



Return to the Court

A Pathway to the Safe Return of Outdoor and Indoor Tennis

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The sport of tennis was fortunate after the first wave of Covid-19 was partially under control. The Province of Ontario allowed clubs and public facilities to open, and players returned to the courts in May, albeit under strict protocol. The OTA's member indoor and outdoor clubs rose to the occasion and provided a safe, fun place for their members to enjoy. The summer and fall saw people swarm to the game, with many clubs achieving record numbers of new members. When the second wave hit, the Province tightened the rules, particularly with respect to indoor capacities. These new rules made it impossible for our indoor member clubs and academies to remain open. The economic impact of this was devastating to many of the clubs and the thousands of people they employ. Hardest hit of all were the many full and part time teaching pros who are paid hourly for work done. Fast forward to Spring 2021; just as our outdoor member clubs were getting ready to open, the Province suddenly shut them down on April 17.

Along with many other groups and individuals, the OTA has been lobbying to ask the Province to reconsider re-opening sports like tennis. The OTA believes that its member clubs can open safely, as they did last year, and provide hundreds of thousands of players with the physical, emotional and mental benefits so important to Ontarians, particularly in these difficult times.

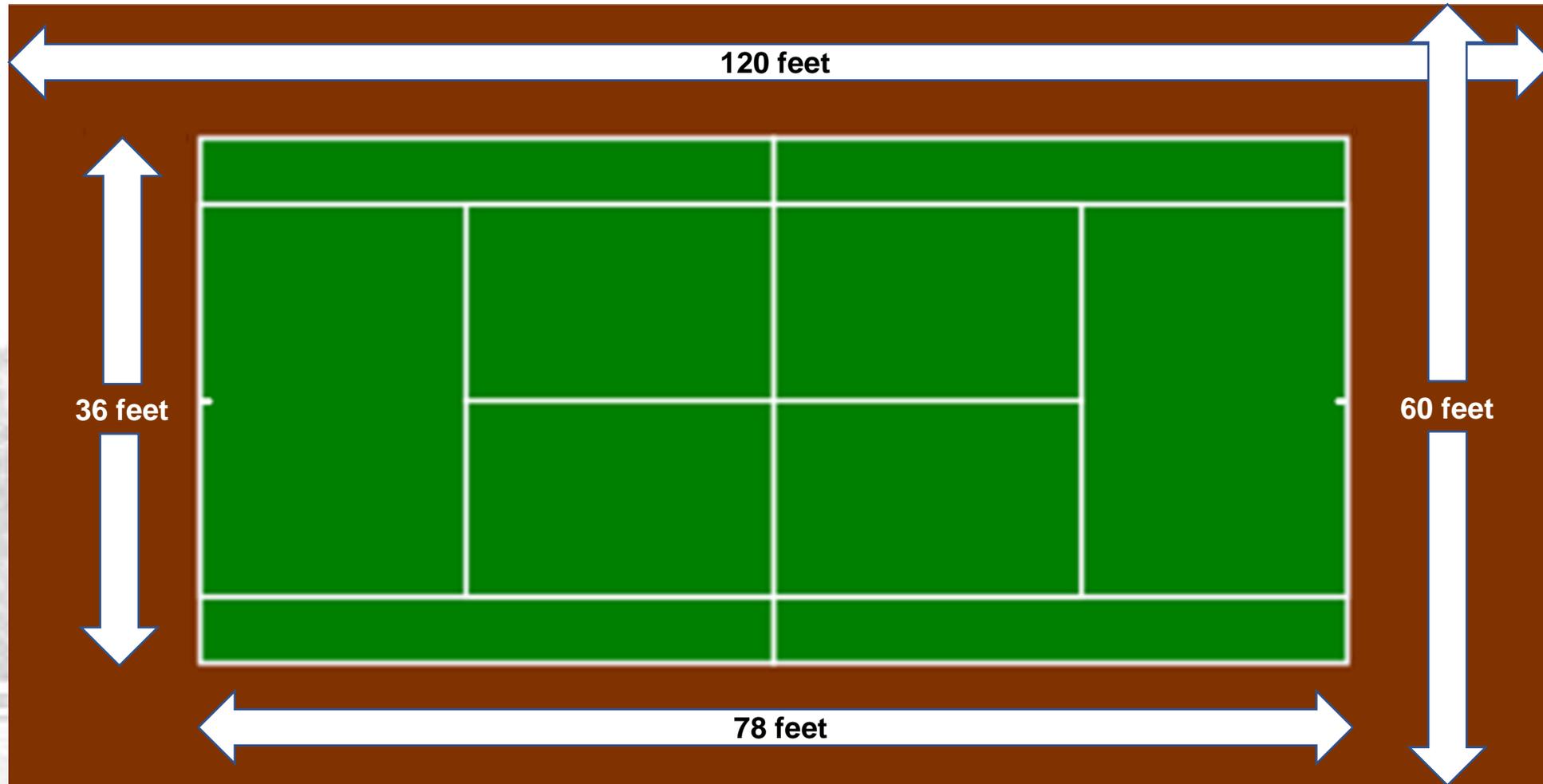
The OTA will continue to lobby the Province to walk back its recent rulings regarding tennis court closure but also wants to make sure, whenever people are allowed on the courts again, that the rules governing their return are consistent across the province and follow common sense. The Province's rules with respect to Covid-19 are general in nature and much is left to individual municipalities when it comes to the interpretation and enforcement of these rules. Sometimes the rules are applied inconsistently. This document is intended to clarify some inconsistencies and put forth some recommendations that the Association and the larger tennis community feels is fair and safe when it comes to a safe return to the sport of tennis during the pandemic. For these purposes, unless otherwise noted, a return to the Grey Zone is the minimum expectation.

