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Eye on winter pollution, Delhi government moves up school sports calendar

After 11 students moved the Delhi High Court over sports being held during peak pollution months, the government has advanced the 2026-27 school sports calendar.

Written by: **Sohini Ghosh**, **Drishti Jain**

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Delhi's worst air months are now off-limits for school sports.

The state government has revised its sports calendar for 2026-27, telling the Delhi High Court that all events will be completed by October to ensure students don't play outdoors between November and January when the capital's air quality ranges between 'severe' and 'hazardous'.

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In a circular dated July 6, the Directorate of Education's sports branch issued the tentative schedule for the Delhi State School Games (DSSG) zonal competitions, which includes 40 sports such as athletics, rope skipping, thang-ta, throwball and yoga.

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The schedule shows that the competition will conclude by September 19 at the latest.

The change brings forward trials that would otherwise have been held between November and January each year.

This comes after 11 school children who actively participate in sports had approached the High Court in November 2025, with a plea to ensure that tournaments and trials for outdoor sports are not scheduled during peak pollution months.

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Taking note of the fresh circular, Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma Monday closed the plea after the children's counsel, senior advocate Shyel Trehan, expressed satisfaction with the government's move. "This is what the children came for, this is a positive step," Trehan told the court.

At the time of the court hearing, one of the petitioners, Abhiveer Gulati (16), was in school and was informed by his mother of the rescheduled sports calendar.

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Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Gulati, a Class 12 student at Vasant Valley School, said, "I believe a lot of people, especially those who're very sensitive to air pollution, may not have been actually participating in sports because of the polluted air. With this rescheduling, I think participation may increase, which means better performance as well."

Gulati, an avid football and cricket player, stopped training in late October last year, confining himself indoors. The severe air pollution had clogged his throat, made his eyes water and left him with a headache, ultimately making him knock on a doctor's chamber.

Playing since Class 3, he said he has missed out a lot as sports events were scheduled during peak pollution months. "I did not step out because it would affect my health, and I had to use a nebulizer. I missed out on our practice sessions," he said.

This year, however, sports has taken a backseat for Gulati, who will be appearing for his Class 12 board exams.

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Delhi-NCR schools holding sports activities against court directive, SC told

Behind the plea

In their plea, the 11 students had argued that scheduling sports tournaments in Delhi amid hazardous air quality left them and thousands of other children to choose “between their fundamental right to life and education”.

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The students had also highlighted that the past 10 years has seen a “repeated cycle of toxic air pollution in Delhi in this period,” which is “increasingly becoming a major health issue for children participating in such events”.

The children had sought that directions be issued to the DoE, which schedules zonal, interzonal and state-level tournaments, as well as coaching camps and selection trials, and the School Federation of India Games (SFGI), which schedules the calendar for the national tournaments.

According to SGFI’s national games calendar for this year on its website, most of the national tournaments in New Delhi have been scheduled commencing the third week or fourth week of October. Few events, such as tennis, boxing and rugby are scheduled November onwards.

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In February this year, the government had told the court that the state would be willing to defer sports events if the Air Quality Index (AQI) crosses a certain level, but expressed difficulty in changing the calendar entirely.