

SENIOR HIGH FOOTBALL PRE-SEASON HEAT-ACCLIMATIZATION GUIDELINES

Practice or competition in hot and/or humid environmental conditions poses special problems for student-athletes. Heat illness is a primary concern in these conditions. Having a scripted practice plan with breaks from activity as well as scheduled hydration and cooling off periods will be of great assistance in preparing student-athletes for the football season.

REMINDER: No student is eligible to participate in Practices (including heat-acclimatization), Inter-School Practices, Scrimmages and/or Contests unless the student has completed a comprehensive initial pre-participation physical evaluation ("CIPPE") performed by an Authorized Medical Examiner.

CORE PRINCIPLES:

- 1. Acclimatization Period:** All schools sponsoring high school football are required to institute a heat acclimatization program. Heat acclimatization may begin no earlier than Monday or Tuesday (August 10 or 11, 2026) for 5 consecutive days prior to the Monday starting date (August 17, 2026) for the 2026 football season. If a school opts to institute heat acclimatization during this period, the intent is to have all members of the team be present and participate in all 5 consecutive days of the heat acclimatization period. A school must have 5 consecutive days of heat acclimatization prior to their first contact drills which may not be initiated before the first legal practice date of fall sports (Monday, August 17, 2026).
 - The practices for this week are limited to a 5-3-5-3-5 hours of practice daily for the 5 days of heat acclimatization. Practice sessions shall not be longer than 3 hours in length and teams must have at least 2 hours of rest (recovery period) between sessions. Days 1, 3 and 5 are limited to 5 hours of practice per day and Days 2 and 4 are limited to 3 hours of practice per day. NOTE: If a Team is unable to meet the 3 hour daily minimum due to school being in session during the day(s) of heat acclimatization, the Team is expected to maximize the time available for heat acclimatization on those days to satisfy the spirit and intent of this guideline.
 - Helmets and shoulder pads with shorts are permitted the first 5 days of heat acclimatization. Full gear and contact shall be permitted no earlier than Monday, August 17 after the completion of the five consecutive day heat acclimatization period.
 - If a school starts heat acclimatization on Monday, August 10, they may practice on Saturday, August 15, but there shall be no contact on this day since it is prior to the first contact day of Monday, August 17. If a school starts heat acclimatization on Tuesday, August 11, then Saturday August 15 is their 5th consecutive day of heat acclimatization and no contact is permitted.
- 2. Scrimmages:** A team shall not participate in a scrimmage prior to the first available scrimmage date as provided in Article XVI: Season and Out-of-Season Rules and Regulations of the PIAA By-Laws:
 - A school must satisfy the 5 consecutive days of heat acclimatization with helmets, shoulder pads, shorts, prior to their first legal practice with contact. In addition, a school must sponsor 5 regular practice days (where contact and full gear is permitted) before their first scrimmage.
 - If a school starts heat acclimatization on Monday, August 10, the earliest an inter-school practice or scrimmage could take place is Saturday, August 22.
 - If a school starts heat acclimatization on Monday, August 17, the earliest an inter-school practice or scrimmage could take place is Saturday, August 29.

3. **Contests**

- A school must satisfy the 15 days of practice, which would include days of heat acclimatization, practice, and inter-school practices or scrimmages, before their first contest.
 - If a school starts heat acclimatization on Monday, August 10, the earliest a contest could take place is Friday, August 28;
 - If a school starts heat acclimatization on Monday, August 17, the earliest a contest could take place is Friday, September 4.

4. **Participation Limitation:** No Team, no individual member or members of such Team, and no individual representing any PIAA member school, may Practice or participate in an Inter-School Practice, Scrimmage, Contest, and/or Open Gym on more than six days in any Calendar Week during the Regular Season.

5. **Out-of-Season Activities:** General conditioning provides only partial heat acclimatization. Therefore, student athletes should be exposed gradually to hot and/or humid environmental conditions to provide better heat acclimatization. Each exposure should involve a gradual increase in the amount of exercise that is undertaken over a period of days to weeks until the exercise intensity and duration is comparable to that likely to occur in competition. If conditions are extreme, training or competition should be held during a cooler time of the day.

- When protective gear and clothing is authorized by the school Principal outside of the defined season, frequent rest periods should be scheduled so that the gear and clothing can be loosened to allow evaporation of sweat and other forms of heat loss. During the acclimatization process, it may be advisable to use a minimum of protective gear and clothing and to Practice in T-shirts, shorts, socks and shoes. Excessive tape and outer clothing that restrict sweat evaporation should be avoided. Rubberized suits should never be used.