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Areas of Concern once tennis is allowed to return:

- **Number of players allowed safely on a tennis court – the case for safe physical distancing**
 - The OTA position is that tennis more than meets the minimum standards set out by the Province when it comes to the 2-metre distancing standard and size of gatherings standards
- **Singles vs Doubles – tennis is an individual sport, a dual sport, but not a team sport**
 - When singles is played, tennis is an individual sport. When doubles is played it is a dual “non-contact” sport. It is not a team sport in the traditional sense. It was lumped into the team sport category by some municipalities, but the intention of restricting team sports was clearly to avoid close personal contact
- **Tennis instruction – should it be permitted?**
 - Apart from the devastating economic impact on clubs and pros, the OTA believes that tennis instruction, including junior summer camps, is safe and can easily be modified in terms of numbers on courts to suit any of the Provincial Covid-19 Zones a municipality finds itself in
- **Indoor Tennis – should it be permitted?**
 - Indoor tennis clubs were unfairly lumped in with other indoor activities based on number of people allowed in a “room”. The definition of a room was never made clear. A four-court indoor tennis facility should not be compared to an indoor recreation facility, e.g., a small Yoga studio

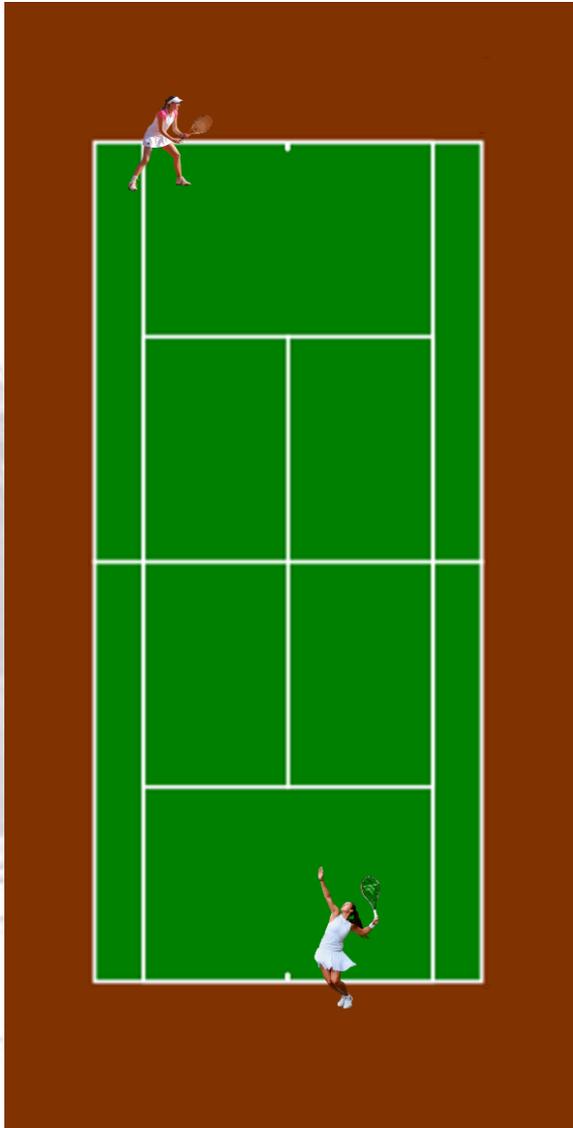
Tennis Court Dimensions



The size of a single tennis court, including the playing area outside the lines, is approximately 7,200 square feet

Protocol Adherence – Tennis Players

Singles



Physical distancing 2m

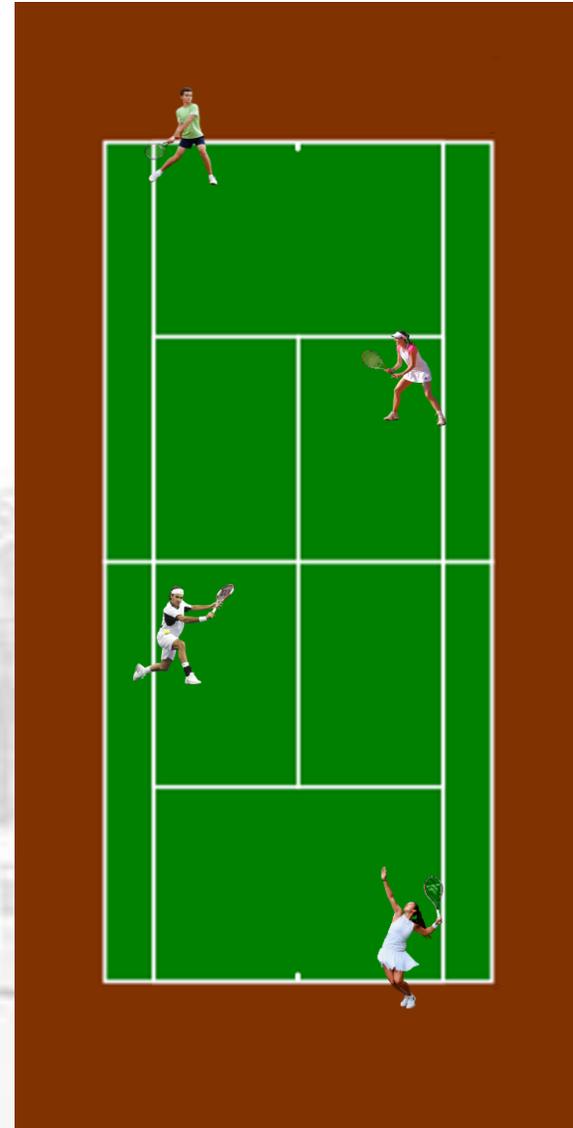


Gathering 5 or under



As was the case in the summer of 2020 when the Province determined tennis to be a safe outdoor activity, the OTA feels, as evidenced by the accompanying illustration, that the Province and individual municipalities should allow singles and doubles play once the sport is allowed to resume.

