



# MONTANA HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

PROMOTING SUCCESS ON THE COURT, ON THE FIELD, ON STAGE  
AND EVERYWHERE ELSE UNDER THE BIG SKY SINCE 1921.

August 25, 2025

**TO: MHSA SUPERINTENDENTS, PRINCIPALS AND ACTIVITIES DIRECTORS;  
MOA REGIONAL DIRECTORS AND FALL MOA SPORTS POOL LEADERS**

**FROM: GRETA BUEHLER, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR & SPORTS MEDICINE LIAISON**

**RE: INFORMATION ON SMOKE, EXCESSIVE HEAT AND LIGHTNING**

As contests begin across the state, I would like to remind everyone that our late summer weather can lead to many areas of the state experiencing smoke, excessive heat and/or lightning. I have included detailed information below for dealing with these situations. Please review this information before your next contests/meets and if you have questions, please contact the MHSA office at 406-442-6010.

## SMOKE

As a reminder, below are the current *Outdoor Activity & Air Quality Guidelines for Schools*. A link to the complete document is provided [here](#).

Outdoor Activity & Air Quality Guidelines for Schools and Child Care Facilities					
Health Effect Category	Good	Moderate	Unhealthy for sensitive groups*	Unhealthy	Very Unhealthy/ Hazardous
Visibility (miles)	13+	9-13	5-9	2-5	Less than 2
Air Quality Index (AQI)	0-50	51 - 100	101 - 150	151 - 200	201 +
Recess or Other Outdoor Activity (15-30 minutes)	No limitations	No limitations	Keep students with chronic lung or heart conditions indoors. Make indoor space available for all children to be active, especially young children.	Keep all students indoors and limit students to light or moderate activities.	Keep all students indoors and limit students to light activities.
Physical Education Class (1 hour)	No limitations	Monitor sensitive groups and limit their vigorous activities.	Keep students with chronic lung or heart conditions indoors. Limit these students to light activities. Make indoor space available for all students to be active, especially young children. If outdoors, limit students to light or moderate activities.	Conduct P.E. classes in an indoor environment with good air quality and limit students to light or moderate activities.	Conduct P.E. classes in an indoor environment with good air quality and limit students to light activities.
Athletic Events and Practices (2-4 hours)	No limitations	Monitor sensitive groups and limit their vigorous activities.	Students with chronic lung or heart conditions should abstain from outdoor practices and events based on the severity of their condition and sensitivity to smoke. Consider moving practice and events indoors. If events are not cancelled, increase rest periods and substitutions to allow for lower breathing rates.	Reschedule events or relocate to an area with good air quality. Conduct practices in an indoor environment with good air quality and limit students to light activities.	Reschedule/cancel events. Conduct practices in an indoor environment with good air quality and limit students to light activities.
Visit <a href="http://todaysair.mtdeq.us">todaysair.mtdeq.us</a> for local air quality conditions and more information.					

Air quality data, including that from schools' PurpleAir monitors, can be accessed at <https://fire.airnow.gov/#>. Up-to-date air quality information can also be accessed at [www.deq.mt.gov](http://www.deq.mt.gov) or <http://todaysair.mt.gov>.

## HEAT

Follow *NFHS Heat Acclimatization & Heat Illness Prevention Guidelines*. A link to the complete document is provided [here](#). Sport-specific accommodations for heat are summarized below:

### Cross Country

Cross country meet managers can take several precautions for unusual heat:

- Move meet starting times to earlier in the morning.

- Rule 3-2-4u allows for providing liquids during competition. Have several water stations set up throughout the course. Coaches can be allowed on the course to give additional water to their athletes.
- Provide misters or spots on the course for runners to run through a water spray, if possible.
- Station medical personnel along course.
- Have a trail official in a golf cart with a trainer and water.

### **Football**

- Football officials can call an official's timeout for unusual heat. NFHS Rule 3-5-7g states an official's time-out (which is not charged to either team) occurs during a dead ball for unusual heat or humidity which may create a health risk to the players.
- Officials should not schedule these timeouts. In previous seasons, officials have announced during the pregame that they would be taking a timeout during each quarter at the six-minute mark for heat and hydration issues. This should not be done by the game officials. The purpose of this rule is not to pre-schedule these timeouts during a game, but to randomly have these timeouts during the game.

