuse Prevention and Concussion Training.

### ***Training and Tutorials***

There will be plenty of training aids available to help you with using the US Soccer Connect system; these will be available on the Mass Youth Soccer website on the Adult Registration webpage.

More information about US Soccer Connect can be found on the Mass Youth Soccer website under the MA Safe Soccer tab.

## **NEW MA SAFE SOCCER PLATFORM MASSACHUSETTS YOUTH SOCCER ATHLETE AND PARTICIPANT SAFETY POLICY**

Under the Mass Youth Soccer Safe Soccer platform, we are required by U.S. Soccer to establish an Athlete and Participant Safety Policy. The official Massachusetts Youth Soccer Athlete and Participant Safety Policy can be found on newly updated Mass Youth Soccer website at [www.mayouthsoccer.org](http://www.mayouthsoccer.org) under MA Safe Soccer/Required Policies.

This expansive policy calls for the implementation of additional education, training, policies and procedures and protocols. This policy applies to all Mass Youth Soccer member organizations and should be referenced on each of these organization's websites.

MA SAFE SOCCER has been developed to provide all members quick and easy access to useful information; policies and procedures, training, videos and other resources encompassing all aspects of player and participant safety. Information includes the follow plus more:

- Abuse Prevention
- Head Injury – Concussion and Heading Policies
- Injury Prevention and Recovery
- Nutrition
- Weather Policies
- Goal Safety

**NEW REQUIREMENTS:** The Massachusetts Youth Soccer Association Athlete and Participant Policies are required to be communicated, understood, followed and managed.

### ***What you will need to do?***

You will need to open the policies (print out if easier) and familiarize yourself with all of them. These policies must be communicated to parents and adult participants in your organization. It is important these policies be adhered to at all times.

More information about the policies can be found on the Mass Youth Soccer website under MA Safe Soccer.

## **CONCLUSION – REALLY THE NEW BEGINNING**

Yes, there is a lot to digest. The overall steps are quite simple:

1. Gain access to your town/club's US Soccer Connect web site page.
2. Complete your Annual Adult Registration and establish your account (keep your username and passwords handy and make sure to use the same email address for all soccer related dealings).
3. From your account dashboard, look at your compliance statuses for background checks and required training. Note, if your due for a new background check, status updates may take up to 7 days to update.
4. Once your background checks are cleared and training requirements are met your town/club Registrar will print out your Mass Youth Soccer credential and you're all set to go.