

Should Youth Sports Sidelines Be Smoke-Free?

A young player's campaign raises a bigger question about health, fairness, and rules at outdoor games.



An empty youth soccer field with a sideline bench and a faint haze beyond the fence.

An 11-year-old football player in England is asking leaders to ban smoking and vaping near children's sports games, according to BBC Newsround. Football is the sport many Americans call soccer. The player, Gracie, has **asthma**, a common long-term lung condition that can make airways swollen and narrow. She says smoke on the **sidelines** can make her chest hurt and force her to stop playing.

The story matters because it is not only about one team. It is about how communities decide what adults may do in shared spaces when children are nearby. Smoking is already banned inside many public places in the United Kingdom. But **outdoor** youth sports fields are different. In England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, adults are generally allowed to smoke outside. That means a person standing near a children's game may be following the law, even if the smoke bothers players.

Secondhand smoke is smoke breathed in by people who are not smoking. A health expert from Asthma + Lung UK told BBC Newsround that children can take in more smoke quickly when they are running, because they breathe faster during

exercise. Vaping means using an electronic device that heats liquid into an **aerosol**, or tiny particles in the air, that a person breathes in. The article focuses on both smoking and vaping because both can happen near a field where children are playing.

Some sports groups have tried to change behavior without making a new law. The Football Association of Wales banned smoking from the sidelines for small-sided and junior football in 2020 and added vaping in 2025. In England, some county football associations, including Cheshire FA where Gracie's team is based, take part in a Smokefree Sidelines program. That kind of program asks clubs and local councils to encourage adults not to smoke or vape near games. But it is mostly about education, not punishment. Coaches and clubs are not expected to challenge **spectators** directly if they refuse.

The law is not the same across the United Kingdom. Wales already bans smoking at playgrounds, schools, and hospital grounds. England is considering rules for playgrounds and areas outside schools, according to a Department of Health and Social Care spokesperson quoted by

BBC Newsround. Northern Ireland and Scotland have said they plan consultations, which are official efforts to ask people and experts what they think before changing a law. At the moment, though, there are no laws against smoking at children's sports matches outside school grounds.

The hard part is deciding where one person's freedom ends and another person's health begins. Many laws about smoking are built on that question. Adults may argue that an outdoor space is open air, not an indoor room. Families may answer that children cannot easily move

away during a game, especially if they are on the field, and that children with asthma may face a bigger risk than others.

It also shows how a local problem can become a civics question. In social studies, laws are often described as rules a **community** makes to solve shared problems. In health class, people learn that **prevention** can matter as much as **treatment**. This story sits at the meeting point of both subjects: a child wants to keep playing the sport she loves, and adults must decide whether polite requests are enough.

Written from reporting by BBC Newsround.

THINK IT THROUGH

1. Should outdoor youth sports fields have stricter rules than other outdoor public places? Defend your answer.

A strong answer: A strong answer should weigh children's health and limited choice during games against adults' freedom in open public spaces.

2. Is an education campaign enough, or should there be an enforceable ban on smoking and vaping near children's games?

A strong answer: A strong answer should compare voluntary cooperation with rules that have consequences, including who would enforce them.

3. If a town in the United States considered a similar rule, what information or voices should leaders gather before deciding?

A strong answer: A strong answer should mention evidence about health, views from families, coaches, players, smokers, health experts, and local officials.

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O M N E E N G E I E N O E O E O H D
N E E O A O E X T O A D E R N L T N
T E Y U N C H E I T O C N N R A T D
N U S A L E Y R O T M R O X T U P N
T O R I E R R C A U D A S C L W A U
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H M P O S S P E C T A T O R S Y U N
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AEROSOL

