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## Concussion Guidelines

Act No. 58, § 40 of 2011, Act No. 171, § 39a of 2011, and Act No. 68, § 2 of 2013 which are codified in 16 V.S.A. § 1431, direct the AOE to develop guidelines to assist schools in taking reasonable steps to prevent, and to minimize the effects of, school athletic team-related concussions. In the creation of these guidelines, the AOE has consulted with the Vermont Department of Health, the Vermont Principals' Association, and the Vermont School Boards Insurance Trust; we gratefully acknowledge their assistance.

The law requires that schools educate their coaches, their youth athletes, and the youth athletes' parents and guardians regarding the prevention and mitigation concussion-related injuries.

Under 16 V.S.A. § 1431, responsibility to ensure compliance with these guidelines falls on principals of public schools, and on heads of approved independent schools.

Section 1431 is set forth below, along with the rest of the relevant portions of S.100:

\* \* \* \* \*

- **§ 1431. Concussions and other head injuries**

(a) Definitions. As used in this subchapter:

- (1) "Coach" means a person who instructs or trains students on a school athletic team.
- (2) "Collision sport" means football, hockey, lacrosse, or wrestling.
- (3) "Contact sport" means a sport, other than football, hockey, lacrosse, or wrestling, defined as a contact sport by the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- (4) "Health care provider" means an athletic trainer, or other health care provider, licensed pursuant to Title 26, who has within the preceding five years been specifically trained in the evaluation and management of concussions and other head injuries. Training pursuant to this subdivision shall include training materials and guidelines for practicing physicians provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, if available.
- (5) "School athletic team" means an interscholastic athletic team or club sponsored by a public or approved independent school for elementary or secondary students.
- (6) "Youth athlete" means an elementary or secondary student who is a member of a school athletic team.

(b) Guidelines and other information. The Secretary of Education or designee, assisted by members of the Vermont Principals' Association selected by that association, members of the Vermont School Boards Insurance Trust, and others as the Secretary deems appropriate, shall develop statewide guidelines, forms, and other materials, and update them when

necessary, that are designed to educate coaches, youth athletes, and the parents and guardians of youth athletes regarding:

- (1) the nature and risks of concussions and other head injuries;
- (2) the risks of premature participation in athletic activities after receiving a concussion or other head injury;
- (3) the importance of obtaining a medical evaluation of a suspected concussion or other head injury and receiving treatment when necessary;
- (4) effective methods to reduce the risk of concussions occurring during athletic activities; and
- (5) protocols and standards for clearing a youth athlete to return to play following a concussion or other head injury, including treatment plans for such athletes.

(c) Notice and training. The principal or headmaster of each public and approved independent school in the State, or a designee, shall ensure that:

(1) the information developed pursuant to subsection (b) of this section is provided annually to each youth athlete and the athlete's parents or guardians;

(2) each youth athlete and a parent or guardian of the athlete annually sign a form acknowledging receipt of the information provided pursuant to subdivision (1) of this subsection and return it to the school prior to the athlete's participation in training or competition associated with a school athletic team;

(3)(A) each coach of a school athletic team receive training no less frequently than every two years on how to recognize the symptoms of a concussion or other head injury, how to reduce the risk of concussions during athletic activities, and how to teach athletes the proper techniques for avoiding concussions; and

(B) each coach who is new to coaching at the school receive training prior to beginning his or her first coaching assignment for the school; and

(4) each referee of a contest involving a high school athletic team participating in a collision sport receive training not less than every two years on how to recognize concussions when they occur during athletic activities.

(d) Participation in athletic activity.

(1) Neither a coach nor a health care provider shall permit a youth athlete to continue to participate in any training session or competition associated with a school athletic team if the coach or health care provider knows or should know that the athlete has sustained a concussion or other head injury during the training session or competition.

(2) Neither a coach nor a health care provider shall permit a youth athlete who has been prohibited from training or competing pursuant to subdivision (1) of this subsection to

train or compete with a school athletic team until the athlete has been examined by and received written permission to participate in athletic activities from a health care provider.

(e) Action plan.

(1) The principal or headmaster of each public and approved independent school in the State or a designee shall ensure that each school has a concussion management action plan that describes the procedures the school shall take when a student athlete suffers a concussion. The action plan shall include policies on:

(A) who makes the initial decision to remove a student athlete from play when it is suspected that the athlete has suffered a concussion;

(B) what steps the student athlete must take in order to return to any athletic or learning activity;

(C) who makes the final decision that a student athlete may return to athletic activity; and

(D) who has the responsibility to inform a parent or guardian when a student on that school's athletic team suffers a concussion.

