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‘Why should we be robbed of our childhood?': Delhi students who took fight against air pollution to HC

Eleven students moved court to shift the sports calender amid Capital's polluted months. The Indian Express speaks to two of them.



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Written by **Drishti Jain**

New Delhi | Updated: November 23, 2025 12:51 PM IST

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Delhi sees another bad air day on Saturday, recording AQI of 370. (Gajendra Yadav)

Fifteen-year-old Abhiveer Gulati, a resident of Vasant Vihar in Delhi, has not gone out of his house to play since late October. Though he is going to school, the condition there is no better.

“Teachers at school advise us not to leave the class... even access the corridors. There’s no one walking the corridors, there’s no one in the field. Our physical education classes are conducted indoors,” says Abhiveer, one of the 11 school students who had moved [Delhi](#) High Court seeking rescheduling of outdoor sports and tournament calendar to avoid the months between November and January, when the Capital experiences severe bad air.

Until recently, much of his day revolved around participating in cricket sessions, playing football matches, cycling with friends or simply taking a walk in the school corridor or field.



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However, last month, after a cricket practice session, his throat clogged up, eyes became watery and a headache sent him to a doctor's chamber. "The doctor told me that I had an acute wheezing and bronchitis attack... I was advised to stay indoors and missed school for an entire week," he recalls.

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When he returned to school, his confinement continued as he could not play and practice for upcoming tournaments. The restricted routine – home to school and back – made his interaction with peer groups limited, says Abhivier.

Frustrated, Abhiveer, along with 10 of his schoolmates, moved the HC. The students, who actively participate in sports, sought that directions be issued to the Directorate of Education (DoE) — which schedules zonal, interzonal and state-level tournaments, coaching camps and selection trials — and the School Games Federation of India (SGFI).

During the hearing on Wednesday, the HC remarked orally that the Delhi government was “shirking its responsibility” by allowing sports activities between November and January.

Justice Sachin Datta sought a status report from the government on the steps it has taken this year, as well as the steps it intends to take for the next year, to address the issue.

The same day, the Supreme Court asked the air pollution watchdog for Delhi-NCR to consider issuing directions to schools to move sports activities scheduled in November and December to “safer months”. The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) complied within hours, directing state governments in the region to postpone all physical sports competitions scheduled for November and December.

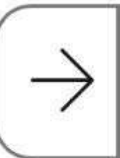
“Sports was our way to connect. We do connect online now but it’s not the same,” says Abhiveer. “Why should we be robbed of our childhood,” he asks.

His mother, Vidyut Gulati, worries how much time he now spends on computers and video games. “It is disturbing to see that the bulk of his time goes into playing games on the computer as he tries to connect with his friends.”

Abhiveer says he came to know about air pollution when he was 7. “I had then participated in a march against air pollution at Jantar Mantar.”

Abhiveer says the push for legal action came organically. “It began as a small conversation among a few of us. Then our parents joined in, and everyone realised something has to be done,” he adds.

His friend Reyansh Poddar – a track athlete since he was in Class 4 and a petitioner – experiences watery eyes and itchy throat when he steps out.



“I experienced a coughing fit in the middle of a training session. That’s when I realised that it is not safe for younger athletes and it pushed me to think that something bigger needed to be done,” he says.

“Everything feels dull. People around me constantly talk about AQI and how polluted the air is...,” he adds.

According to a 2021 study conducted by AIIMS Delhi, Kalawati Saran Children’s Hospital and Vallabhbhai Patel Chest Institute, even short-term exposure to polluted air can lead to a marked rise in emergency room visits by children facing acute respiratory symptoms, both on the day of exposure and for up to six days later.

“I have read articles which say that living in Delhi can reduce your lifespan by 5-6 years. It saddens me because this city is my home,” says Abhiveer.