Doubles



Physical distancing 2m

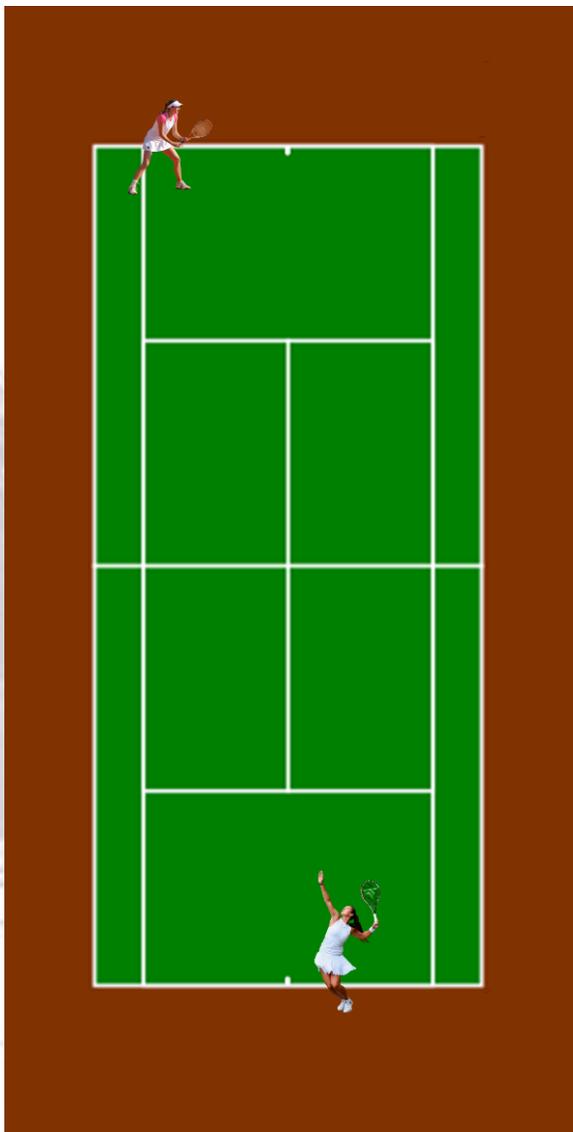


Gathering 5 or under



Protocol Adherence – Tennis One-on-one Coaching

Singles



Physical distancing 2m

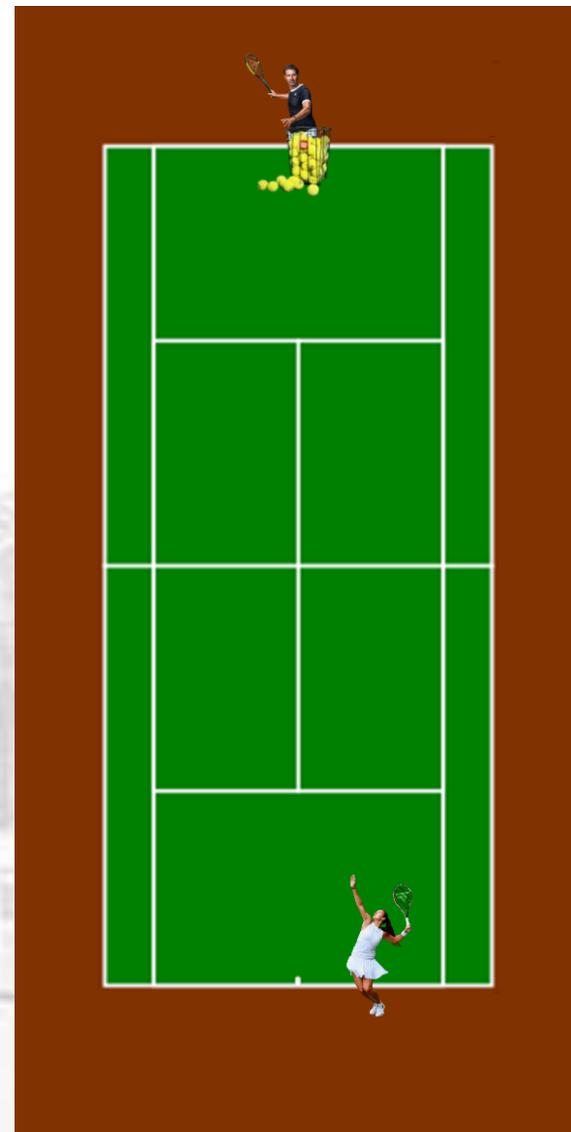


Gathering 5 or under



As was the case in the summer of 2020 when the Province determined coaching to be a safe outdoor activity, the OTA feels, as evidenced by the accompanying illustration, that, as a minimum, the Province and individual municipalities should allow one-on-one coaching once the sport is allowed to resume.