(2) The action plan required by subdivision (1) of this subsection shall be provided annually to each youth athlete and the athlete's parents or guardians.

(3) Each youth athlete and a parent or guardian of the athlete shall annually sign a form acknowledging receipt of the information provided pursuant to subdivision (2) of this subsection and return it to the school prior to the athlete's participation in training or competition associated with a school athletic team.

Subsection (f) effective July 1, 2015.

(f) Health care providers; presence at athletic events.

(1) The home team shall ensure that a health care provider is present at any athletic event in which a high school athletic team participates in a collision sport. If an athlete on the visiting team suffers a concussion during the athletic event, the health care provider shall notify the visiting team's athletic director within 48 hours after the injury occurs.<sup>1</sup>

(2) Home teams are strongly encouraged to ensure that a health care provider is present at any athletic event in which a high school athletic team participates in a contact sport.

(3) A school shall notify a parent or guardian within 24 hours of when a student participating on that school's athletic team suffers a concussion. (Added 2011, No. 58, § 40, eff. May 31, 2011; amended 2011, No. 171 (Adj. Sess.), § 39a; 2013, No. 68, § 2.)

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix B – Recommended “Possible Concussion Notification” form for sending and receiving athletic directors.

For the purpose of carrying out the mandates of 16 V.S.A. § 1431, it is recommended that schools require their coaches to follow the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance and training materials regarding concussions. Those resources, which include resources for coaches, student athletes and parents, are available online at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/headsup/youthsports/index.html>. In addition, hard copies of those resources are included at the end of these guidelines.

Each new coach shall complete the concussion education course (offered by the CDC or NFHS) before their first date of practice and should thoroughly review 16 V.S.A. § 1431 and all of the CDC's concussion-related materials prior to the commencement of coaching activities, and all coaches should thoroughly review 16 V.S.A. § 1431 and all of the CDC's concussion-related materials no less frequently than every year, prior to the commencement of coaching activities. It is also recommended that all coaches complete the CDC's online coaches' concussion training which can be found at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/headsup/youthsports/training/index.html>. This on-line training is intended to augment, and not to substitute for, a thorough review of the other coach-focused CDC training materials which are recommended herein and attached hereto.

It is the duty of all coaches to ensure that the student athlete materials and the parent/guardian materials are distributed in accordance with the statute, and that the signed forms that are required by the statute are collected before the student athlete may participate in training or competition.

Copies of the recommended coach, athlete and parent materials are attached to these guidelines, but all coaches, student athletes and parents are encouraged to go to the CDC website and to delve in greater depth into its broad array of resources. See Appendix C -E.

Principals and Heads of School shall ensure that parents receive the concussion-related information required by the statute, that all students receive meaningful age-appropriate exposure to concussion-related information, and that students suspected of having suffered concussions are disqualified from engaging in school-related athletic activity until they have been cleared to return to such activity by a properly qualified individual.

### Health Care Provider Requirement, Presence at Athletic Events

Pursuant to Act 68 of 2013, as codified at Section 1431(f) of Title 16, the home team at any athletic event in which a high school athletic team participates in a collision sport (as defined by Section 1431(a)(2) of Title 16), shall ensure that a health care provider (as defined by Section 1431(a)(4) of Title 16) is present. A home team can rely on a signed assurance that the health care provider meets all of the statutory qualifications to serve in this capacity. A suggested form shall be prepared by the Secretary of Education and made available on the website of the Agency of Education. See Appendix A.

## Appendix A

# ASSURANCE FORM FOR HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS AT ATHLETIC EVENTS

I hereby assure \_\_\_\_\_ School District that I am an athletic trainer, or other health care provider, licensed pursuant to Title 26 of the Vermont Statutes Annotated, who has within the preceding five years been specifically trained in the evaluation and management of concussions and other head injuries.

The license number assigned to me by the State of Vermont, Office of Professional Regulation is \_\_\_\_\_.

I further assure \_\_\_\_\_ School District that the requisite training I have received has included applicable training materials and guidelines for practicing physicians provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Health Care Provider)

STATE OF VERMONT  
COUNTY OF \_\_\_\_\_, SS.

Subscribed and sworn to before me this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Notary Public

My Commission Expires: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

## Possible Concussion Notification

On \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_, at the \_\_\_\_\_ [insert name of event], \_\_\_\_\_ [insert student athlete's name] may have sustained a concussion. We encourage you to bring your child to a physician for diagnosis and any necessary treatment.

