

# **How will UIL handle COVID-19 issues during TXHSFB playoffs? Here's what we know about a postseason with no guarantees**

What if a team has to quarantine? How will neutral sites be determined?

Football teams in Texas are having to forfeit playoff games before the postseason begins.

The University Interscholastic League said state championship games could be postponed if a state finalist can't play because of COVID-19 — but nixed the idea of a team advancing in the playoffs after losing to a team that couldn't play the following week.

And the normally straightforward task of finding a neutral site for playoff games has become quite a chore.

This was supposed to be a season that celebrated 100 years of UIL football. Instead, the UIL is celebrating the fact that only about 10 percent of its games statewide weren't played.

Exactly 100 regular-season games in the Dallas area have been canceled or postponed this season. Paris made the playoffs despite having to forfeit two of its six district games for COVID-19 reasons, and district champion Wilmer-Hutchins has played five fewer games than its first-round playoff opponent (Kaufman).

The postseason will be even more bizarre and challenging for schools in Class 4A and below. Those schools start their playoffs Thursday, while teams in 6A and 5A still have four weeks remaining in their regular season.



It's a season where nothing was guaranteed, and still nothing is.

Complicating matters is the fact that COVID-19 numbers are rising again.

"Every phone call, every email, every text message you get, you're always wondering if you're about to lose players," Sanger coach Rocky Smart said.

On Nov. 4, Texas reported more than 9,000 new daily COVID-19 cases for the first time in three months. This week, Dallas County reported two of its worst days (1,248 new cases Monday, 1,401 on Tuesday) since the coronavirus pandemic began in March.

UIL deputy executive director Jamey Harrison said Tuesday that he considers this season a success so far. He said that at no point has the UIL considered pausing the season.

"It's been a challenging season for sure, but overall we're pleased with where we are," Harrison said. "About 90% of the scheduled games have been played so far. Having 90% of those games played means so much to those students in those games and to their families and to their communities.

"We will see what these next few weeks bring. As we stand today, I think our plan has proved to be the right way to go."

Teams that made the playoffs but won't get to play might feel differently.

As of Wednesday night, 11 teams statewide had been forced to forfeit their first-round playoff game because they couldn't play for COVID-19 reasons. That doesn't include a pair of Class 2A schools — Coleman (Division I) and Junction (Division II) — that qualified for the playoffs but announced before the district certification deadline that they wouldn't be able to play and were replaced in the postseason bracket by the fifth-place team from their district.

"It's going to be devastating," Aubrey coach Keith Ivy said about teams that end up in that position. "Not only for the kids, but for the parents, the families, the communities. I do not look forward to seeing that

happen to schools.”

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San Elizario, outside of El Paso, had not had any cancellations until its entire varsity team was recently put into quarantine and the school had to forfeit its playoff game against Fort Stockton.

Coach Roberto Herrera didn't get a chance to tell his team in person that the season was over, having to reveal that in an online meeting.

“It was very emotional,” Herrera said.

What will happen if a team wins a playoff game, then can't play the following round because of COVID-19 issues? Harrison said that the next opponent will get a bye, rather than having the losing team advance.

That guideline will apply all the way through the state semifinals. But the state's governing body for public school athletics wants to play its state championship games, even if it means delaying them.

The UIL states on its website that if one or both teams are unable to play in the state championship game due to COVID-19, then teams will be allowed to reschedule games at a site determined by both schools. Those games will be required to be completed by Jan. 16 in 1A through 4A, and by Feb. 13 in 5A and 6A.

It wasn't until Wednesday — the day before the playoffs start — that the UIL said it will hold its state championship games for 4A through 1A [at the Cowboys' AT&T Stadium](#) in Arlington. The games are scheduled for Dec. 16-18.

The UIL still hasn't finalized the location for its 6A and 5A state finals Jan. 15-16.

Sanger canceled last week's regular-season finale because about one-third of its 30-player varsity was in quarantine, and Sanger ISD moved all classes online for its high school and middle school until Nov. 30 because COVID-19 cases were still prevalent on those campuses.

Smart said he supports the decision because it limits the chance of exposure for his players, and Sanger will get all but two of its quarantined players back for Saturday's 6 p.m. playoff opener against Iowa Park at the Ford Center at The Star.

"If you had told me six months ago that we were going to be doing this, I would have had a coronary," Smart said.

Coaches will have to be stronghearted when looking for playoff sites while 5A and 6A schools are still using their stadiums for regular-season games.

Smart said Sanger chose to play Saturday because it was the only time it could play at The Star, which hosts games for Frisco ISD schools on Thursdays and Fridays.

Ivy said that he and coaches from potential first-round playoff opponents called 12 to 15 locations and had no luck finding a neutral-site stadium. Aubrey will play at Mineral Wells on Thursday after losing

a coin flip for home field.

Preparing for a game doesn't just involve scouting the opponent. This year, it includes scouting the area for stadiums.

"Most schools I talked to, they're not hosting games while they're in district," said Celina coach Bill Elliott, whose team will open the playoffs with a home game against Vernon on Friday. "We'll go week by week and see what's available."

As if coaches didn't already have enough to worry about with COVID-19 and the uncertainty of this year's playoffs.

## Playoff schedule

The playoffs start Thursday for schools in Class 4A and below.

### Class 4A, 3A, 2A and 1A

Round	Dates
1	Nov. 12-14
2	Nov. 19-21
3	Nov. 26-28
4	Dec. 3-5
5	Dec. 10-12
State finals	Dec. 16-18

### Class 6A, 5A

Round	Dates
1	Dec. 10-12

2	Dec. 17-19
3	Dec. 24 or Dec. 26
4	Dec. 31-Jan. 1
5	Jan. 7-9
State finals	Jan. 15-16 (tentative)

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Note: No games will be played on Dec. 25

## **[Football](#)**

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