### **Soccer**

- Soccer officials have the authority to suspend play when conditions warrant.

### **Golf**

- Encourage athletes to properly hydrate for the conditions.
- Tournament officials have the authority to suspend play when conditions warrant.

## **LIGHTNING**

Lightning is often a possibility during contests. Here is a summary of the NFHS/MHSA guidelines for handling lightning disturbances:

### **Proactive Planning:**

1. *Assign staff to monitor local weather conditions before and during practices and contests.*
2. *Develop an evacuation plan, including identification of appropriate nearby safer areas and determine the amount of time needed to get everyone to a designated safer area:*
  - a. *A designated safer place is a substantial building with plumbing and wiring where people live or work, such as a school, gymnasium or library. An alternate safer place from the threat of lightning is a fully enclosed (not convertible or soft top) metal car or school bus.*
3. *Develop criteria for suspension and resumption of play.*
  - a. *When thunder is heard or lightning is seen\*, the leading edge of the thunderstorm is close enough to strike your location with lightning. Suspend play for at least 30 minutes and vacate the outdoor activity to the previously designated safer location immediately.*
  - b. *30-Minute Rule. Once play has been suspended, wait at least 30 minutes after the last thunder is heard or lightning is witnessed\* prior to resuming play.*
  - c. *Any subsequent thunder or lightning\* after the beginning of the 30-minute count will reset the clock and another 30-minute count should begin.*
  - d. *When independently validated lightning-detection devices or mobile phone apps are available, this technology could be used to assist in making a decision to suspend play if a lightning strike is noted to be within 10 miles of the event location. However, you should never depend on the reliability of these devices and, thus, hearing thunder or seeing lightning\* should always take precedence over information from a mobile app or lightning-detection device.*

\* – At night, under certain atmospheric conditions, lightning flashes may be seen from distant

*storms. In these cases, it may be safe to continue an event. If no thunder can be heard and the flashes are low on the horizon, the storm may not pose a threat. Independently verified lightning detection information would help eliminate any uncertainty.*

4. *Review the lightning safety policy annually with all administrators, coaches and game personnel and train all personnel.*
5. *Inform student-athletes and their parents of the lightning policy at the start of the season.*

Protocol when lightning is seen:

1. Officials and game administration should suspend play and clear the field and stands for at least 30 minutes.
  - a. The process for removing teams from the field when lightning is observed usually works well, but many times fans do not leave the stadium during these delays. **It is imperative you announce that play has been suspended and the facility needs to be evacuated.** [Sample announcements](#) are linked to use during your contests/meets.
  - b. It is the administration's responsibility to make sure the players and students have been evacuated to safe areas. If fans do not leave the stadium, it becomes their responsibility for ignoring the evacuation announcements after being notified by game administration of the risk.
2. **Officials and contest administration should contact the MHSA staff liaison for the particular sport:**
  - a. **Scott Wilson – (406) 249-8674 – football**  
**Kip Ryan – (406) 930-1047 – cross country**  
**Greta Buehler – (406) 690-0714 – soccer**  
**Brian Michelotti – (406) 465-0556 – golf, all activities**
  - b. MHSA personnel can also assist with sport-specific rules and regulations pertaining to delayed or terminated contests, rescheduling, etc.
3. Officials, contest administration and head coaches should meet to decide on resumption or suspension of play.
  - a. Contest administration should use every available weather resource (lightning meter, smartphone app, etc.) to look at the short-term forecast for the local area when making resumption of play decisions.
  - b. When using a smartphone app (Weather Bug), the reporting station must be local or the NFHS 30-minute rule should be followed. For example, game management in Fairfield cannot use data from the Great Falls airport for decisions.
  - c. If you have these technologies available when lightning is seen in the distance, and the technology accurately shows the lightning is at a safe distance and moving away from your area, the decision could be made to resume your game immediately.
  - d. Participant and spectator safety is the highest priority, so work together to ensure the proper decisions are made.

If a second lightning sighting occurs:

1. Repeat steps 1-3 above.

If play is resumed:

1. Appropriate personnel should continue to monitor the lightning status throughout the contest.
2. For football, the halftime intermission may be shortened by mutual agreement of opposing coaches if a weather delay occurs during the last three minutes of the second period.

If you have any questions pertaining to adverse weather conditions, please contact our office for more information.