Common signs and symptoms for concussion include:

- Memory difficulties
- Neck pain
- Delicate to light or noise
- Headaches that worsen
- Odd behavior
- Repeats the same answer or question
- Vomiting
- Fatigued
- Slow reactions
- Focus issues
- Irregular sleep
- Irritability
- Seizures
- Patterns
- Less responsive than usual
- Weakness/numbness in arms/legs
- Slurred speech

If you are unclear and have questions about the above symptoms, please contact an appropriate health care provider (as defined by Section 1431(a)(4) of Title 16). A player who we conclude may have sustained a concussion may not return to play until there is provided a signed clearance from a medical doctor. A copy of this notification will be sent [provided] to your school principal.

Student Athlete Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Athlete's Team: \_\_\_\_\_

Player Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Legal Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Team Official (Coach) Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Receiving Athletic Director Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

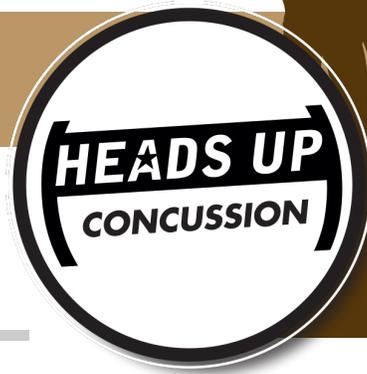
Sending Athletic Director Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*By signing, dating, and returning this Notification Form, I confirm that I have been provided with, and acknowledge that, I have read the information contained in the Form.*

*If returning the signed Form by mail, send it to \_\_\_\_\_. If returning this Form by email, send it to the following address: \_\_\_\_\_*

## Appendix C

# CONCUSSION FACT SHEET FOR ATHLETES



## CONCUSSION FACTS

- A concussion is a brain injury that affects how your brain works.
- A concussion is caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body.
- A concussion can happen even if you haven't been knocked out.
- If you think you have a concussion, you should not return to play on the day of the injury and until a health care professional says you are OK to return to play.



## CONCUSSION SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Concussion symptoms differ with each person and with each injury, and may not be noticeable for hours or days. Common symptoms include:

- Headache
- Confusion
- Difficulty remembering or paying attention
- Balance problems or dizziness
- Feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy
- Feeling irritable, more emotional, or "down"
- Nausea or vomiting
- Bothered by light or noise
- Double or blurry vision
- Slowed reaction time
- Sleep problems
- Loss of consciousness

During recovery, exercising or activities that involve a lot of concentration (such as studying, working on the computer, or playing video games) may cause concussion symptoms to reappear or get worse.

## WHY SHOULD I REPORT MY SYMPTOMS?

- Unlike with some other injuries, playing or practicing with concussion symptoms is dangerous and can lead to a longer recovery and a delay in your return to play.
- While your brain is still healing, you are much more likely to have another concussion.
- A repeat concussion in a young athlete can result in permanent damage to your brain. They can even be fatal.

[ INSERT YOUR LOGO ]

## WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I HAVE A CONCUSSION?

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### **DON'T HIDE IT. REPORT IT.**

Ignoring your symptoms and trying to "tough it out" often makes symptoms worse. Tell your coach, parent, and athletic trainer if you think you or one of your teammates may have a concussion. Don't let anyone pressure you into continuing to practice or play with a concussion.

### **GET CHECKED OUT.**

Only a health care professional can tell if you have a concussion and when it's OK to return to play. Sports have injury timeouts and player substitutions so that you can get checked out and the team can perform at its best. The sooner you get checked out, the sooner you may be able to safely return to play.

### **TAKE CARE OF YOUR BRAIN.**

A concussion can affect your ability to do schoolwork and other activities. Most athletes with a concussion get better and return to sports, but it is important to rest and give your brain time to heal. A repeat concussion that occurs while your brain is still healing can cause long-term problems that may change your life forever.



▶ **“IT’S BETTER TO MISS ONE GAME,  
THAN THE WHOLE SEASON.”**

JOIN THE CONVERSATION AT [www.facebook.com/CDCHeadsUp](https://www.facebook.com/CDCHeadsUp)



**HEADS UP**

TO LEARN MORE GO TO >> [WWW.CDC.GOV/CONCUSSION](http://WWW.CDC.GOV/CONCUSSION)

Content Source: CDC's Heads Up Program. Created through a grant to the CDC Foundation from the National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment (NOCSAE).