MIDDLE SCHOOL / JR HIGH FOOTBALL PRE-SEASON HEAT-ACCLIMATIZATION GUIDELINES (Effective July 1, 2026)

Practice or competition in hot and/or humid environmental conditions poses special problems for student-athletes. Heat illness is a primary concern in these conditions. Having a scripted practice plan with breaks from activity as well as scheduled hydration and cooling off periods will be of great assistance in preparing student-athletes for the football season.

REMINDER: No student is eligible to participate in Practices (including heat-acclimatization), Inter-School Practices, Scrimmages and/or Contests unless the student has completed a comprehensive initial pre-participation physical evaluation ("CIPPE") performed by an Authorized Medical Examiner.

CORE PRINCIPLES:

1. **Acclimatization Period:** All schools sponsoring high school football are required to institute a heat acclimatization program. Heat acclimatization may begin no earlier than Monday, August 17, 2026 for 5 consecutive days for the 2026 football season. A school must have 5 consecutive days of heat acclimatization prior to their first contact drills which may not be initiated before Saturday, August 16, 2025.

- The practices for this week are limited to a 5-3-5-3-5 hours of practice daily for the 5 days of heat acclimatization. Practice sessions shall not be longer than 3 hours in length and teams must have at least 2 hours of rest (recovery period) between sessions. Days 1, 3 and 5 are limited to 5 hours of practice per day and Days 2 and 4 are limited to 3 hours of

practice per day. NOTE: The Team is expected to maximize the time available for heat acclimatization on those days to satisfy the spirit and intent of this guideline. For the JUNIOR HIGH/MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL ONLY the team must minimally practice 90 minutes per day during heat acclimatization.

- Helmets and shoulder pads with shorts are permitted the first 5 days of heat acclimatization. Full gear and contact shall be permitted no earlier than Saturday, August 22 after the completion of the five consecutive day heat acclimatization period.
- 2. Scrimmages:** A team shall not participate in a scrimmage prior to the first available scrimmage date as provided in Article XVI: Season and Out-of-Season Rules and Regulations of the PIAA By-Laws:
- A school must satisfy the 5 consecutive days of heat acclimatization with helmets, shoulder pads, shorts, prior to their first legal practice with contact. In addition, a school must sponsor 5 regular practice days (where contact and full gear is permitted) before their first scrimmage.
 - If a school starts heat acclimatization on Monday, August 17, the earliest an inter-school practice or scrimmage could take place is Saturday, August 29.
- 3. Contests**
- A school must satisfy the 15 days of practice, which would include days of heat acclimatization, practice, and inter-school practices or scrimmages, before their first contest.
 - If a school starts heat acclimatization on Monday, August 17, the earliest a contest could take place is Friday, September 4.
- 4. Participation Limitation:** No Team, no individual member or members of such Team, and no individual representing any PIAA member school, may Practice or participate in an Inter-School Practice, Scrimmage, Contest, and/or Open Gym on more than six days in any Calendar Week during the Regular Season.
- 5. Out-of-Season Activities:** General conditioning provides only partial heat acclimatization. Therefore, student athletes should be exposed gradually to hot and/or humid environmental conditions to provide better heat acclimatization. Each exposure should involve a gradual increase in the amount of exercise that is undertaken over a period of days to weeks until the exercise intensity and duration is comparable to that likely to occur in competition. If conditions are extreme, training or competition should be held during a cooler time of the day.
- When helmets and clothing are authorized by the school Principal outside of the defined season, frequent rest periods should be scheduled so that the gear and clothing can be loosened to allow evaporation of sweat and other forms of heat loss. During the acclimatization process, it may be advisable to use a minimum of protective gear and clothing and to Practice in T-shirts, shorts, socks and shoes. Excessive tape and outer clothing that restrict sweat evaporation should be avoided. Rubberized suits should never be used.

DEFINITIONS

(Both Junior High / Middle School and Senior High)

Maximum Practice Time: The maximum allotted time per day for practice is 5 hours and teams must have 2 hours of rest between sessions.

Minimum Practice Time: The minimum practice time for the first five days is 3 hours per day (Note: 90-minutes for junior high/middle school).

Practice: The time a player engages in physical activity. It is defined that any practice session be no greater than three (3) hours in length. Warm-up, stretching, conditioning, weight training and 'cool-down' periods are all considered practice.

Recovery Period: A minimum of a two (2) hour recovery period must be provided after any session.

Walk-through: No protective equipment or strenuous activity permitted. Only balls and field markers (cones) may be used. Prevention of Heat Illness from the Sport Medicine Guidelines of the PIAA Handbook should be observed. These include regular measurements of environmental conditions. See Sports Medicine Guidelines for more detail or consult with your athletic trainer and/or team physician.

