



# ISSUE ANALYSIS

Requirements to Reopen Cheerleading Gyms in Ontario

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## Issue Analysis: Requirements to Reopen Cheerleading Gyms in Ontario

The following issue analysis was completed on June 3, 2020. It was conducted using publicly available information that was current on the abovementioned date. Given the dynamic nature of the pandemic, the analysis and proposed options should be updated if the issue is revisited at a future date.

### ISSUE SUMMARY

Under the current COVID-19 guidelines in Ontario, indoor sport facilities can reopen if they follow public health guidelines and meet one of three criteria listed under the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* and associated Regulations. The criteria require the sport in question to be (1) funded by Sport Canada, (2) recognized by the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, or (3) a member of a professional sport league.

An article entitled “[Ontario Doesn’t Consider Cheerleading a Sport, Keeping Clubs Closed for Now](#)”, which was published by the *Toronto Star* on June 3, 2020, stated that the cheerleading industry in Ontario has not been permitted to reopen gyms because they do not meet the abovementioned criteria. However, cheerleading is recognized by the International Olympic Committee and the Canadian Olympic Committee; it was granted provisional status three years ago and may be an event at future Olympic games.

The Ontario Cheerleading Federation and gym owners in Ontario are requesting that the Government of Ontario modify the reopen list to include sports recognized by the Canadian Olympic Committee.

### PROPOSED OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Request amendments to the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Regulations* that expand criteria for the reopening of indoor sport facilities by allowing for (1) acceptance of recognition by the Canadian Olympic Committee or (2) acceptance of provisional status granted by the International Olympic Committee.

As an alternative to amending the Regulations, there may be the possibility of an exemption. The article published by the *Toronto Star* states that Cheer Canada does not have funding status with Sport Canada, but does not mention that it is halfway through the five-year application process (*Cheer Canada Strategic Plan, 2019*). This timeline suggests that the industry is taking steps to comply with provincial and federal standards. Perhaps this is an issue of unfortunate timing as opposed to the industry not meeting criteria required for inclusion on the reopen list?

\*See the [Issue Analysis](#) section for details that informed the proposed options.

## ARTICLE SOURCE

- **Article:** Ontario Doesn't Consider Cheerleading a Sport, Keeping Clubs Closed for Now
- **Source:** Toronto Star
- **Author:** Josh Brown
- **Publication Date:** June 3, 2020
- **Citation:** <https://www.thestar.com/sports/2020/06/03/ontario-doesnt-consider-cheerleading-a-sport-forcing-clubs-to-stay-closed-for-now.html>

## ARTICLE TEXT, ANALYSIS & INDUSTRY QUESTIONS

CAMBRIDGE—Competitive cheerleaders across Ontario are flipping out after they were told they can't resume individual training because the province doesn't recognize cheerleading as a sport.

**[CENTRAL ISSUE]** The provincial government announced recently that indoor sports facilities could reopen providing they follow public health guidelines in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. But those facilities have to meet one of three criteria.

**[CENTRAL ISSUE]** Their sport must be funded by Sport Canada, recognized by the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries or be a member of a professional sports league. And that leaves cheerleading out of the loop.

**Q1:** What legislation and COVID-19 policies govern decisions regarding the closure of indoor sport facilities during the pandemic?

- [Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act and Regulations](#)
- [The Emergency Management Program, Ministry of the Solicitor General](#)
- [Emergency Management Ontario, Ministry of the Solicitor General](#)

**[IMPACT TO INDUSTRY]** “Because of the exact wording of the order there is a substantial population of young people in the province of Ontario that are not going to be able to return to their sport,” said C.J. Pugh, president of the Ontario Cheerleading Federation. “That’s been very challenging for our membership and our member clubs. A lot of them are small businesses and have had to lay off their staff and close their doors for the last 11 weeks.”

**Q2:** How many cheer clubs operate in Ontario?

- 38 cheer clubs and schools operate across the province.  
(Ontario Cheerleading Federation)
- **Follow up question:** Are the 38 cheer clubs located in Southern Ontario or across the province? Because of the size of Ontario, speaking about regions as opposed to the entire province may provide the reader with a better understanding of the size of the industry. Mentioning that 38 clubs span Southern Ontario creates the idea of a growing industry that has established itself. The idea that 38 clubs span all of Ontario is not as strong.