## Appendix D

# CONCUSSION FACT SHEET FOR PARENTS



## WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

A concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury. Concussions are caused by a bump or blow to the head. Even a “ding,” “getting your bell rung,” or what seems to be a mild bump or blow to the head can be serious.

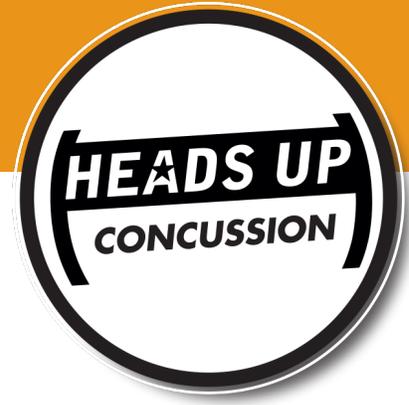
You can’t see a concussion. Signs and symptoms of concussion can show up right after the injury or may not appear or be noticed until days or weeks after the injury. If your child reports any symptoms of concussion, or if you notice the symptoms yourself, seek medical attention right away.

## WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF CONCUSSION?

If your child has experienced a bump or blow to the head during a game or practice, look for any of the following signs of a concussion:

### SYMPTOMS REPORTED BY ATHLETE:

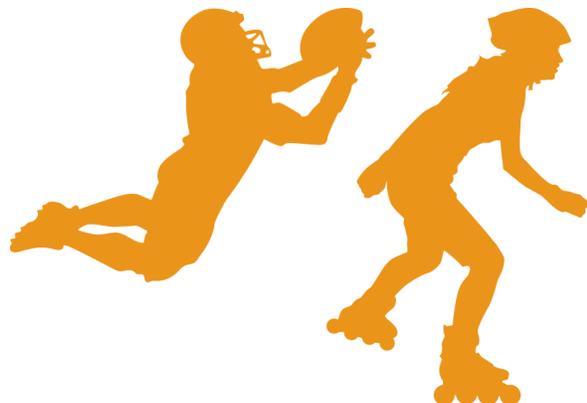
- Headache or “pressure” in head
- Nausea or vomiting
- Balance problems or dizziness
- Double or blurry vision
- Sensitivity to light
- Sensitivity to noise
- Feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy
- Concentration or memory problems
- Confusion
- Just not “feeling right” or is “feeling down”



### SIGNS OBSERVED BY PARENTS/ GUARDIANS:

- Appears dazed or stunned
- Is confused about assignment or position
- Forgets an instruction
- Is unsure of game, score, or opponent
- Moves clumsily
- Answers questions slowly
- Loses consciousness (even briefly)
- Shows mood, behavior, or personality changes

[ INSERT YOUR LOGO ]



## DANGER SIGNS

Be alert for symptoms that worsen over time. Your child or teen should be seen in an emergency department right away if s/he has:

- One pupil (the black part in the middle of the eye) larger than the other
- Drowsiness or cannot be awakened
- A headache that gets worse and does not go away
- Weakness, numbness, or decreased coordination
- Repeated vomiting or nausea
- Slurred speech
- Convulsions or seizures
- Difficulty recognizing people or places
- Increasing confusion, restlessness, or agitation
- Unusual behavior
- Loss of consciousness (even a brief loss of consciousness should be taken seriously)

## WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU THINK YOUR CHILD HAS A CONCUSSION?

1. **SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION RIGHT AWAY**  
A health care professional will be able to decide how serious the concussion is and when it is safe for your child to return to regular activities, including sports.
2. **KEEP YOUR CHILD OUT OF PLAY.**  
Concussions take time to heal. Don't let your child return to play the day of the injury and until a health care professional says it's OK. Children who return to play too soon - while the brain is still healing - risk a greater chance of having a second concussion. Repeat or later concussions can be very serious. They can cause permanent brain damage, affecting your child for a lifetime.
3. **TELL YOUR CHILD'S COACH ABOUT ANY PREVIOUS CONCUSSION.**  
Coaches should know if your child had a previous concussion. Your child's coach may not know about a concussion your child received in another sport or activity unless you tell the coach.