ASTHMA

COMMUNITY

EXERCISE

OUTDOOR

PREVENTION

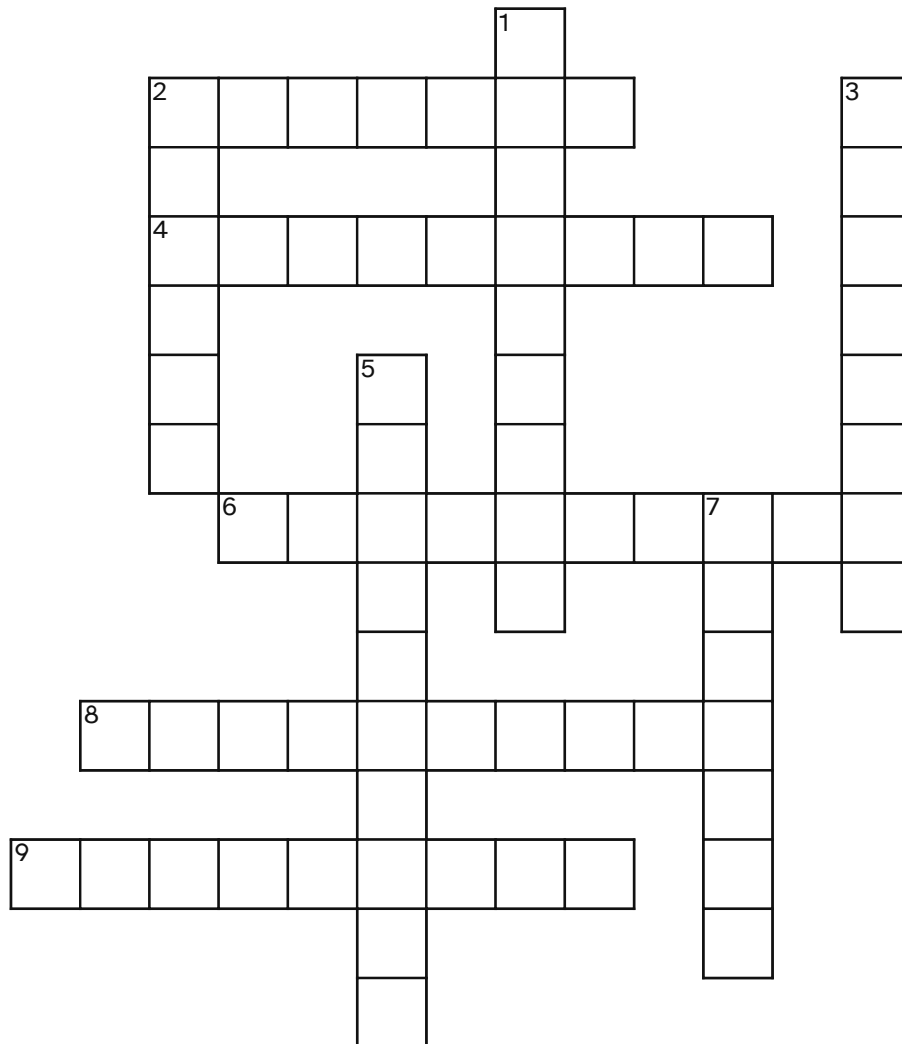
SECONDHAND

SIDELINES

SPECTATORS

TREATMENT

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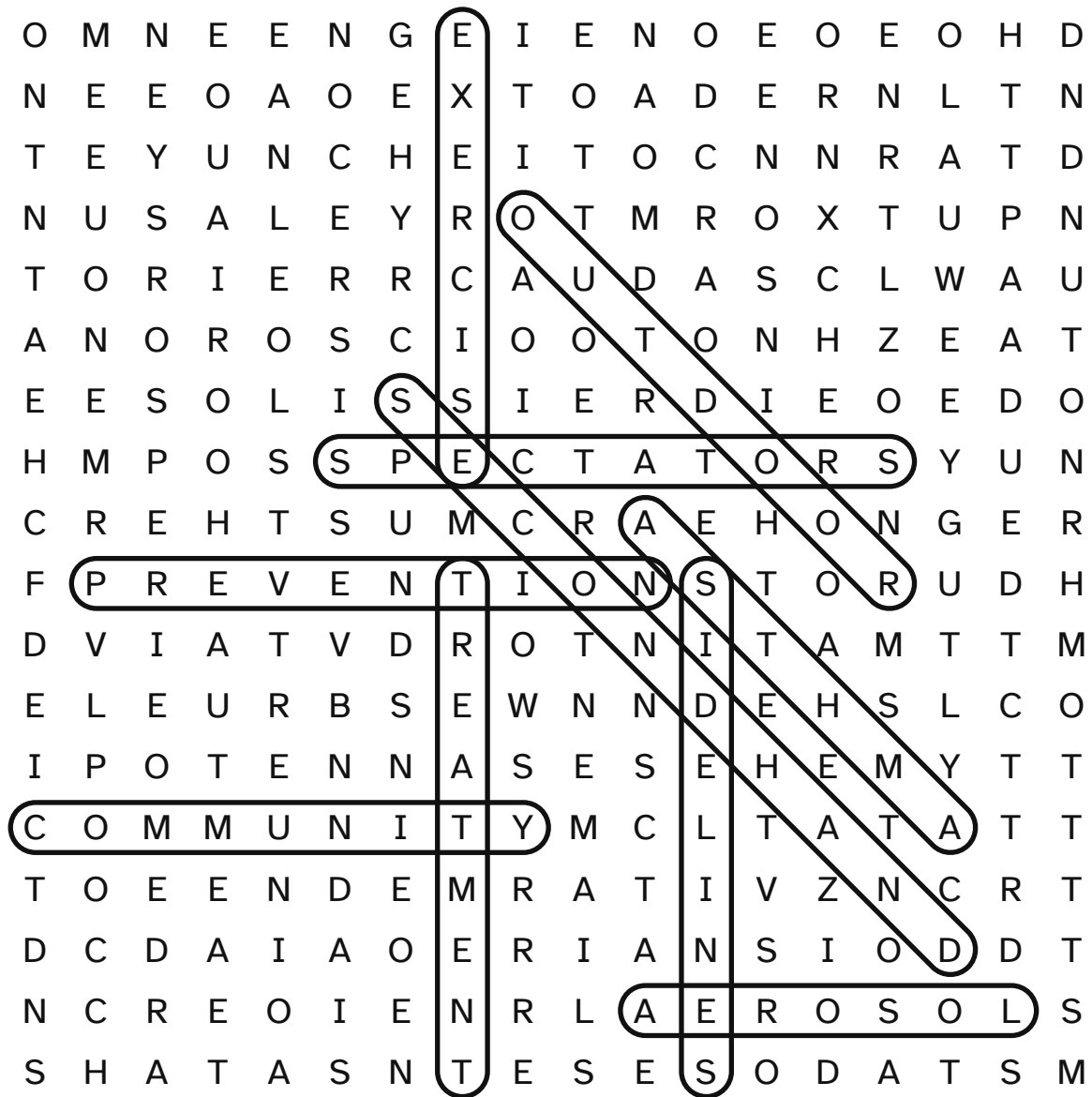
ACROSS