Private Lesson



Physical distancing 2m

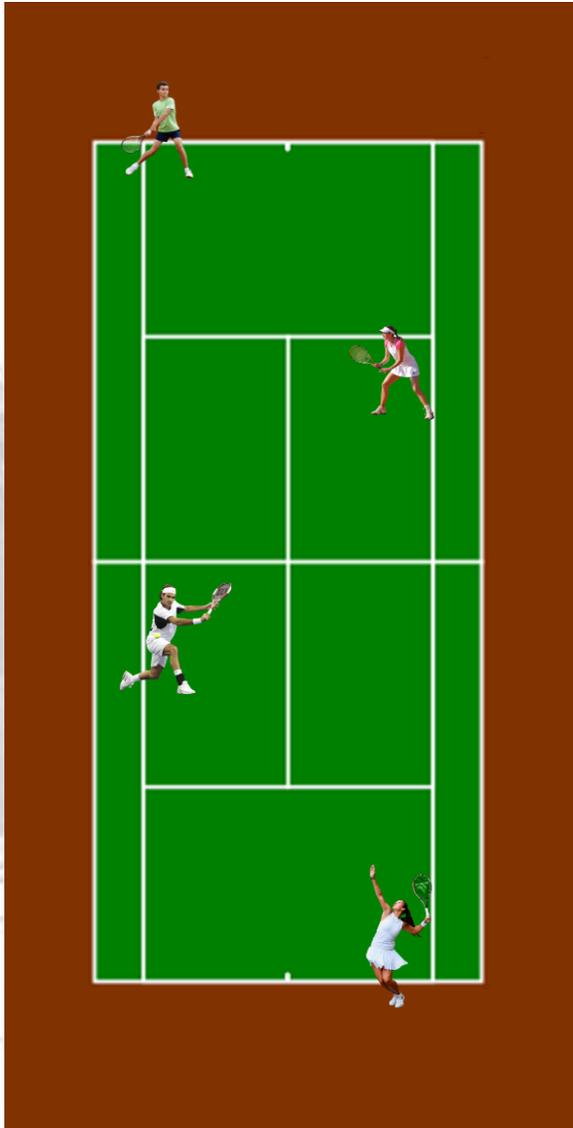


Gathering 5 or under



Protocol Adherence – Tennis Group Clinic

Doubles



Physical distancing 2m

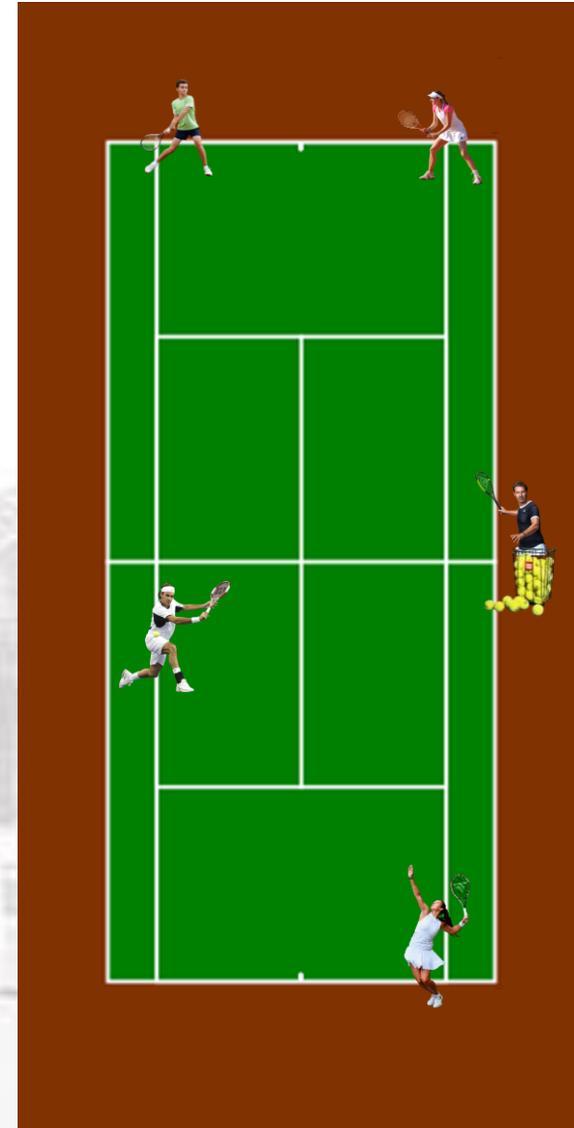


Gathering 5 or under



As was the case in the summer of 2020 when the Province determined group instruction to be a safe outdoor activity, the OTA feels, as evidenced by the accompanying illustration, that the Province and individual municipalities should allow group clinics to proceed once the sport is allowed to resume.