**Q3:** How many staff are employed by cheer clubs in Ontario?

- No stats were located online.
- I looked up a sample of websites from the 38 cheer clubs operating in Ontario. My estimate is that on average, 10 staff members (full-time and part-time) are employed by each gym. This includes admin staff, managers, and coaches.
  - 10 staff x 38 cheer clubs = 380 staff members in Ontario (estimate)
- **Follow up question:** How many cheer clubs vs. cheerleading gyms are in Ontario? I am assuming that each gym would employ approximately 10 staff members (full-time and part-time). The estimate requires updates if the number of cheer gyms is greater than the number of cheer clubs operating in the province.

**Q4:** How many athletes belong to cheer clubs in Ontario?

- Answered in article (para. 8). 4,000 athletes enrolled across the province.

**Q5:** What is the financial impact to the industry?

- Cheer gyms have been closed for 11 weeks (para. 4). If the fiscal year runs from January 1, 2020 – December 31, 2020 (requires verification), 11 weeks accounts for 21% of the fiscal year.

To gain recognition as a sport in Ontario, cheerleading's national organization must receive funding from Sport Canada, which it does not. The rub is that cheerleading is recognized by the

International Olympic Committee and Canadian Olympic Committee and was even granted provisional status three years, back meaning it could be an event at a future Summer Games.

**Q6:** Has the cheerleading industry in Canada started the process to receive funding from Sport Canada? If so, how far along are they? How long does the entire process take to complete?

- **Cheer Canada Strategic Plan, 2019**

- “In the Fall of 2018, Cheer Canada began collecting the fee required by Sport Canada and associated with each participant in order to demonstrate the size of the sport and that it has a significant level of interest across the country. Financial statements, demonstrating a minimum of \$50,000 revenue per year for a minimum of four years, must be audited to demonstrate financial sustainability and responsibility.”
- “Goal is to reach application for funding status by 2021.”

- **Cheer Canada FAQ:**

- “Cheer Canada, the governing body for cheer in Canada, has initiated the process to receive funding from Sport Canada. This process has been underway to prepare for participation in international competitions such as the Olympics.”
- “Because cheer is heading towards being an official Olympic sport, we need to take the necessary steps as soon as possible in Canada to receive official recognition as a sport by Sport Canada and the Canadian Olympic Committee. This process will take a minimum of five years.”

**NOTE:** The industry in Canada is in the process of fulfilling requirements to receive funding from Sport Canada. The process, which takes a minimum of five years to complete, was initiated in 2018.

The article published by the *Toronto Star* states that Cheer Canada does not have funding status with Sport Canada, but does not mention that it is two years into the application process. This could be an important factor, as it demonstrates that the industry is following the appropriate steps to receive formal recognition as a sport (confirm details with industry).

Perhaps gym closures are related to unfortunate timing as opposed to not meeting the criteria required for inclusion on the reopen list?

Pugh is hoping the province can find a compromise.

**[REQUEST]** “We’re asking for the province to look at its definition and perhaps broaden it to include activities like cheerleading that have recognition at the international level, but are precluded from returning based on the wording of the order that was issued,” he said.

Today’s cheerleading is like gymnastics. Athletes perform stunts with a high degree of difficulty in choreographed routines with intense floor work, aerials and flips. More than 4,000 athletes train in Ontario and many compete at the world championships.

**[PUBLIC HEALTH REQUIREMENTS]** “We have no issue with the requirement to not practice the team portion of our sport,” said Pugh. “We want to comply with all the social distancing guidelines and be held to the same standard as any other organization, but we’re not even given the opportunity to do that.”

Cheerleaders in British Columbia, the United States and New Zealand have been cleared to resume training.

**Q7:** Is BC the exception? Have cheer gyms in other provinces been able to open or are they subject to the same criteria as gyms in Ontario?

