

2026 MHSA and NFHS Cross Country Changes and Information

For the 2026 season, below we have listed the major NFHS and MHSA Rule changes and also some other important MHSA cross country information. Please contact Kip in the MHSA Office if you have any questions.

FIRST DAY OF CROSS COUNTRY PRACTICE AND MEETS

For the 2026-27 school year, the starting date for cross country practice will be Friday, August 14th and the first date for cross country competition will be Thursday, August 27th. No individual shall participate in any Association cross country meet until he/she has a minimum of eight (8) days of cross country practice of at least one practice session per day on eight (8) different days (no practice is permitted on Sunday), prior to the date of the first allowable cross country meet.

NUMBER OF MEETS

No student shall participate in more than ten (10) meets excluding Association sponsored meets. No cross country athlete may participate in an out-of-state invitation only meet unless approved by the MHSA Executive Director. Any out-of-state participation approved under these criteria will count toward the ten-meet limit for the particular athlete.

POST SEASON COMPETITION

For an athlete to be eligible to compete in post-season competition he/she must compete in at least two (2) Association sanctioned meets, which can be varsity or sub varsity meets, during the regular cross country season. Only a medical waiver from a certified physician stating that an athlete has sustained an injury preventing him/her from competing until that time will be accepted as a condition to be exempt from the rule. The high school for which the student will participate must file a request with the MHSA Executive Director for consideration of a waiver of this rule.

COURSE LENGTH

Course length is 5 Kilometers.

QUALIFYING TIME

As approved by the MHSA Executive Board, for the State Cross Country Meet: athletes in classes AA, A, B, and C must meet a minimum time in at least one regular season cross country meet prior to participation in the 2026 State Cross Country Meet. The minimum times are as follows:

Classes AA, A, B, & C

Boys – 25.00 minutes or faster

Girls – 30.00 minutes or faster

Athletes who do not meet the required performance time at least once during regular season competition will not qualify for participation at the State Cross Country Meet and cannot be entered as a team member or alternate.

Coaches will be required to submit a form stating the qualifying time of each athlete entered in the Meet when they pick up their Coach's Packet in Billings.

STATE MEET TO BE HELD IN BILLINGS

The 2026 State Cross Country Meet will be staged in Billings on October 24. The competition will take place at Amend Park. Each member school's boys' and/or girls' team(s) may enter seven (7) athletes and two (2) alternates.

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To view the current MHSA State and NFHS Cross Country Rules addressing uniform and sportsmanship items that all coaches and competitors will be expected to adhere to during the regular cross country season and at the State Cross Country Meet, go to www.mhsa.org; navigate to the cross country page and click on the 2026 State Cross Country Policies and Procedures and NFHS Rules.

MHSA 63rd STATE CROSS COUNTRY CHAMPIONSHIPS

OCTOBER 24, 2026

AMEND PARK

BILLINGS, MONTANA

2026 State Cross Country Order of Competition and Awards Presentation Schedule

Start Time

11:00 am	C - Girls	At conclusion, C Girls' individual awards
11:30 am	AA - Girls	At conclusion, AA Girls' individual awards
12:00 pm	C - Boys	At conclusion, C Boys' individual awards and C boys'/girls' team trophies
12:30 pm	AA - Boys	At conclusion, AA Boys' individual awards and AA boys'/girls' team trophies
1:00 pm	A - Girls	At conclusion, A Girls' individual awards
1:30 pm	B - Girls	At conclusion, B Girls' individual awards
2:00 pm	A - Boys	At conclusion, A Boys' individual awards and A boys'/girls' team trophies
2:30 pm	B - Boys	At conclusion, B Boys' individual awards and B boys'/girls' team trophies

STATE CROSS COUNTRY FEES

Each school participating in the 2026 State Cross Country Meet shall share proportionally the cost of running the Meet by paying a \$7.00 fee for each athlete that actually participates in the State Meet (alternates are not considered

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participants). Example for Team A: 7 boy participants and 7 girl participants = 14 total participants X \$7.00 for each participants = \$98.00 will be the fee Team A must pay to participate. Coaches will be required to pay the total fee at the time they register for the state cross country.

Please share this information with your cross country coaches and if you have any questions or concerns please call Kip Ryan at 442-6010 or email him at kryan@mhsa.org.

Deadline for State Cross Country entries is Sunday, October 20th at 3:00 p.m., any school missing the deadline will be assessed a \$100 fine.

Reminder NFHS Major Rule Changes

Other rules revisions approved by the Track and Field Rules Committee include the following:

4-6-5: Permits an appropriate health care professional, designated by the games committee, to evaluate a downed competitor without resulting in disqualification.

Rationale: The change permits the games committee to designate an appropriate health care professional to evaluate a downed competitor on the course without resulting in disqualification provided no assistance is given in progressing along the course. It prioritizes athlete safety by permitting on-course evaluation while preserving the integrity of the competition.

4-6-6c (NEW): Clarifies athletes are not permitted to wear any type of audio or video recording devices during a race, trial, or while in restricted areas.

Rationale: No athlete participating in a meet is permitted to wear any type of audio or video device to record or transmit in a race, trial or in restricted areas. This language aligns with other NFHS rules books.