- 2 Tiny airborne particles, such as those from a liquid-heating e-cigarette
- 4 Medical care that helps someone manage or recover from illness
- 6 People watching a game or event without taking part
- 8 Smoke breathed in by someone who does not use tobacco
- 9 Edges of a sports field where coaches and watchers stand

DOWN

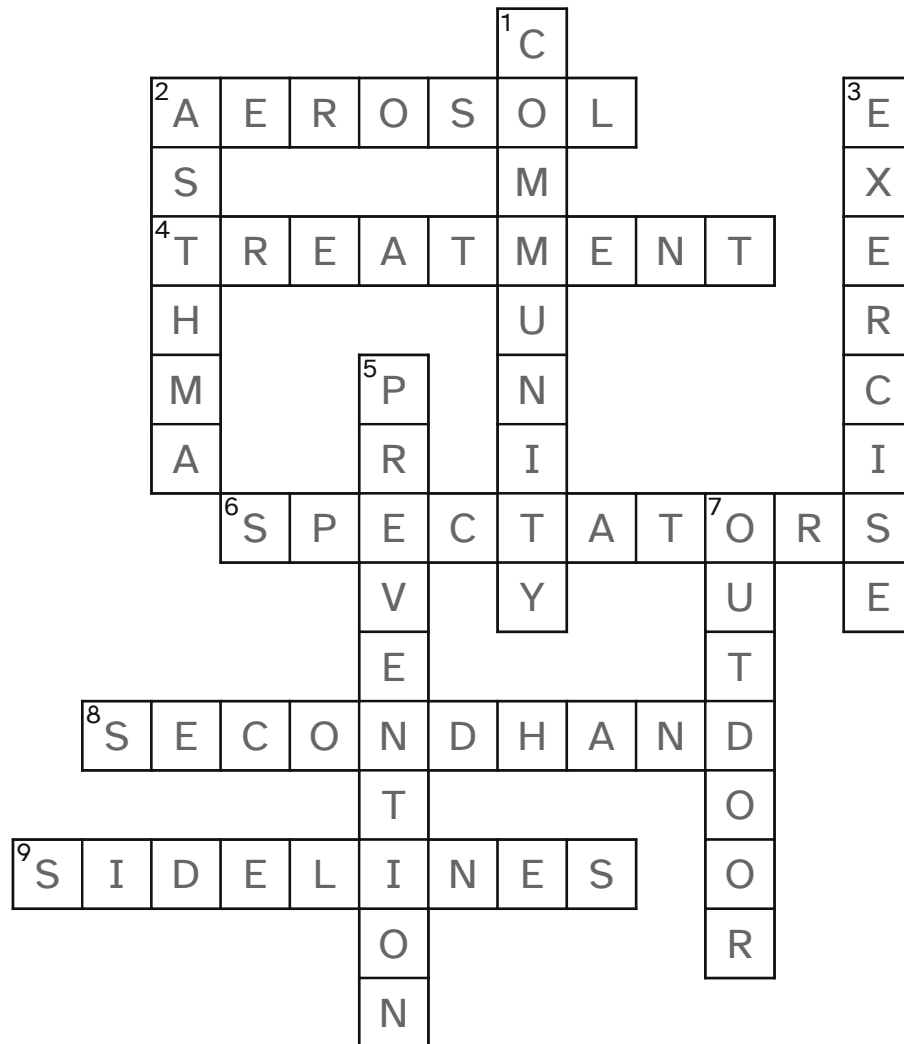
- 1 People sharing an area or common concerns and responsibilities
- 2 Long-term lung condition that narrows and swells breathing tubes
- 3 Body-working activity, such as running during a game
- 5 Steps taken to stop an illness before it begins
- 7 Located or happening outside a building

Should Youth Sports Sidelines Be Smoke-Free? — answer key



AEROSOL ASTHMA COMMUNITY EXERCISE OUTDOOR
 PREVENTION SECONDHAND SIDELINES SPECTATORS
 TREATMENT

Should Youth Sports Sidelines Be Smoke-Free? — answer key



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Where this came from

This article was written for 3andB from the reporting below. It is not a reprint — the wording is ours and the facts are theirs.

BBC Newsround

“How do you feel about people smoking on the sidelines when you're playing sport?”

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https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/articles/cm4g1j5y509xo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss

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The article with a note on each question, a word search, a crossword, and the answer key to both.

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