Clinic – up to 4 + Instructor



Physical distancing 2m

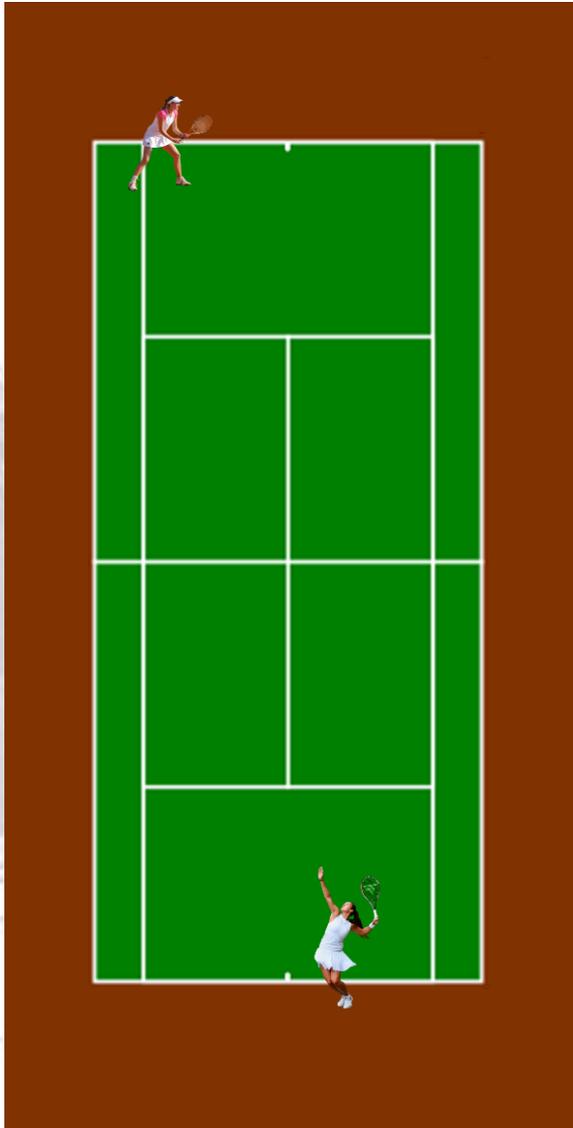


Gathering 5 or under



Protocol Adherence – Singles Tennis vs Singles Pickleball

Singles tennis



Physical distancing 2m

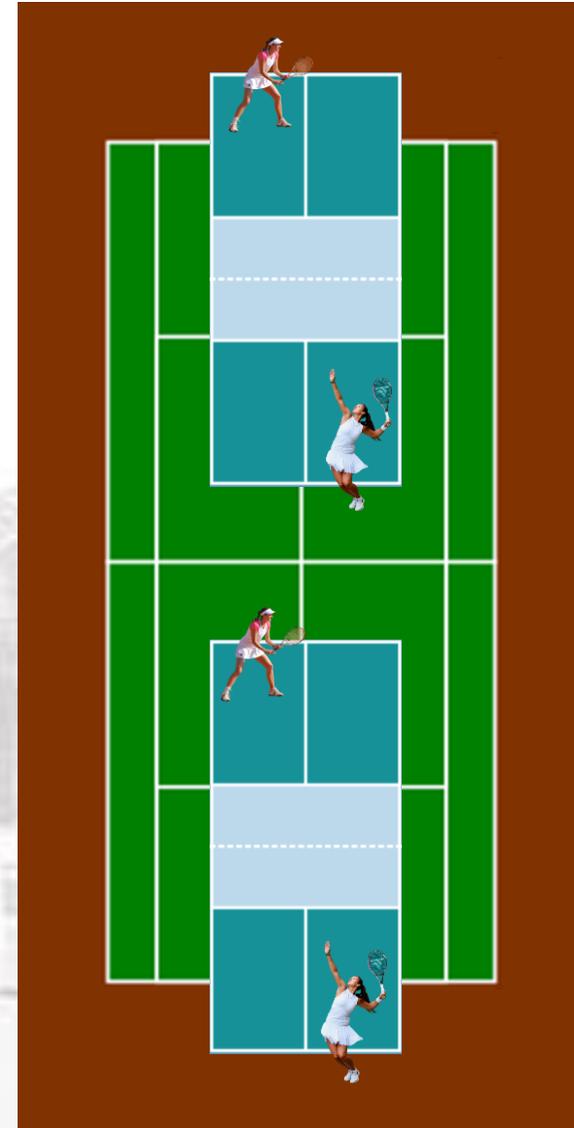


Gathering 5 or under



As further support for doubles play in tennis, the OTA feels that, even when ONLY singles play is allowed for Pickleball, since the sport often shares court space with tennis as evidenced by the accompanying illustration, that the Province and individual municipalities should allow doubles to be played once the sport is allowed to resume.

Singles Pickleball



Physical distancing 2m



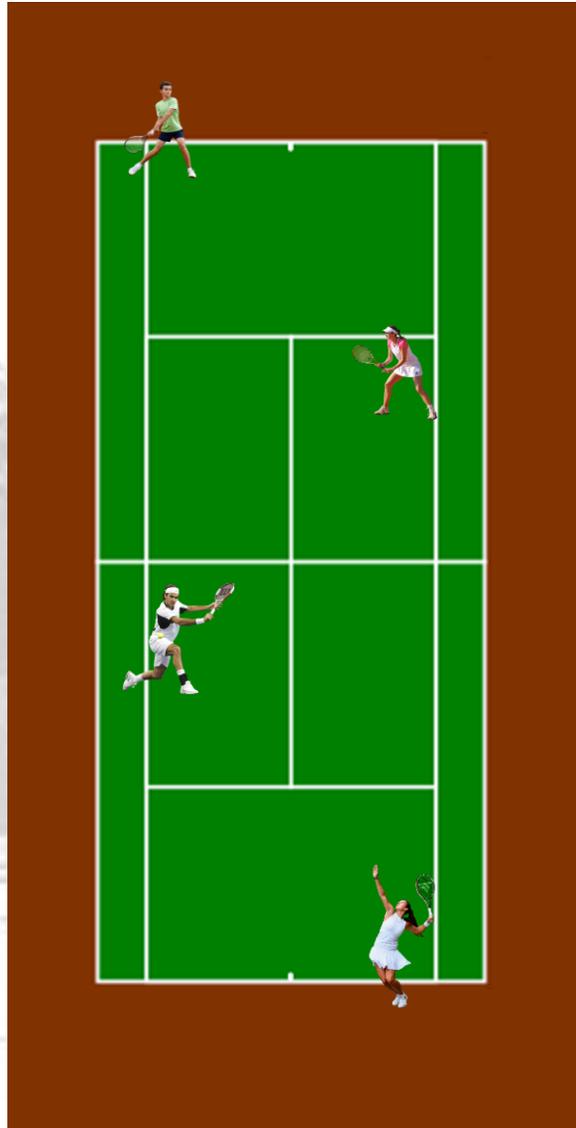
Gathering 5 or under



Protocol Adherence – Doubles Tennis vs Doubles Beach Volleyball



Doubles Tennis



Physical distancing 2m



Gathering 5 or under



As further support for doubles play, similarly to Pickleball, the OTA feels that, when 2 per side Beach Volleyball is allowed, as evidenced by the accompanying illustration, that the Province and individual municipalities should allow doubles to be played once the sport is allowed to resume.