## HOW CAN YOU HELP YOUR CHILD PREVENT A CONCUSSION OR OTHER SERIOUS BRAIN INJURY?

- Ensure that they follow their coach's rules for safety and the rules of the sport.
- Encourage them to practice good sportsmanship at all times.
- Make sure they wear the right protective equipment for their activity. Protective equipment should fit properly and be well maintained.
- Wearing a helmet is a must to reduce the risk of a serious brain injury or skull fracture.
  - However, helmets are not designed to prevent concussions. There is no "concussion-proof" helmet. So, even with a helmet, it is important for kids and teens to avoid hits to the head.

## HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD RETURN TO SCHOOL SAFELY AFTER A CONCUSSION?

Children and teens who return to school after a concussion may need to:

- Take rest breaks as needed
- Spend fewer hours at school
- Be given more time to take tests or complete assignments
- Receive help with schoolwork
- Reduce time spent reading, writing, or on the computer

Talk with your child's teachers, school nurse, coach, speech-language pathologist, or counselor about your child's concussion and symptoms. As your child's symptoms decrease, the extra help or support can be removed gradually.



JOIN THE CONVERSATION  [www.facebook.com/CDCHeadsUp](http://www.facebook.com/CDCHeadsUp)

TO LEARN MORE GO TO >> [WWW.CDC.GOV/CONCUSSION](http://WWW.CDC.GOV/CONCUSSION)

Content Source: CDC's Heads Up Program. Created through a grant to the CDC Foundation from the National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment (NOCSAE).

## Appendix E



# HEADS + UP

## CONCUSSION IN HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

GUIDE FOR COACHES



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION



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# The Facts

- A concussion is a **brain injury**.
- All concussions are **serious**.
- Most concussions occur **without** loss of consciousness.
- Concussions can occur **in any sport** or recreation activity.
- Recognition and proper response to concussions when they **first occur** can help prevent further injury or even death.



A bump, blow, or jolt to the head can cause a concussion, a type of traumatic brain injury (TBI). Concussions can also occur from a blow to the body that causes the head and brain to move rapidly back and forth. Even a “ding,” “getting your bell rung,” or what seems to be a mild bump or blow to the head can be serious.

During sports and recreation activities, concussions may result from a fall or from players colliding with each other, the ground, or with obstacles, such as a goalpost. The potential for concussions is greatest in athletic environments where collisions are common.<sup>1</sup> Concussions can occur, however, in any organized or unorganized sport or recreational activity, as well as outside of sports from events such as a motor vehicle crash.

Sometimes people do not recognize that a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body can cause a concussion. As a result, athletes may not receive medical attention at the time of the injury, but they may later report symptoms such as a headache, dizziness, or difficulty remembering or concentrating. These symptoms can be a sign of a concussion.<sup>2</sup>

**\* For a full list of concussion symptoms, see page 5.**





## DID YOU KNOW?

- \* Athletes who have ever had a concussion are at increased risk for another concussion.
- \* Young children and teens are more likely to get a concussion and take longer to recover than adults.<sup>3-6</sup>
- \* A repeat concussion that occurs before the brain recovers from the first—usually within a short period of time (hours, days, or weeks)—can slow recovery or increase the likelihood of having long-term problems.<sup>7,8</sup>

# Recognizing a Possible Concussion



To help recognize a concussion, you should watch for and ask others to report the following two things among your athletes:

1. A forceful bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body that results in rapid movement of the head.
- and--
2. Any concussion symptoms or change in the athlete's behavior, thinking, or physical functioning.

Athletes who experience **one or more** of the signs and symptoms listed on page 5 after a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body should be kept out of play the day of the injury and until a health care professional, experienced in evaluating for concussion, says they are symptom-free and it's OK to return to play.<sup>9,10</sup>

SIGNS OBSERVED BY COACHING STAFF
Appears dazed or stunned
Is confused about assignment or position
Forgets an instruction
Is unsure of game, score, or opponent
Moves clumsily
Answers questions slowly
Loses consciousness ( <i>even briefly</i> )
Shows mood, behavior, or personality changes
Can't recall events <i>prior</i> to hit or fall
Can't recall events <i>after</i> hit or fall

SYMPTOMS REPORTED BY ATHLETE
Headache or "pressure" in head
Nausea or vomiting
Balance problems or dizziness
Double or blurry vision
Sensitivity to light
Sensitivity to noise
Feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy
Concentration or memory problems
Confusion
Just not "feeling right" or is "feeling down"

# When a Concussion is Suspected



If you suspect that an athlete has a concussion, implement your four-step “Heads Up” action plan:

**1. Remove the athlete from play.** Look for signs and symptoms of a concussion if your athlete has experienced a bump or blow to the head or body. *When in doubt, sit them out.*

**2. Ensure that the athlete is evaluated by a health care professional experienced in evaluating for concussion.**

Do not try to judge the severity of the injury yourself.

