

Date of Hearing: April 7, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON ARTS, ENTERTAINMENT, SPORTS, AND TOURISM
Christopher M. Ward, Chair
AB 2503 (Wallis) – As Introduced February 20, 2026

SUBJECT: California Interscholastic Federation: pupil health: heat illness: guidelines

SUMMARY: AB 2503 requires the California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) to revise existing heat guidelines for schools located in extreme desert climates.

Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires CIF to revise guidelines developed relating to the prevention and management of exertional heat illness for schools located in extreme desert climates within Region Category 3, characterized by prolonged periods of high ambient temperatures and acclimatized populations.
- 2) Requires CIF's guidelines to allow outdoor practices and contests for schools within Region Category 3 up to a Wet Bulb Globe Temperature (WBGT) of 93.5 degrees Fahrenheit if additional safety measures are implemented. These additional safety measures include, but are not limited to, all of the following:
 - a) Mandatory hydration breaks every 15 minutes.
 - b) Reduced practice intensity and duration.
 - c) Onsite monitoring by trained personnel for signs of heat illness.
 - d) Enhanced heat acclimatization protocols.
 - e) Availability of shaded rest areas and cooling measures.
- 3) Requires CIF guidelines to define eligibility for schools within Region Category 3 based on objective climatic data, such as average summer WBGT readings, historical temperature patterns, or other scientifically validated criteria.
- 4) Requires CIF guidelines for schools within Region Category 3 to allow for the temperature threshold to be raised above a WBGT of 93.5 degrees Fahrenheit based on updated peer-reviewed research, but prohibits lowering the threshold below a WBGT of 93.5 degrees Fahrenheit.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Requires CIF, in consultation with the California Department of Education (CDE), to develop guidelines, procedures, and safety standards for the prevention and management of exertional heat illness. (Education Code (EDC) 35179.8)
 - a) Guidelines developed pursuant to this section shall identify the environmental conditions at which a school shall limit and prohibit practice and play. These guidelines shall include information regarding the accurate measurement of environmental heat stress at

the site of the athletic activity, including the use of WBGT to determine ambient temperature, relative humidity, wind speed, and solar radiation from the sun, including sun angle and cloud cover.

- b) Guidelines developed pursuant to this section shall identify the environmental conditions at which a school shall have a method to institute whole-body cooling to treat a student athlete with exertional heat illness, especially heat stroke, that is easily accessible at all practice and contest venues.
- 2) Establishes the 1998 California High School Coaching Education and Training Program (HSCTP), administered by school districts, updated and rehearsed annually, and emphasizing the following components (EDC 35179.1):
- a) Development of coaching philosophies consistent with school, school district, and governing board of a school district's goals.
 - b) Sport psychology: emphasizing communication, reinforcement of the efforts of pupils, effective delivery of coaching regarding technique and motivation of the pupil athlete.
 - c) Sport pedagogy: how pupil athletes learn, and how to teach sport skills.
 - d) Sport physiology: principles of training, fitness for sport, development of a training program, nutrition for athletes, and the harmful effects associated with the use of steroids and performance-enhancing dietary supplements by adolescents.
 - e) Sport management: team management, risk management, and working within the context of an entire school program.
 - f) Training: certification in CPR, use of an automated external defibrillator (AED), and first aid, including, but not limited to, training in recognizing the signs and symptoms of, and responding to, concussions, heat illness, and, by July 1, 2024, cardiac arrest. Certification in CPR and use of an AED shall be consistent with national evidence-based emergency cardiovascular care guidelines. Concussion, heat illness, and cardiac arrest training may be provided by entities offering free, online, or other types of training courses. For purposes of this section, "heat illness" includes heat cramps, heat syncope, heat exhaustion, and exertional heat stroke.
 - g) Knowledge of, and adherence to, statewide rules and regulations, as well as school regulations, including, but not necessarily limited to, eligibility, gender equity, and discrimination.
 - h) Sound planning and goal setting.
- 3) Requires CIF to report to the appropriate policy committees of the Legislature and the Governor on its evaluation and accountability activities on or before January 1, 2023, and on or before January 1 every seven years thereafter. The report is required to include, but not be limited to, the goals and objectives of CIF with regard to, and the status of, all of the following (EDC 33353):

- a) The governing structure of CIF, and the effectiveness of that governance structure in providing leadership for interscholastic athletics in secondary schools.
- b) Methods to facilitate communication with agencies, organizations, and public entities whose functions and interests interface with CIF.
- c) The quality of coaching and officiating, including, but not limited to, professional development for coaches and athletic administrators, and parent education programs.
- d) Gender equity in interscholastic athletics, including, but not limited to, the number of male and female pupils participating in interscholastic athletics in secondary schools, and action taken by CIF in order to ensure compliance with Title IX of the federal Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1681 et seq.).
- e) Health and safety of pupils, coaches, officials, and spectators.
- f) The economic viability of interscholastic athletics in secondary schools, including, but not limited to, the promotion and marketing of interscholastic athletics.
- g) New and continuing programs available to pupil athletes.
- h) Awareness and understanding of emerging issues related to interscholastic athletics in secondary schools.