2 per side Beach Volleyball



Physical distancing 2m

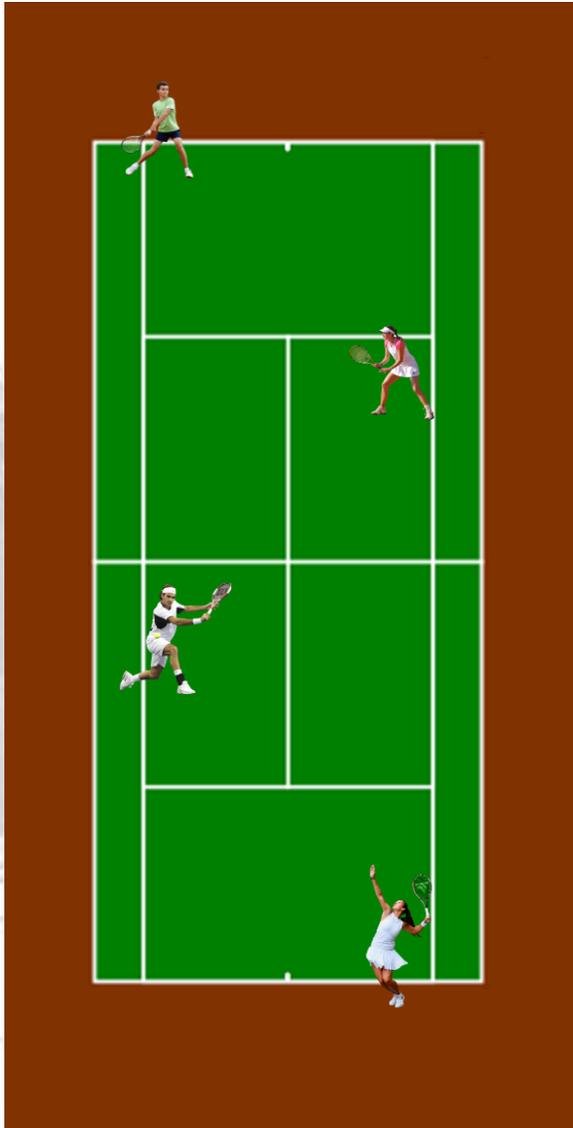


Gathering 5 or under



Protocol Adherence – Doubles Tennis vs Outdoor Park Setting

Doubles Tennis



Physical distancing 2m

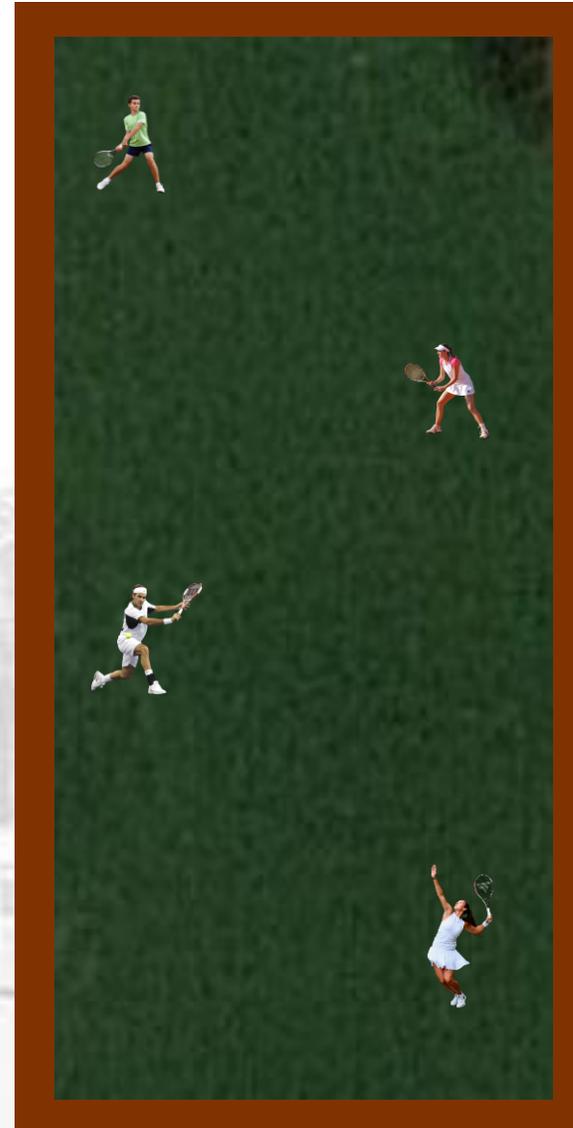


Gathering 5 or under



As further support for doubles play, the OTA feels that, when 4 people are spread out in a park environment roughly the size of a tennis court as evidenced by the accompanying illustration, it is deemed to be safe by the Provincial government.