Health care professionals have a number of methods that they can use to assess the severity of concussions. As a coach, recording the following information can help health care professionals in assessing the athlete after the injury:

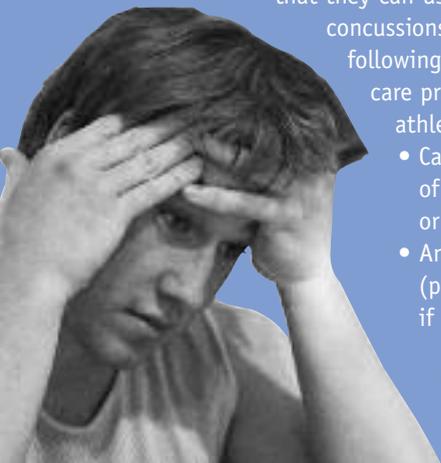
- Cause of the injury and force of the hit or blow to the head or body
- Any loss of consciousness (passed out/knocked out) and if so, for how long

- Any memory loss immediately following the injury
- Any seizures immediately following the injury
- Number of previous concussions (*if any*)

**3. Inform the athlete’s parents or guardians about the possible concussion and give them the fact sheet on concussion.** Make sure they know that the athlete should be seen by a health care professional experienced in evaluating for concussion.

**4. Keep the athlete out of play the day of the injury and until a health care professional, experienced in evaluating for concussion, says s/he is symptom-free and it’s OK to return to play.** A repeat concussion that occurs before the brain recovers from the first—usually within a short period of time (hours, days, or weeks)—can slow recovery or increase the likelihood of having long-term problems. In rare cases, repeat concussions can result in edema (brain swelling), permanent brain damage, and even death.

**CONCUSSION:** [Prevention and Preparation](#)



Remember, you can't see a concussion and some athletes may not experience and/or report symptoms until hours or days after the injury. Most people with a concussion will recover quickly and fully. But for some people, signs and symptoms of concussion can last for days, weeks, or longer. Exercising or activities that involve a lot of concentration, such as studying, working on the computer, or playing video games may cause concussion symptoms (such as headache or tiredness) to reappear or get worse. After a concussion, physical *and* cognitive activities—such as concentrating and learning—should be carefully managed and monitored by a health care professional.

It is normal for athletes to feel frustrated, sad, and even angry because they cannot return to sports right away or cannot keep up with their school work. Talk with athletes about these issues and offer support and encouragement.

**CONCUSSION:** [When a Concussion is Suspected](#)

## Danger Signs

In rare cases, a dangerous blood clot may form on the brain in a person with a concussion and crowd the brain against the skull. An athlete should receive immediate medical attention if after a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body s/he exhibits any of the following danger signs:

One pupil larger than the other
Is drowsy or cannot be awakened
A headache that not only does not diminish, but gets worse
Weakness, numbness, or decreased coordination
Repeated vomiting or nausea
Slurred speech
Convulsions or seizures
Cannot recognize people or places
Becomes increasingly confused, restless, or agitated
Has unusual behavior
Loses consciousness (a brief loss of consciousness should be taken seriously).

# Prevention and Preparation

As a coach, you can play a key role in preventing concussions and responding properly when they occur. Here are some steps you can take throughout the school year to help prevent concussion and ensure the best outcome for your athletes, the team, and the school.

## Preseason

### **Check with your school or district about concussion policies.**

Concussion policy statements can be developed to include the school's commitment to safety, a brief description of concussion, and information on when athletes can safely return to play (i.e., an athlete should be kept out of play the day of the injury and until a health care professional, experienced in evaluating for concussion, says the student is symptom-free and it's OK to return to play). Parents and athletes should sign the concussion policy statement at the beginning of each sports season.



Involve and get support from other school officials—such as principals, certified athletic trainers, other coaches, school nurses, and parent-teacher associations—to help ensure that school rules and concussion policies are in place before the first practice.

**Create a concussion action plan.** To ensure that concussions are identified early and managed correctly, have an action plan in place before the season starts. You can use the four-step “Heads Up” action plan included on page 6. This plan can be included in your school or district’s concussion policy. To start:

- Identify a health care professional to respond to injuries during practice or competition.
- Fill out the “Heads Up” pocket card or clipboard sticker and keep it with you

so that information about signs, symptoms, and emergency contacts is readily available.