CONTACT GUIDELINES FOR FOOTBALL
(Both Junior High / Middle School and Senior High)

Regular and Postseason: No football player is allowed to participate in more than three (3) days of contact and sixty (60) minutes of full contact practice per week. A team may continue to dress in full pads for practice but may only participate in live action drills and game time simulations no more than sixty minutes per athlete per week. It is assumed that when players are in shells (shorts, shoulder pads, and helmets) no live action drills or simulations will occur. This rule is intended to limit live action drills and simulations and not the number of practices a team may participate in full pads. A team may participate in “air,” “bags,” and “wrap,” drills and simulations at any point. Live Action and Thud are considered full contact drills. These contact levels are defined below:

- **AIR** – Players should run unopposed without bags or any opposition.
- **BAGS** – Activity is executed against a bag, shield or pad to allow for a soft-contact surface, with or without the resistance of a teammate or coach standing behind the bag.
- **WRAP** – Drills run at full speed until contact, which is above the waist with players remaining on their feet.
- **FULL CONTACT:** For the purposes of the rule, “full contact” is defined as football drills or live game simulations where “live action” occurs.
- **LIVE ACTION:** as defined by USA Football, is contact at game speed where player execute full tackles at a competitive pace taking players to the ground.
- **THUD** – Same as wrap but tempo is competitive with no pre-determined winner and the players are not tackling to the ground.

FOOTBALL HEAT ACCLIMATIZATION FAQ'S

What date must the Heat Acclimatization start?

- No earlier than Monday, August 10, 2026 or Tuesday, August 11, 2026 for Senior High.
- No earlier than Monday, August 17, 2026 for Junior High / Middle School.

What is the minimum length of Heat Acclimatization?

- Five (5) consecutive days
 - If starting Monday, August 10, 2026 then up to and including Friday, August 14, 2026.
 - If starting Tuesday, August 11, 2026 then up to and including Saturday, August 15, 2026.
 - If starting Monday, August 17, 2026 then up to and including Friday, August 21, 2026.

What are the daily minimum and maximum times permitted for each session of the Heat Acclimatization Period?

- The minimum amount of time for practice each day during the Heat Acclimatization Period is three (3) total hours (Note: 90-minutes for junior high/middle school).
- The maximum amount of time for practice on Days #1, #3, and #5 is five (5) total hours.
- The maximum amount of time for practice on Days #2 and #4 is three (3) total hours.
- If you plan on using the five (5) total hours allotted for Days #1, #3, and #5, then you must have at least a two (2) hour rest period after three (3) hours of practice prior to practicing the additional two (2) hours.

The following is a sample illustration of a Heat Acclimatization Plan that meets the above provisions:

DAY	AM SESSION	BREAK	PM SESSION
1	8:00 AM – 11:00 AM	11:00 AM – 1:00 PM	1:00 PM – 3:00 PM
2	8:00 AM – 11:00 AM	N/A	N/A
3	8:00 AM – 11:00 AM	11:00 AM – 1:00 PM	1:00 PM – 3:00 PM
4	8:00 AM – 11:00 AM	N/A	N/A
5	8:00 AM – 11:00 AM	11:00 AM – 1:00 PM	1:00 PM – 3:00 PM

Who must participate in the Heat Acclimatization Period?

- All teams (senior high or junior high / middle school) shall complete five consecutive days of heat acclimatization.

What is the minimal amount of days a “team” must participate in the Heat Acclimatization Period?

- The team as a whole must participate in a minimum of five (5) consecutive days of Heat Acclimatization.

What if a student athlete(s) miss a day of the Heat Acclimatization Period due to illness or other excused absence?

- Student Athletes are expected to participate in all five (5) days of the Heat Acclimatization Period. Student athletes missing a day(s) of the heat acclimatization period must be evaluated by school coaching staff and medical personnel before permitting additional participation.

What equipment may players wear during the Heat Acclimatization Period?

- Student athletes may wear their helmet and shoulder pads during the Heat Acclimatization Period. Full gear shall not be worn until the first official day of Fall Sports (Monday, August 11, 2025). **Note:** Junior high / middle schools cannot wear full gear until the team has satisfied the five consecutive days of heat acclimatization.

May our team “scrimmage” another team during the Heat Acclimatization Period?

- No, teams may NOT “scrimmage”, conduct “inter-school practices”, etc. during the Heat Acclimatization Period.

**Special thanks to Jason Zimmerman and the District XI Committee for the development of the FAQ’s.*