4 People - Outdoor Park Setting



Physical distancing 2m



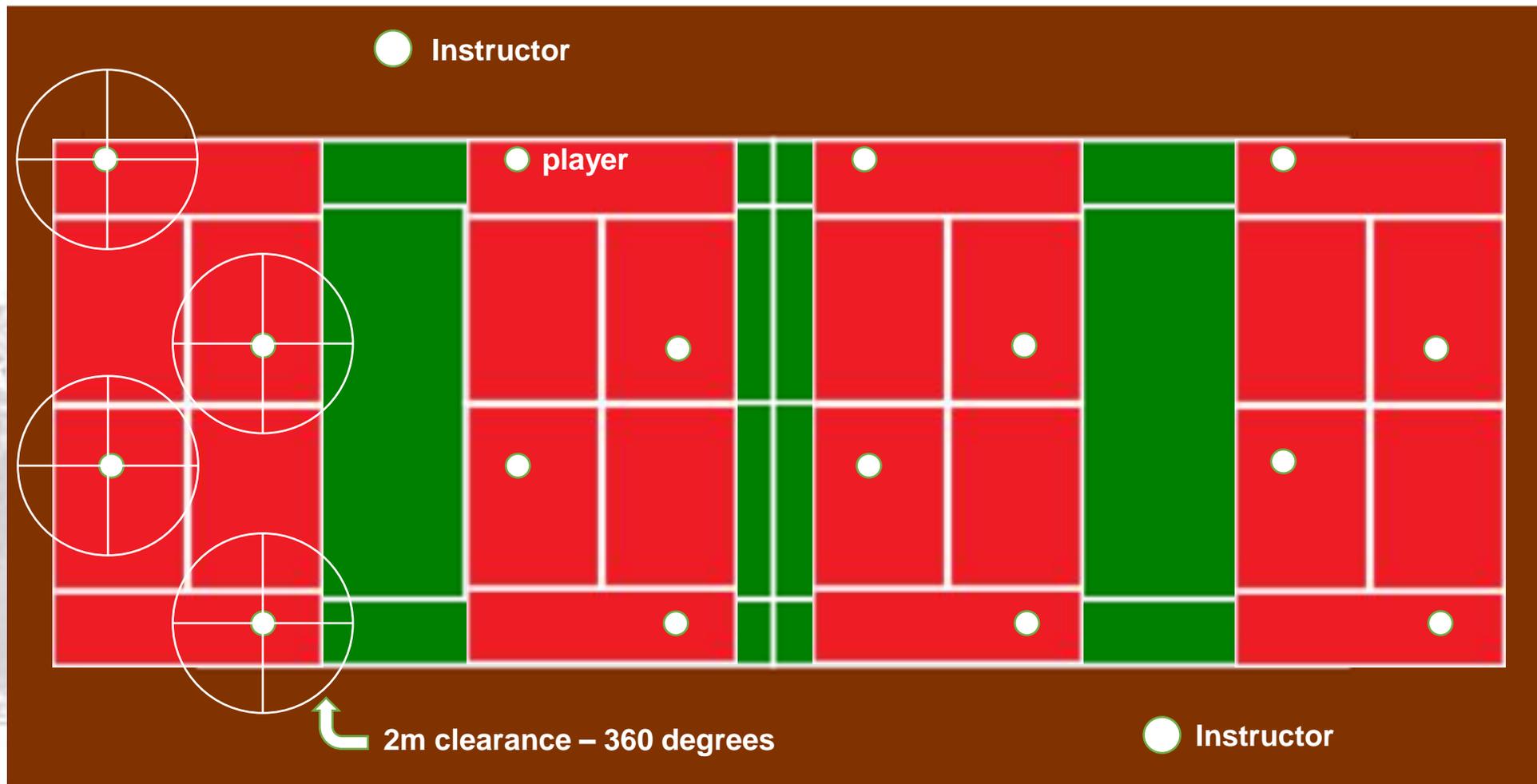
Gathering 5 or under



Protocol Adherence – Junior Tennis Camps, (Red Zone or Better)



4 Junior Red Dot Courts (36 ft. X 18 ft.) per Standard Tennis Court – 4 Juniors per Red Dot Court



Physical distancing 2m



25 people or under in outdoor classes



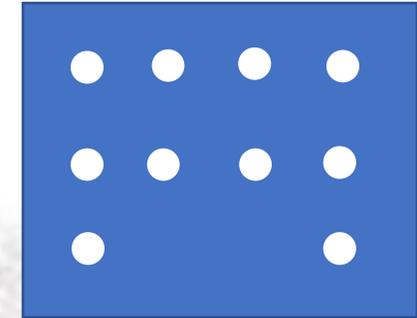
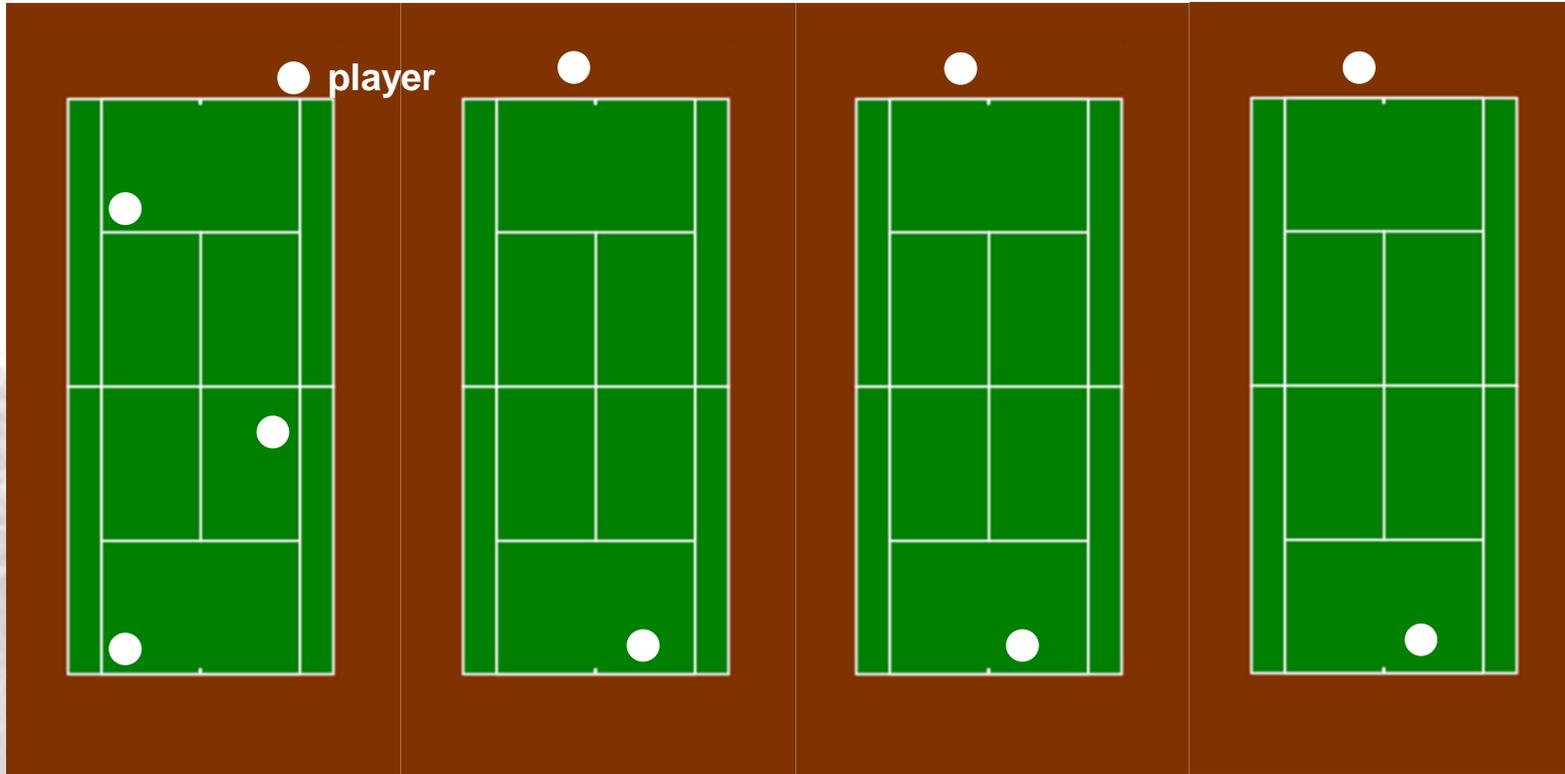
As was the case in the summer of 2020 when the Province determined junior summer camps to be a safe outdoor activity, the OTA feels, as evidenced by the accompanying illustration, that the Province and individual municipalities should allow junior summer camps to proceed once the sport is allowed to safely resume.

