

# The “Bubble”: Safe and informed population health management based on strategic, novel laboratory testing to restart a global sports league, stimulate the economy and foster normalcy during the COVID-19 pandemic

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The National Basketball Association’s (NBA) closed campus occupational health program (the “NBA Bubble”) was a novel, bold, and health-focused approach during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic to facilitate safe operation of the world’s preeminent professional basketball league in a way that unified and inspired people during challenging lockdowns and social distancing. The NBA Bubble was operational between July and October 2020 and allowed the NBA to safely conclude its season and bring a sense of normalcy to the public during difficult times.

Comprehensive SARS-CoV-2 testing strategies, data-driven decision-making, and subsequent low incidence of COVID-19 infections underscore the NBA Bubble’s effectiveness. Protocols included daily PCR testing for more than one thousand campus residents, quarantine upon campus entry, indoor masking with provided PPE, physical distancing, comprehensive disinfection procedures, and enhancement of building ventilation. A temporary healthcare facility was created within the Bubble with an onsite clinic, mobile MRI and CT scanners, mobile dental care, and an on-campus clinical psychologist. Protocols not only governed the activities of the players and staff living in the Bubble, but also thousands of vendors who lived off-site and provided transport, security, supplies & inventory management, food preparation and cleaning services. The testing program and accompanying alert and analytic systems, which served as the backbone of the Bubble, were of particular importance for staff and vendors living off-campus and commuting in, given their daily risk of exposure within the Orlando community. Although many of the infection control principles were known, the epidemiologic application of these safeguards in the context of the pandemic had not been previously attempted at this scale.

During the lockdowns at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the NBA Bubble created more than 6,500 jobs required for implementation, with a local economic impact in Orlando exceeding \$200M. The success of this initiative, and scientific insights associated with the NBA Bubble SARS-CoV-2 testing strategy, enabled staff across the 22 NBA teams to safely assess and protect all aspects of life on campus, thus ensuring that there were 0 cases of COVID-19 among NBA players and NBA team staff residing on campus in the Bubble.



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