FISCAL EFFECT: None. This measure has been keyed non-fiscal by Legislative Counsel.

COMMENTS:

- 1) Author's statement. According to the author, "Coaches, athletic directors, administrators, and parents throughout my district have expressed frustration with the current CIF WBGT guidelines in Region 3. High school practices have been forced late into the evening or early morning to comply with the rules. The ripple effects are real. Logistical and transportation burdens, disrupted family routines, compromised sleep, and declining academic performance are pushing students and families to the breaking point. Living in California's desert communities fosters a unique kind of acclimatization. AB 2503 makes a modest adjustment to the heat threshold that would allow more practices to stay on schedule and better reflect desert athletes' ability to perform in extreme heat. The bill pairs this adjustment with strong safety provisions, including cold-water immersion tubs, mandatory water breaks, on-field shade, and light equipment requirements during high-heat conditions. This is a commonsense fix for the students these guidelines are meant to protect."
- 2) Background. CIF, in consultation with the CDE, has developed guidelines, procedures, and safety standards for monitoring the safety of practice and play when WBGT readings reach specified levels, and requires the governing board of the school district or the governing body of the charter school to ensure that there is a written emergency action plan in place that describes the location and procedures to be followed in the event of heat illness related to the athletic program's activities or events.

According to the National Weather Service (NWS), a WBGT is a measure of the heat stress in direct sunlight, which takes into account: temperature, humidity, wind speed, sun angle, and cloud cover (solar radiation). This differs from the heat index, which takes into consideration temperature and humidity and is calculated for shady areas. Using a WBGT monitor on-site provides more accurate data than that from the NWS and can help athletic programs to dictate modifications in activity (work/rest ratios, hydration breaks, equipment work, length of practice) that make sports safer for all participants.

Research indicates that when establishing WBGT guidelines for physical activity, the guidelines must be geographically specific. Researchers have established heat safety regions to address the differences in heat acclimation among residents in these areas. Thus, the first step for schools is to determine which geographic category applies to their location.



To the left is a map of the California heat safety zones (the darkest section is Region Category 3) matched to the CIF Sections that can be used to read the activity guideline chart. The next step is to match the WBGT reading with the activity guidelines in the chart below:

CIF guidance also provides direction on acclimatization for high school athletes to help them adapt to hot weather conditions and reduce the risk of heat-related illnesses. These include gradual increases in activity, adequate hydration, modifying practice schedules for cooler times of day, and monitoring athlete health to identify signs of heat-related illness.

| Cat 3 | Cat 2 | Cat 1 | Outdoor Activity Guidelines |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| <82.0°F <27.8°C | <79.7°F <26.5°C | <76.1°F <24.5°C | Normal Activities – Provide at least three separate rest breaks each hour with a minimum duration of 3 min each during the workout. |
| 82.2 - 86.9°F 27.9 - 30.5°C | 79.9 - 84.6°F 26.6 - 29.2°C | 76.3 - 81.0°F 24.6 - 27.2°C | Use discretion for intense or prolonged exercise; Provide at least three separate rest breaks each hour with a minimum duration of 4 min each. |
| 87.1 - 90.0°F 30.6 - 32.2°C | 84.7 - 87.6°F 29.3 - 30.9°C | 81.1 - 84.0°F 27.3 - 28.9°C | Maximum outdoor practice time is 2 h. Provide at least four separate rest breaks each hour with a minimum duration of 4 min each. <u>For Football/Field Hockey</u> ; players are restricted to helmet, shoulder pads, and shorts during practice. If the WBGT rises to this level during practice, players may continue to work out wearing full pads without changing to shorts. |
| 90.1 - 91.9°F 32.2 - 33.3°C | 87.8 - 89.6°F 31.0 - 32.0°C | 84.2 - 86.0°F 29.0 - 30.0°C | Contests are permitted with additional hydration breaks. Maximum outdoor practice time is 1 h. No protective equipment may be worn during practice, and there may be no conditioning activities. There must be 20 min of rest breaks distributed throughout the hour of practice. |
| ≥92.1°F ≥33.4°C | ≥89.8°F ≥32.1°C | ≥86.2°F ≥30.1°C | No outdoor workouts/contests. Delay practice/competitions until a cooler WBGT is reached. |

- 3) Training for coaches. Currently, the CIF offers training programs to high school coaches who receive a certificate upon course completion. The completed certificate is transferable between school districts. CIF's mandated coaches training program under the HSCTP currently includes instruction on CPR, First Aid and concussions, sudden cardiac arrest, and heat illness. "Heat illness" includes heat cramps, heat syncope, heat exhaustion, and exertional heat stroke.

