Participating during the pandemic: Are Run/Walk Events Safe?

Every one of our favorite runs and walk events have been affected by COVID-19. Most have had to cancel or switch to virtual (which I have to commend those that have created great content and fun for these virtual runs). Those that can be held will be vastly different with heavy safety measures in place. Sadly too, some events will never return. The burning question for many is, “are events that are happening safe to participate in?”

The answer: YES* - Hey 2020 is the year of the asterisk, so might as well throw one in here, and here is why. For in large part, the events that can take place are very, very safe. You likely have less chance of any exposure in a controlled event than you do on those daily runs and walks at a local park (especially on nice weekends). While it is very safe, we know it will take a few events for many to “see” them take place without incident before you will start to feel safe coming back. As an event producer/director, we understand that, and when you are ready, we will welcome you back with great big smiles (trust us, while you can’t see us smiling, we are, under our masks).

(I am smiling! Especially because I got to announce 20 starts for the 2020 Cookie Chase)
So what can you expect and do you need to know as you return to participating in-person? I am so glad you asked.

1. **SAFETY SAFETY SAFETY** – The one thing that hasn’t changed, is that safety continues to be our number one priority! Safety measures today look different and have considered everything from porto arrangements, start line configurations, and out and back sections of courses, to how to handout your goodies at the finish. Many municipalities, cities, states, and rec departments have been working with event producers/directors to develop guidelines based on CDC, state, and county department of health (DOH) requirements. I can personally attest to dedicating literally 100’s of hours to developing plans around having safe events. In Colorado, for example, the leadership of the Colfax Marathon (thank you Creigh Kelley and Andrea Dowdy) led a joint venture task force (which we at HAL Sports were involved in) to develop guidelines that have been vetted by numerous agencies, including DOH’s. You can rest assured that many hours have been spent planning out how to keep you safe. You will see MANY more cones and signs on-site. Please follow them.

2. **EVERY MUNICIPALITY IS DIFFERENT** – Every municipality and permitting department is different and has different requirements. Be patient and understanding because what is allowed or accepted at one event may not be the same at another. And while some parks or venues may be allowing events, others may not (even if they are “just down the street”).

3. **SEEK DETAILS ABOUT SAFETY MEASURES** – Just because mandates and guidelines exist, that doesn’t mean that they will be followed or enforced. Be sure you are comfortable with the group producing the event. Look for communication explaining what safety measures they will
be taking now and on event day. It is important for the entire event industry that safety protocols are established and followed. Rogue events could cause all events to be shut down or cancelled for extended period of time and no one wants that.

4. **PACKET PICKUP** – Some events may have packet pickup on event day only, but most are offering packet pickup (or even mailed packets for a nominal fee) prior to event day. You should try to get your packet in advance if possible. It will save you time and alleviate the need to have you standing in line on event day (not to mention it helps out event staff on event day too)! Please remember you will need to follow all guidelines with wearing a mask and social distancing.

5. **SOCIAL CONTRACT** – One of many buzzwords for 2020, the social contract. When you register or when you pickup your packet, you will likely be required to agree to (either electronically or good ole paper and pen) a social contract that outlines the rules and requirements for the event. Basic things like agreeing to wear a mask, and staying home if you’re sick, etc.

6. **EVENT DAY IS GOING TO LOOK AND BE DIFFERENT** – Events will look different, but they are still fun!
   a. **Start Line** - There won’t be mass starts, but hey, you always wanted to do a time trial anyway right? You likely will be assigned a time to show up for an assigned start window or block. You will be lined up in small groups in chutes that will have you socially distanced apart (usually in groups as small as 10 to 25). Each start group will be released in rows. Athletes in the 1st row at the start line will start and the 2nd row will move up and then be released. Usually at 5 to 10 second intervals. All timing will be done by nettime, so the fun part is that if you are one of the first groups to start (and cross the finish line), your position may change throughout the day!
b. **Masks** – Masks or proper face coverings will be required in all areas at all times except (unless otherwise mandated) on the course itself, you can remove the mask after crossing the start line. Once you get to the finish line, catch your breath, and then put your mask back on.

c. **Limited or no pre- or post-event activities** – Expect that the traditional festivities will be heavily limited or non-existent. All food and beverages will be pre-packaged or kept whole. Event staff and volunteers will limit the handling of food and beverages when possible but will be masked and wearing gloves when in these areas.

d. **BYOW (Bring your own water)** – Likely for standard 5K or 10K events, there will be no aid/water stations along the route. For those that do provide aid stations you can expect sealed bottles that you will help yourself to. Please come prepared or find out prior to event day if on course water will be provided.

e. **Follow instructions** – Please don’t be *THAT* person. Be patient and follow directions. The event staff and volunteers want you to have a safe and fun experience! Being patient, understanding, and kind will go a long way toward enabling the fun and excitement of the event to shine through (for you and everyone else)!
7. HAVE FUN AND WE THANK YOU – have fun! We know things are not quite what we are used to, but we hope you enjoy getting back to the events we all love and the amazing running community we are all part of! On behalf of HAL Sports, our industry and sport, and all of the charities these events support, we appreciate you and we thank you! We look forward to hosting you at some great events this year and beyond, as we gear up for a return to full scale events.