- Be sure that other appropriate athletic and school staff and health care professionals know about the plan and have been trained to use it.

**Learn about concussion.** Take the free online training course available at [www.cdc.gov/Concussion](http://www.cdc.gov/Concussion). Review the signs and symptoms of concussion and keep the four-step action plan with you at games and practices.

**Educate athletes, parents, and other coaches about concussion.** Before the first practice, talk to athletes, parents, and other coaches and school officials about the dangers of concussion and potential long-term consequences of concussion. Explain your concerns about

concussion and your expectations of safe play. Show the videos, available online at: [www.cdc.gov/Concussion/Resources.html](http://www.cdc.gov/Concussion/Resources.html), and pass out the concussion fact sheets for athletes and for parents at the beginning of the season and again if a concussion occurs. Remind athletes to tell the coaching staff right away if they suspect that they have a concussion or that a teammate has a concussion.

### **Monitor the health of your athletes.**

Make sure to ask if an athlete has ever had a concussion and insist that your athletes be medically evaluated and in good condition to participate. Some schools conduct preseason baseline testing (also known as neurocognitive tests) to assess brain function—learning and memory skills, ability to pay attention or concentrate, and how quickly someone can think and solve problems.





These tests can be used again during the season if an athlete has a concussion to help identify the effects of the injury. Prior to the first practice, determine whether your school would consider conducting baseline testing.

## During the Season: Practices and Games

**Insist that safety comes first.** Teach athletes safe playing techniques and encourage them to follow the rules of play. Encourage athletes to practice good sportsmanship at all times and make sure they wear the right protective equipment for their activity (such as helmets, padding, shin guards, and eye and mouth guards). Protective equipment should fit properly, be well maintained, and be worn consistently and correctly.

**Prevent long-term problems.** If one of your athletes has a concussion, her/his brain needs time to heal. Don't let the student return to play the day of the injury and until a health care professional, experienced in evaluating for concussion, says s/he is symptom-free and it's OK to return to play. A repeat concussion that occurs before the brain recovers from the first—usually within a short time period (hours, days, weeks)—can slow recovery or increase the chances for long-term problems.

**Teach your athletes it's not smart to play with a concussion.** Rest is key after a concussion. Sometimes athletes, parents, and other school officials wrongly believe that it shows strength and courage to play injured. Discourage others from pressuring injured athletes to play. Some athletes may also try

to hide their symptoms. Don't let your athlete convince you that s/he is "just fine" or that s/he can "tough it out."

Emphasize to athletes and parents that playing with a concussion is dangerous.

**Work closely with other school officials.**

Be sure that appropriate staff are available for injury assessment and referrals for further medical care. Enlist school nurses and teachers to monitor any changes in the athlete's behavior or school work that could indicate that the student has a concussion. Ask them to report concussions that occurred during the school year. This will help in monitoring injured athletes who participate in multiple sports throughout the school year.

## Postseason

**Keep track of concussion.** Work with school nurses and other school staff to review injuries that occurred during the season. Discuss with other staff any needs for better concussion prevention or response preparations.

**Review your concussion policy and action plan.** Discuss any need for improvements in your concussion policy or action plan with appropriate health care professionals and school staff.



# Communicating Effectively about Concussions

It's important to raise awareness about concussion throughout the school community and to educate athletes, parents, and others about how to prevent, recognize, and respond to concussions. Enlist the help of other school staff, including school nurses, and pass out the "Heads Up" fact sheets, shows the videos, and/or make presentations to each group.

## Talking to Athletes

Pass out the "Heads Up" fact sheet for athletes and show the videos on concussion found online at: [www.cdc.gov/Concussion/Resources](http://www.cdc.gov/Concussion/Resources). Emphasize that you take the issue seriously and that you expect them to do so as well. Devote a regular team meeting to this topic and invite the school nurse or other health care professional to speak to your team. Here are some things you can discuss with your athletes:

- "Every bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body can potentially cause a concussion."
- "Playing injured does not show courage or strength. Do not play through symptoms of concussion. You can increase your chances of having a repeat concussion and more serious long-term problems."
- "Tell coaching staff right away if you receive a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body and have signs and symptoms of concussion or just don't 'feel right.'"
- "Signs and symptoms of concussion can appear right away or may not be noticed for days or weeks after the injury. Tell your coach if you think you have a concussion or if you think a teammate has one."