CIF offers a free online concussion training course for coaches where they receive an immediate printed certification upon completion. The free CIF online training course in heat illness prevention includes sections which explore the principles of Heat Illness Awareness, Adequate Hydration, Gradual Acclimatization, Hydration Status Record Keeping, and offers Additional Prevention Measures. Currently, coaches must complete a CPR/First Aid/Concussion course and renew that training every two years. This applies to all CIF member schools, public and private.

- 4) Arguments in support. According to Palm Desert High School in support, "Our league's schools—including Rancho Mirage, Palm Desert, Palm Springs, Shadow Hills, La Quinta, and Xavier College Prep—regularly experience extreme temperatures during the early months of the school year. Practices often must be delayed late into the evening to comply with statewide thresholds that do not fully account for the unique climate of our desert environment. These delays result in student-athletes returning home late at night, impacting both their rest and academic success, and contributing to burnout.

"It is important to note that our student athletes are acclimated to these conditions throughout the year. Our programs emphasize safety by enforcing unlimited water breaks, readily available shade, and constant monitoring by certified athletic trainers and coaching staff. These safety measures, coupled with the students' year-round adaptation to desert temperatures, ensure that practices are conducted responsibly even when readings are slightly above the current statewide limits.

"The requested adjustment would allow for local flexibility while maintaining CIF's commitment to athlete safety. Our goal is to create equitable opportunities for participation that reflect the realities of our region."

- 5) Arguments in opposition. According to a coalition including the Climate Reality Project (Los Angeles and San Fernando Valley Chapters), North County Climate Change Alliance, CleanEarth4Kids.org, and others in opposition, "California currently ranks 35th amongst all states for sports safety, as rated by the Kori Springer Institute (up from last place in the prior reporting period). The rankings are based on written policies, and do not reflect verified safety practices across states. Most schools do not have properly trained, certified, or licensed athletic trainers, and fewer have necessary equipment, such as ice baths, in order to render immediate life saving aid in the event of heat stroke...

"WBGT guidelines were developed in the 1950s in an effort to reduce the number of heat related deaths among Army and Marine Corps members, not youth athletes, and are not related to health and developmental windows unique to youth and adolescents...

"This bill would potentially impose significantly elevated health risks to athletes, coaches, staff and observers due to extreme heat. Not all coaches, students and staff have grown up in

the extreme desert region, and an untold number are not acclimated to the climate, and neither are visiting teams, coaches, and parents traveling into the Category 3 region for competitions.”

- 6) Double-referral. Should the bill pass from this committee, it will be re-referred to the Assembly Committee on Education.
- 7) Policy considerations. The committee has concerns about increasing a scientifically determined safety threshold for holding high school athletic practices and games in high heat, without definitive research showing that it would be safe for student athletes. During the process of implementing provisions of AB 1653 (Sanchez), Chapter 589, Statutes of 2023, which established California’s use of the WBGT to determine heat stroke risk for CIF athletics, CIF consulted with climate experts to make marginal changes to regional heat category maps, in recognition of different microclimates impacting schools.

Changes to existing law could modify EDC 35179.8 to direct CIF to routinely update the guidelines, procedure, and safety standards for the prevention and management of exertional heat illness, in order to make changes if justified by new academic or scientific information on the risks associated with WBGT readings over 92 degrees.

- 8) Prior and related legislation:
- a) SB 1248 (Hurtado), Chapter 463, Statutes of 2024, requires CDE to compile and post on its website standardized guidelines that would trigger modifications to student physical activities during extreme weather conditions.
- b) AB 245 (McKinnor), Chapter 422, Statutes of 2023, adds to the CHSCTP, by July 1, 2024, training in recognizing and responding to the signs and symptoms of concussions, heat illness, and cardiac arrest.
- c) AB 1653 (Sanchez), Chapter 589, Statutes of 2023, requires the CIF, in consultation with the CDE, to develop guidelines, procedures, and safety standards for monitoring the safety of practice and play when WBGT readings reach specified levels, no later than July 1, 2024; and requires the governing board of the school district or the governing body of the charter school to ensure that there is a written emergency action plan in place that describes the location and procedures to be followed in the event of heat illness related to the athletic program's activities or events.
- d) AB 2800 (Chu), Chapter 21, Statutes of 2021, adds basic understanding of the signs and symptoms of, and appropriate responses to, heat illness, to the training component of the HSCTP.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Desert Empire League
 Palm Desert High School
 Small School Districts Association
 Xavier College Preparatory High School

Opposition

Beyond Plastics

Cleanearth4kids.org

Climate Reality Project, Los Angeles Chapter

Climate Reality Project, San Fernando Valley Chapter

Mothers Out Front National

Mothers Out Front Silicon Valley

Non-toxic Communities

North County Climate Change Alliance

Safe Healthy Playing Fields, INC.

San Diegans for Sustainable, Equitable, & Quiet Equipment in Landscaping

SoCal Stop Artificial Turf Task Force

West Coast Turf

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