- “Cheer gyms in other provinces have reopened because being under Sport Canada’s umbrella has not been a requirement.”  
(“Technicality Beaches Cambridge Cheer Sport Sharks”, *Cambridge Times*)
- “Ontario is the only one of nine provinces with a cheerleading federation that does not recognize the activity as a sport.”  
(“Cheerleaders Boo Unequal Treatment”, *Ottawa Citizen*)

“We’re pretty frustrated,” said Ali Moffatt, co-owner of the Cambridge-based Cheer Sport Sharks, which serves about 1,400 members at five Ontario locations. “We were all excited and ready to go.”

Moffatt has spent about a month fine-tuning a return-to-train protocol, a process that included chats with parents and athletes and studying how other gyms in North America managed their comebacks.

Phase one of her plan involves small classes based on the maximum number of people allowed to congregate under government rules. Athletes will be six feet apart and equipment will be cleaned after each use.

“If you’re going to train tumbling at gymnastics clubs ... you’re just as safe here to do that similar tumbling lesson,” she said.

**[REQUEST]** The Ontario Cheerleading Federation was hoping the provincial ministry would modify its reopen list to include sports recognized by the Canadian Olympic Committee.

**[IMPACT TO INDUSTRY]** “If they could do that, that would be something that is simple but does allow an industry like ours to survive,” said Moffatt. “It still keeps the intent and spirit of what they were looking to do, but it gives a sport like ours that is slipping through the cracks a lifeline.”

The federation has since been told by the ministry that it won’t be able to return until phase two, whenever that is.

## ISSUE ANALYSIS

### *Central Issue*

Cheerleading gyms cannot reopen because they do not meet one of three reopening criteria required under the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* and associated Regulations.

The current reopening criteria require sports to be (1) funded by Sport Canada, (2) recognized by the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, or (3) a member of a professional sport league.

While cheerleading is not formally recognized as a sport in Ontario, it has been recognized by the International Olympic Committee and the Canadian Olympic Committee.

### *Request from Industry*

The Ontario Cheerleading Federation is requesting that the Government of Ontario expand criteria allowing indoor sport facilities to reopen during the COVID-19 pandemic. The revised criteria would include sports recognized by the Canadian Olympic Committee.

### *Impact to Industry*

According to the Ontario Cheerleading Federation, there are 38 cheer clubs based in Ontario that train 4,000 athletes each year. It is estimated that these clubs employ 380 individuals across the province, including managers, coaches, and administrative staff.

In 2020, cheerleading gyms have been closed for 11 weeks, which accounts for 21% of the total fiscal year. During this time, staff members have been laid off and athletes are not able to train.

The combined impact of gym closures is twofold. First, gym owners and staff have lost close to one quarter of expected earnings/income in 2020. They are also threatened with a loss of clients due to the interrupted training season and uncertainty regarding when gyms will reopen. Second, athletes are not able to train, which may set the industry back in future years. Athletes will be required to regain levels of physical fitness and agility required to compete at previous competition levels, such as world championships.

### *Compliance with Public Health Requirements*

The industry is committed to complying with social distancing and facility sanitation guidelines. They do not have plans to practice team portions of the sport until public health guidelines in Ontario permit such activities.



### ***Legislative Requirements Across Canada***

Cheerleading gyms across the country have reopened. No other jurisdiction requires funding from Sport Canada as a reopening requirement.

### ***Issue for Consideration: Application for Funding from Sport Canada***

The cheerleading industry in Canada is in the process of fulfilling requirements to receive funding from Sport Canada. The process, which takes a minimum of five years to complete, was initiated in 2018.

The article published by the *Toronto Star* (text above) states that Cheer Canada does not have funding status with Sport Canada, but does not mention that it is halfway through the five-year application process. This timeline suggests that the industry is taking appropriate steps to comply with provincial and federal standards to receive formal recognition as a sport.

Based on the fact that the application for funding from Sport Canada is underway, could an exception be made that allows cheerleading gyms to reopen? Would this fact allow cheerleading gyms to fall under the current reopening criteria listed in the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Regulations*?