

IHSA PRESS RELEASE

Illinois High School Association (IHSA) Executive Director Craig Anderson, members of the IHSA staff, and Illinois Elementary School Association (IESA) staff members met virtually with Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike, Deputy Governor Jesse Ruiz, and IDPH Chief of Staff Justin DeWitt on the evening of January 6, 2021.

"We appreciate the dialogue with state leadership and believe it is crucial that it continue moving forward," said IHSA Executive Director Craig Anderson. "We understand that the state faces shifting priorities as it continues to fight the pandemic, while also beginning the distribution of the vaccine. There was no expectation that a single meeting would resolve all our questions. However, we believe that collaboration with state officials is vital for the IHSA to be able to develop an informed plan for the 300,000-plus student-athletes and over 800 high schools that encompass the Association."

IHSA and IESA leadership used the meeting to reintroduce recommended mitigations from the IHSA Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC), as well as to seek understanding on any preliminary insight IDPH may have related to the return of interscholastic sports. The IHSA also asked IDPH leadership to review the risk levels of all remaining sports, with consideration for lowering some sports from their current risk levels.

"We believe that there is both data and science that validates the idea that we can safely conduct sports," said Anderson. "We have seen it work in other states and believe it can in Illinois if we utilize the mitigations provided by IDPH and the IHSA SMAC. Students are already leaving or participating out-of-state on weekends. We believe that competing for their high school remains the safest venue for participation."

"All IHSA sports remain on pause at the moment. Low risk sports may not begin until the state returns to Phase 4 in the All Sports Policy. The IHSA Board of Directors are scheduled to meet again on January 13.

"Our Board of Directors is going to have difficult decisions to make regarding the seasons' for medium- and high-risk sports very soon," said Anderson. "With no specific IDPH timeline or statistical benchmarks established for the return of sports and the calendar shrinking, putting together a puzzle that allows for all sports to be played becomes increasingly improbable. We continue to urge all residents of our state to be diligent in their efforts to adhere to safety guidelines, as a lower positivity rate remains the key to athletics returning."