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NEWS

Alaska high school championships cancelled over virus fears

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) - The organization overseeing Alaska high school competitions has cancelled state championship events for all fall activities because of concerns over increased coronavirus cases.

The cancellations announced Tuesday by the Alaska School Activities Association affects football, swimming, volleyball, gymnastics, riflery, eSports, music and drama, debate and forensics, The Anchorage Daily News reported.

The organization postponed the start of winter activities until its board can adopt a revised calendar.

The association's board of directors met with Alaska Chief Medical Officer Anne Zink, Department of Education Commissioner Michael Johnson and Division of Public Health physician Liz Ohlsen Tuesday concerning rising case counts and the growing need for contact tracing.

The board then voted unanimously to cancel fall championships, association Executive Director Billy Strickland said.

"I think the board made the appropriate decision. I know we're going to get second-guessed," Strickland said. "No one gets into this business to cancel activities, so not having state championships is something we take seriously."

Regional championships can be held before Nov. 22, the association ruled.

Alaska's football playoffs started last weekend. Strickland said the postseason can continue, but only with games for teams in the same regions.

A playoff for Anchorage football teams is likely to occur as a replacement for the association's First National Bowl, Anchorage School District spokesman Alan Brown said.

"We anticipate holding some sort of regional football championship, but no details have been worked out yet," Brown said in an email.

Administrators planned to meet with school principals Wednesday to review the impact of the cancellation and consider options, Brown said.

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some - especially older adults and people with existing health problems - it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia, and death.

The number of infections is thought to be far higher because many people have not been tested, and studies suggest people can be infected with the virus without feeling sick.

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