- “You can get a concussion even if you are not ‘knocked out.’”
- “Concussions can happen during drills, practices, and games. Injuries that happen during practice should be taken just as seriously as those that happen during competition.”
- “Tell your coach if you have *ever* had a concussion.”
- “If you think you have a concussion, don’t hide it, report it. Take time to recover. It’s better to miss one game than the whole season.”

### Talking with Parents

Send a copy of the concussion policy and action plan to each athlete’s family during the preseason,

along with the “Heads Up” fact sheet for parents. Parents should sign the concussion policy statement at the beginning of each sports season and be informed that if an athlete has a concussion s/he will be kept out of play until a health care professional, experienced in evaluating for concussion, says the student is symptom-free and it’s OK to return to play. Here are some things you can discuss with your athletes’ parents:

- “Your teen’s safety is our first priority. Every concussion should be taken seriously.”
- “Let your teen know that it’s not smart to play injured. Don’t let your teen convince you that s/he is ‘just fine.’”



- “We know you care about your teen’s health. That is why it is so important that you talk with her/him about the potential dangers of concussion and to how to prevent it.”
- “Learn about and watch for any signs and symptoms of concussion if your teen has a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body. Signs and symptoms can appear right away or may not be noticed for days after the injury.”
- “Help look for signs of concussion. Carry the list of symptoms and the action plan with you to practices and games.”
- “Alert your teen’s coach to any known or suspected concussion. To help prevent the possibility of long-term problems, don’t let your teen return to play until a health care professional, experienced in evaluating for concussion, says s/he is symptom-free and it’s OK to return to play.”

### Talking with School Staff

Enlist support from and look for opportunities to meet with your school nurse, principal, athletic director, or other school staff. Explain your concerns, the seriousness of the issue, and the impact that concussions in high school sports can have on an athlete, the team, and the school. Discuss the school or district's concussion policy and action plan and ask for support to implement them. Here are some things you can discuss with school staff:

- "A concussion can happen in any sport or recreational activity. All concussions are serious."
- "School staff, working as a team with health care professionals and parents, are key to preventing, recognizing, and correctly responding to concussions."
- "Keeping students safe and healthy helps enhance the reputation of the school and provides a positive and supportive environment for learning."
- "A monitoring and communication plan should be established among coaches of different sports, so that an athlete does not go from one sport to another with a concussion."
- "It's ideal to have a health care professional available during athletic activities—both practices and competitions."
- "Coaches of all sports should be encouraged to distribute educational materials about concussion to athletes and parents."

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## Additional Resources



*"Heads Up: Concussion in High School Sports" initiative*

**Resources for high school coaches, administrators, parents, and athletes**

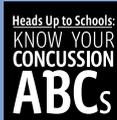
Along with this Guide, additional concussion resources for high school coaches, administrators, parents, and athletes, in English and Spanish, including videos, fact sheets, and Podcasts, are available at: [www.cdc.gov/Concussion](http://www.cdc.gov/Concussion).



*"Heads Up: Concussion in Youth Sports" initiative*

**Resources for youth sports coaches, administrators, parents, and athletes**

Concussion resources for youth sports coaches, administrators, parents, and athletes, in English and Spanish, including fact sheets, videos, e-cards, a clipboard, magnet, poster, and quiz, are available at: [www.cdc.gov/Concussion](http://www.cdc.gov/Concussion).



*"Heads Up to Schools: Know Your Concussion ABCs" initiative*

**Resources for school nurses, administrators, counselors, teachers, parents, and students**

Concussion resources for school professionals, parents, and students, in English and Spanish, including a concussion symptom checklist, fact sheets, a magnet, and poster, are available at: [www.cdc.gov/Concussion](http://www.cdc.gov/Concussion).



### How Can I Order a Large Number of CDC's Concussion Resources?

To order bulk quantities of CDC's concussion resources **free-of-charge** and/or to learn how you can get involved to help keep kids and teens safe from concussion, visit [www.cdc.gov/Concussion](http://www.cdc.gov/Concussion) or contact CDC by email ([CDC-INFO@cdc.gov](mailto:CDC-INFO@cdc.gov)) or toll-free at **1-800-CDC-INFO** (1-800-232-4636).

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Institute for Preventive Sports Medicine  
National Association for Sport and Physical Education  
National Athletic Trainers Association  
National Federation of State High School Associations  
National Football League  
National Safety Council  
North American Brain Injury Society  
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***“Helping all people live to their full potential”***

**[www.cdc.gov/Concussion](http://www.cdc.gov/Concussion)**