Protocol Adherence – Indoor Tennis as a Safe Sport

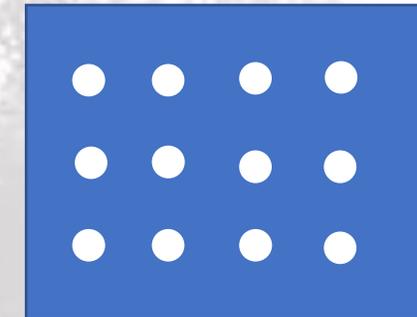


4 court indoor tennis facility: 1 “room” – 28,800 sq. ft. – max. 10

Yoga Studio: 1 “room” – 2,400 sq. ft. – max. 10



Retail Space: 1 “room” – 2,400 sq. ft. – max. 12



The OTA feels strongly that the indoor tennis facilities have been treated unfairly, especially during the second wave. As evidenced by the illustration above, the Province lumped multiple court indoor tennis facilities with smaller sports facilities like Yoga studios; allowing only 10 people per “room”. For further clarification, using the Provinces Ontario Store Capacity Calculator for retailers, a 2,400 square 1 roomed retail location would be allowed to accommodate up to 12 people. The OTA recognizes that medical authorities have deemed indoor spaces as more likely to promote spread of the virus, but coming out of the Stay-at-Home Order, the OTA recommends that the Province introduces a safety protocol based on a safe number of people allowed on a per square foot basis, instead of lumping all recreation facilities under the “one room” label.

What Medical Experts and Others Saying...

Try sports where there is more natural spacing, such as tennis, badminton or mountain biking. - **Ottawa Public Health Unit.**

... and if lower-risk outdoor socializing replaces higher-risk indoor gatherings, that's a win" - **Dr. Zain Chagla, infectious disease expert with McMaster University**, March 31, 2021.

"Look, what we know is that we estimate, and this is just an estimate, that outdoor activities are probably roughly 20 times safer than indoor activities," – **Dr. Peter Jüni, director of Ontario's COVID Scientific Advisory Table**, April 19, 2021.

"We need to make a distinction between settings that are safe and settings that are unsafe. A park is safe. A tennis court is safe." - **Dr. Peter Jüni, director of Ontario's COVID Scientific Advisory Table**, April 22, 2021.

"I would support any reconsideration of the limits on outdoor activity that is based on scientific advice received." – **Toronto Mayor John Tory**, April 22, 2021.

"Now that the parks and playgrounds are opened, it doesn't make any sense to keep any outdoor recreational activities limited so long as reasonable masking, distancing protocols continue to be enforced. It (outdoor activity) remains an important activity for maintaining physical, mental and social well-being, all of which are compromised as we deepen in this third wave," - **Dr. Abdu Sharkawy, Infectious Disease Specialist, University Health Network**, April 22, 2021.

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Conclusions/Recommendations:

- **Tennis is a safe sport when the proper protocols are adhered to**
 - As was proven in 2020, the tennis community acted responsibly and protected their players, often exceeding the minimum safety requirements from the Province and local municipalities. The OTA recommends that tennis be continued to be permitted so long as provincial and municipal medical experts consider it safe to do so.
- **Singles vs Doubles**
 - The OTA recommends that doubles continue to be allowed as it was during parts of 2020. There is little evidence that doubles is any more dangerous than singles, since players generally stay more than 2 metres apart – most of the time the distance between players is far greater.
- **Tennis instruction**
 - The OTA recommends that tennis pros be allowed to instruct individuals and small groups, in accordance with the Covid Zone their municipality is in. Having a pro on court in a supervisory position is potentially safer than general play. As well, tennis instructors are in high demand from players and have been hit hard economically. They need to get back to work.
- **Junior Summer Camps**
 - The OTA recommends that, once a municipality has entered the appropriate Covid Zone, junior summer camps should be permitted. It is important for children's physical, mental and emotional health, helps their parents find a safe summer activity for their children and allows pros to earn a living.
- **Indoor Tennis**
 - The OTA recommends that indoor tennis facilities should be allowed to open and that the current protocol should be adjusted in with appropriate Covid Zone restrictions to be more equitable with other indoor facilities, provided that medical authorities are convinced of its safety.