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9711 Waveland Ave.
Franklin Park, Illinois 60131

www.fpipe.com

847-671-4268
Fax: 847-671-4755

Kevin Meyers
Ice Arena Manager

Tim Monroe
Hockey Director &
Assistant Manager

Anne Raucci
Skating Director

9560 Franklin Avenue
Franklin Park, Illinois 60131

www.fpparks.org

Administrative Offices
847-455-2852
Fax: 847-455-9053

Ice Arena
847-671-4268

North Park
847-678-4021

Service Center
847-451-1507

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of Commissioners

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This season of Panthers Hockey has been different from any other season of hockey. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Illinois has issued the Illinois All Sports Plan to help control the spread of infection. These guidelines apply directly to youth sports and to ice hockey specifically. Under the Illinois All Sports Plan, Ice Hockey has been deemed as a Level 1 High Risk activity. There are many reasons supporting this risk level designation and many arguments against classifying ice hockey at this level. Our organization, as well as every other youth ice hockey organization, has a responsibility to keep our participants, coaches, volunteers, and families safe. Our organization also has a responsibility to follow the laws and mandates set forth by our local and state government. Our organization views these responsibilities as serious and important priorities during this season and moving forward.

The states that surround Illinois have not taken measures to enforce strict guidelines on youth sports, including ice hockey. Game play has been allowed in some of these states and youth ice hockey teams from Illinois have been traveling to these neighboring states to play in tournaments and league games. It is difficult to predict what will transpire over the next few months. Currently, there is a rise in COVID-19 cases in many areas and a higher rise in cases where there are few restrictions on youth sports and social gathering.

Ice hockey, many have argued, is a sport in which social distancing can be easily applied. A few examples of this are, that players wear full equipment including gloves, players do not touch the puck, player body contact can be limited, and the playing surface is usually 17,000 sq. /ft. However, the actual game play is not the primary safety concern during this pandemic. The ability to maintain social distancing and the removal of risk for close contact becomes extremely difficult in ice arena lobbies, restrooms, spectator viewing areas, player dressing rooms, and players benches. Additionally, teams that attend tournaments and league games will have to deal with the increased risks seen while traveling and lodging.

Our organization is working to maintain our teams' activities and striving to ensure all of our players can continue to be on the ice while safely doing so. To achieve this our organization will continue adhering to the Illinois All Sports Plan. None of our teams will be authorized to travel locally or out of state for tournament or league games. This restriction will be reviewed if guidance from local and state government changes.

Kevin Meyers | Ice Arena Manager

Park District of Franklin Park
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Phone: 847-671-4268

