

# Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer greenlights the resumption of high school sports during pandemic

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9 September 2020

As cases of athletics-related COVID-19 grow across the US, Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer announced Thursday that Michigan high school football is back. She lifted her executive order banning contact sports, permitting the resumption of football, basketball and soccer. Whitmer also reversed her position on the risks posed by gyms and fitness centers, allowing them to resume operations today.

The governor's decision apparently flies in the face of the advice of the state's top public health advisor. In a press release announcing the resumption of high school sports, Michigan's chief medical executive Dr. Joneigh Khaldun warned against engaging in contact sports. "Based on current data, contact sports create a high risk of COVID-19 transmission, and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services strongly recommends against participating in them at this time." She added, "COVID-19 is still a very real threat to our families."

With the government willing to admit that the transmission of the coronavirus will be facilitated through sports, why is the public being permitted to resume these nonessential activities? It is not for the health benefits of exercise, which can be accomplished with social distancing, but because of the demands of the ruling elite for a back-to-work by the population.

Even as tens of thousands across the US continue to test positive for COVID-19 every day, both Democrats and Republicans are attempting to present life as "normal" so that workers can be forced to return to unsafe factories and plants and continue pumping out profits.

The most strident demand for the resumption of football in Michigan came from Detroit Public Schools

Community District (DPSCD) Superintendent Nikolai Vitti. In a letter dated August 28 and addressed to the Michigan High School Sports Association (MHSSA), Vitti expresses "shock" at the prior decision to shift the football season to the spring. He noted, prior to the press release, "On the topic of fall sports, both @GovWhitmer and @MHSAA have failed student-athletes and families. Neither have led on the topic and it's embarrassing. Both should be blamed, namely the @MHSAA for even cancelling football."

In mid-August the MHSAA had announced the football season would be pushed back until next spring. In his letter, Vitti had said he was speaking for "countless players, coaches, and families" who have reached out to him "within Detroit and throughout the state, about their frustration with the MHSAA's decision." He urged the MHSAA to ignore Whitmer's Executive Order 176 and announce the resumption of football season in the fall. In any case, Whitmer is now in line with the near full-resumption of businesses and schools in the state.

Vitti, whose annual salary is \$321,000, was installed as superintendent in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Detroit Public Schools in 2016. The deal was engineered to bail out Wall Street bondholders, creating a new district, the vastly underfunded DPSCD inhabiting dozens of dilapidated buildings. Approximately half of Detroit's schoolchildren now attend privately-run, publicly-funded charter schools and likely the district sees sports—not offered in the stripped-down charter businesses—as a major attraction of public school.

According to Dr. Khaldun, there have been 30 reported outbreaks of the virus in August involving

athletic teams and facilities in Michigan. In her press release last Thursday, Khaldun said that individuals who wish to play contact sports should follow “strict safety measures” to reduce the risk of infection with COVID-19. The idea that limiting attendance numbers at games, as mandated by Whitmer, or minimal measures like frequent hand washing or not sharing towels, as recommended by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), will stop the coronavirus has already been shown as false.

Frankly, the lexicon of football illustrates the impossibility of combining infection control for corona with these sports. How would athletes observe any type of strict safety measures, the most critical of which is social distancing, while playing a sport that requires players to get in a “huddle” and to physically tackle each other and “get in each other’s face” with every snap of the ball? The virus is rapidly spread through aerosolized breath, which naturally accompanies the heavy breathing and sweating involved.

It has now been established through an immense body of scientific evidence that children can not only suffer and die from infection with COVID-19, but they can be asymptomatic carriers of the disease who can infect others with whom they come into contact.

As of this writing, the state of Michigan has experienced nearly 7,000 deaths due to COVID-19 infection. The state sustained more than 100 deaths per day during the final week of April, when lockdown measures deemed by the national media to be among the most rigorous to be imposed in any state, were fully in effect.

The city of Detroit overall has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused the deaths of at least 1,500 residents. Detroit has been subjected to decades of deindustrialization and policies that have contributed to a decline in both the living standards and health conditions of working-class communities. Statistics maintained by the Detroit Department of Health reveal that city residents suffer substantially higher rates of death from heart disease, diabetes, kidney disease, pneumonia, stroke and cancer than in the rest of the state of Michigan and across the US.

Moreover, the last two weeks have witnessed college campuses quickly becoming local epicenters of the disease throughout the country. Since the beginning of

the fall semester, there have been at least 51,000 COVID-19 cases reported at over 1,020 campuses, with at least 64 deaths in US colleges and universities. Many of these cases have been linked to college sports teams, including notably Louisiana State University and Clemson University, each reporting COVID-19 among more than 30 of their team athletes.



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