

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2026

How Bad Air Has Redrawn Playing Field For Schools

Causes Rethink On Sports Calendars, Many Turn To Indoor Schedules

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New Delhi: With Nov and Dec likely to be lost to outdoor sports because of air pollution, Delhi-NCR schools are being forced to rethink their sports calendars.

Several schools are looking at moving annual sports days, athletics meets and inter-school competitions to Sept-Oct, while others may shift postponed events to Jan and Feb next year.

The challenge is greater for students training for competitive events, as changes to school-level competitions can affect trials, selection and preparation schedules. Parents, too, are likely to face questions over how much outdoor training can realistically be accommodated before winter sets in.

In its Sept 10 order, Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) asked Delhi and NCR administrations to ensure that physical sports activities and competitions are not scheduled in Nov and Dec, citing air-quality trends. It said competitions already scheduled could be rearranged, while ensuring students are not disadvantaged.

Schools are now responding by bringing forward events wherever possible. Ameeta Mohan, principal of Amity International School, Pushp Vihar, said the school has planned its calendar keeping the recurring air-quality challenges in mind. "We have strategically planned our annual calendar to schedule outdoor events and sports activities outside these months, wherever possible," she said, adding that the school would use flexible scheduling to maintain continuity in training for students preparing for competitive events.

At The Indian School, the focus is similarly on completing outdoor sports activities before the pollution-heavy months. Principal Tania Joshi said, "We are ensuring that we finish all our sports activities by Oct."

However, she acknowledged that the disruption is likely to hit students pursuing sports hard. Hence, the school is keeping its indoor auditorium available for those who compete in sports like badminton and do strength training. These students can follow flexible school timings, she said.

Other schools are preparing to replace outdoor activities with indoor training in Nov and Dec. Boonika Pathak,

principal of MM Public School, Pitampura, said the school was restructuring its calendar. The focus in the winter months will be on indoor sports, such as chess, table tennis, yoga, judo and badminton, along with online training modules.

For competitive players, coaches will conduct online sessions covering fitness, diet, rules, match analysis and mental conditioning, supplemented by home-based workout plans. The objective, Pathak said, is to ensure that preparation, trials and selection schedules are not disrupted by the restrictions.

For Mamta Modern School principal Pallavi Sharma, the issue is also about the shrinking window available to children to play outdoors. She noted that extreme heat affects this in May and June, rains in July and Aug, while examinations take up Sept. Oct has traditionally been the period when students return to the field for practice and tournaments. With Nov and Dec now effecti-

SHRINKING SPORTS SEASON

Schools are left with an increasingly narrow window for outdoor sport



May-June
Extreme
heat



July-Aug
Rains



Sept
Exams



Oct
Prime outdoor
window



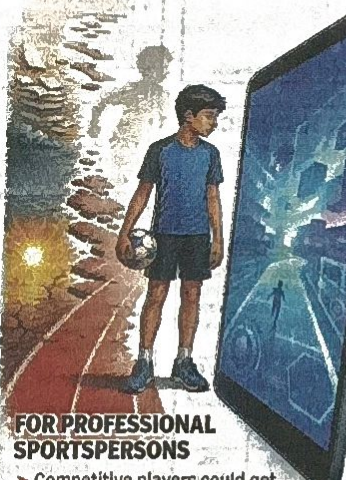
Nov-Dec
Pollution
restrictions

RACE AGAINST OCT

- > Some schools are front-loading outdoor sport, aiming to finish sports days, athletics meets and competitions by Oct-end
- > Events usually held in Nov-Dec may move to Sept-Oct or be pushed to Jan-Feb
- > Oct is becoming the key window between exams and winter pollution

WHEN FIELD GOES OFF-LIMITS

- > Winter focus shifts to badminton, table tennis, chess, yoga and judo
- > Auditoriums and indoor halls double up as spaces for badminton, fitness drills and strength training
- > Schools hope indoor activities will prevent a two-month break from physical activity



FOR PROFESSIONAL SPORTSPERSONS

- > Competitive players could get flexible school timings to train at indoor facilities elsewhere
- > Coaches may shift parts of training online, covering diet, fitness, strategy, rules and match analysis
- > Home workouts and mental conditioning could help maintain continuity

COMPETITIVE HIT

- > Interrupted practice can affect trials, selection and preparation for district, state and national events
- > Delhi-NCR players could lose practice time while competitions and training continue in other states
- > For serious athletes, the issue is not just missing games but losing crucial preparation weeks

MAJOR CONCERNS

- > Less outdoor play could mean more screen time and lower physical activity
- > Sports days can be rescheduled; everyday play is harder to replace
- > Schools say sport is also about fitness, teamwork, discipline, confidence and social interaction

vely unavailable for outdoor sports, schools are left with a much narrower window.

Sharma also flagged the possibility of students in Delhi-NCR losing practice and competition time compared with those in states where such restrictions do not apply. While schools can move tournaments to April-Aug, she said, conducting outdoor sports during the hotter months presents its own difficulties.

The concern is not limited to competitive sport. Sharma stressed that regular play contributes to discipline, teamwork, confidence and physical activity, while prolonged restrictions on outdoor activity could push children towards greater screen use.

The concern extends beyond individual school calendars. Jas Elanjikal, principal of St Michael's Senior Secondary School, Pusa Road, said many schools were already considering moving annual sports meets and competitions to Sept-

Oct or Jan-Feb. But he pointed out that changes to school-level competitions can have implications for district and state-level trials and preparation.

Govt schools, meanwhile, appear to have fewer scheduling concerns in some cases. Sunita, a govt school principal, said, "School-level sports competitions have already been completed, while the remaining state-level events are expected to be finished in Oct. Exams caused an earlier pause, but the pending competitions are now being completed."

After that, she said, only a limited number of national-level competitions are scheduled for Nov, Dec and Jan, involving relatively few students selected on the basis of performance. "Everything will be completed by the end of Oct," she said, adding that unlike last year, when competitions were repeatedly postponed because the calendar started late, the school has planned ahead this time.