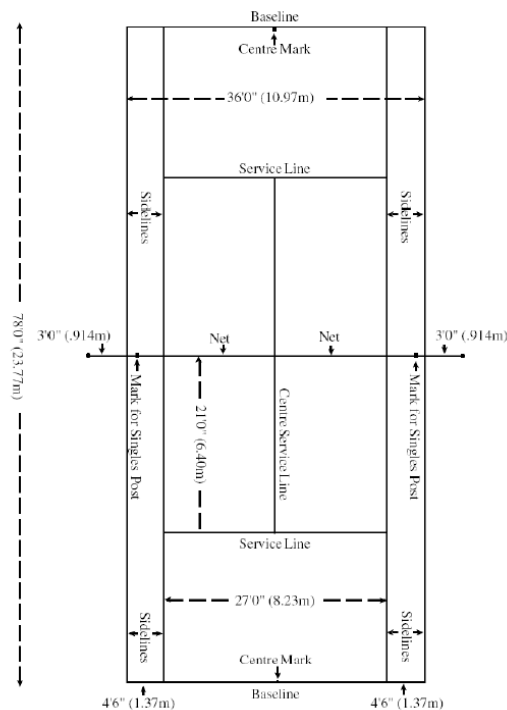




HOW TO PLAY DOUBLES SAFELY DURING COVID-19

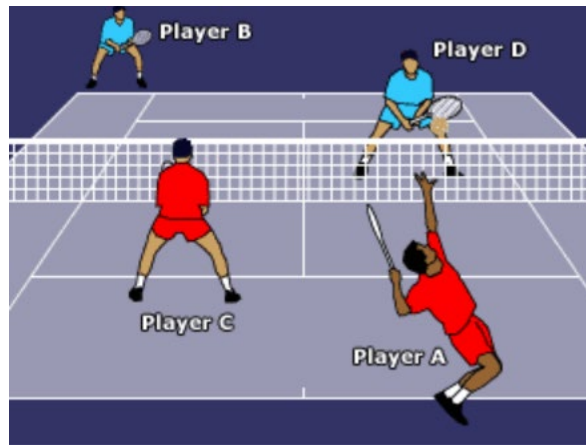
Playing doubles is an important component of the sport of tennis and is very popular with a large group of community club members, from beginners to advanced. This format of play is suggested during Stage 2 of re-launching tennis, rather than at Stage 1, so that the rules of physical distancing are already part of the social norms within the population.

The dimensions of a tennis court (11m wide by 12m long on each side of the net) allow the presence of two players on one half of the court without risking the minimum physical distance of two meters. In addition, a minimum distance of 3.66 meters separates the courts from each other and there is always a minimum clearance of 6.40 meters behind the base line.



After consultation with our own staff and a number of our partnering Provincial Tennis Associations, it is the OTA's opinion that the risks of playing doubles tennis while maintaining all safe protocols is minimal. To better understand this conclusion, let's review the overall strategy and dynamics of the game during doubles.

Players on each side of the net are in a dynamic of cooperation and their objective is to ensure maximum coverage of the playing surface. The physical distance of at least two meters is therefore necessary and constitutes the strategy at the heart of the game. Each player has a specific assigned area and a specific role to play that excludes proximity, as shown in the following illustration:



Although the areas covered are not fixed, the strategy of doubles as well as the communication between the partners avoids close contact. The concern to ensure the safety of his or her partner requires constant distance because of the risks represented by the movements of the racquet.

We are aware that the playing of doubles will generate more traffic in clubs, but to alleviate concerns, the OTA is recommending that only recreational is allowed and not competitive at this stage. We prefer this approach, because the reduced playing intensity makes it possible to recommend a safe and controlled positioning of the players.

The context of doubles play allows compliance with the physical distance guidelines based on the following:

- Four players share a space of 600 m², therefore 300 m² per duo of partners and close situations during matches are extremely rare, as is the potential for close contact;
- Due to the nature of this sport, the players are permanently beyond the two meters distance and there is rarely a closer interaction, because the racquets are 0.9 m or more in length at arm's length;
- Beginning players (adults and juniors) remain in the basic positions 90% of the time (see illustration 1 below). The game is slow and the exchanges short. An exception is the presence of more than one player at the net. The risks of approaching within two meters are therefore almost nonexistent with this configuration;
- Older players, who are generally less mobile, opt for a 3/4 position on the court (illustration 2) without risking breaking the rules of physical distance. The players cover only a small area and move slowly. Consequently, the risk of uncontrolled movements where the partners converge on the same ball and find themselves within two metres is low;
- During the game, the partners are in constant communication in order to determine who will strike the ball or balls in the adjoining areas. The only dynamics of play that can result in a move closer than two meters would be when a ball is struck hard (Illustration 3) in the center and both partners at the net instinctively move towards the ball. Although possible, this situation is particularly rare and only lasts a fraction of a second.

- Celebration of point wins between partners should be limited to virtual high-fives at a safe distance;
- All the same safety procedures applicable to singles would apply in doubles: frequent hand sanitizing, avoid touching tennis balls other than your own, keep 2m distance between points and when exiting the court;
- To avoid too many balls on the court, only the player serving should have their three balls in play – the other three players should put their balls aside or in their pocket;
- Following these safety procedures and general strategies for doubles, it is the OTA's opinion that all four players on the court need NOT be from the same family or household. Again the emphasis is on physical distancing and frequent hand sanitizing.

For all these reasons and as evidenced by the illustrations provided, the OTA recommends that playing doubles can be done in a responsible and safe manner according to the directives issued by government authorities and Public Health. The addition of playing doubles tennis would generate positive benefits without amplifying the risks of spreading COVID-19. It would allow a larger number of tennis players and families to participate in this sport and who, for several reasons, are not able to play singles.

THE DIFFERENT CONFIGURATIONS OF THE DOUBLES TEAMS

