

## **A Parent's Guide to Concussion in Sports:**

### **FROM THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS**

Effective 7/1/2011, A new Virginia law and Quantico Middle/ High School require that in order to participate in any athletic activity, each student-athlete and their parent/guardian shall review information on concussions provided by the school. After reviewing this information describing the effects of concussions, each student-athlete and their parent/guardian shall sign the acknowledgement of risk form acknowledging, receipt, review, and understanding of such information.

The NFHS has implemented a standard rule change in all sports dealing with concussions in student-athletes. The basic rule states: Any athlete who exhibits signs, symptoms, or behaviors consistent with a concussion( such as loss of consciousness, headache, dizziness, confusion, or balance problems) shall be immediately removed from the contest and shall not return t play until cleared by an appropriate health-care professional.

#### **What is a concussion?**

A concussion is a brain injury which results in a temporary disruption of normal brain function. A concussion occurs when the brain is violently rocked back and forth or twisted inside the skull as a result of a blow to the head or body. An athlete does not have to lose consciousness ("knocked-out") to suffer a concussion.

#### **Concussion Facts**

- It is estimated that over 140,000 high school athletes across the United States suffer a concussion each year. (Data from NFHS Injury Surveillance System)
- Concussions occur most frequently in football, but girl's lacrosse, girl's soccer, soccer, boy's lacrosse, wrestling and girls' basketball follow closely behind. All athletes are at risk.
- A concussion is a traumatic injury to the brain.
- Concussion symptoms may last from a few days to several months.
- Concussions can cause symptoms which interfere with school, work, and social life.
- An athlete should not return to sports while still having symptoms from a concussion as they are at risk for prolonging symptoms and further injury.
- A concussion may cause multiple symptoms. Many symptoms appear immediately after the injury, while others may develop over the next several days or weeks. The symptoms may be subtle and are often difficult to fully recognize.

#### **What are the signs and symptoms of a concussion?**

Appears dazed or stunned	Headache
Confused about what to do	Nausea
Forgets plays	Balance problems
Unsure of game, score, opponent	Dizziness
Moves clumsily	Double or fuzzy vision
Answers questions slowly	Feeling sluggish
Loses consciences	Feeling foggy or groggy
Shows behavior or personality changes	Concentration or memory problems
Can't recall events prior or after hit	Confusion

#### **What should I do if my child has a concussion?**

If an athlete is suspected of having a concussion, he or she must be immediately removed from play, be it a game or practice. Continuing to participate in physical activity after concussion can lead to worsening concussion

symptoms, increased risk for further injury, and even death. Parents and coaches are not expected to “diagnose” a concussion, as that is the job of a medical professional. However, you must be aware of the signs and symptoms of a concussion and if you are suspicious, then your child must stop playing.

### **How can a concussion affect schoolwork?**

Following a concussion, many athletes will have difficulty in school. These problems may last from days to months and often involve difficulties with short and long term memory, concentration, and organization. In many cases it is best to lessen the athlete’s class load early on after the injury. This may include staying home from school for a few days, followed by a lightened schedule for a few days, or perhaps a longer period of time, if needed. Decreasing the stress on the brain early on after a concussion may lessen symptoms and shorten the recovery time.

### **What Can I do?**

- Both you and your child should learn how to recognize the “Signs and Symptoms” of concussion as listed above.
- Teach your child to tell the coaching staff if he or she experiences such symptoms.
- Emphasize to administrators, coaches, and other parents your concerns and expectations about concussion and safe play.
- Monitor sports equipment for safety, fit, and maintenance.
- Ask teachers to monitor any decrease in grades or changes in behavior that could indicate concussion.
- Report concussions that occurred during the school year to appropriate school staff. This will help in monitoring injured athletes as they move to the next season’s sports.

### **Other Frequently Asked Questions.**

#### **Who decides if an athlete has been concussed?**

An MD (Medical Doctor), DO (Doctor of Osteopathy), PA (Physician’s Assistant), ARNP (Advanced Registered Nurse Practitioner) or ATC (Certified Athletic trainer) is empowered to make the on-site determination that an athlete has received a concussion. If any one of these individuals has answered that “yes”, there has been a concussion, that decision is final.

#### **Once a concussion has been diagnosed who can issue authorization to return to practice / competition in the sport?**

Once a concussion has been diagnosed by one of the above listed on-site providers, only an MD or DO can authorize subsequent return to play, and such shall be in writing to the administration of the school. School administration shall then notify the coach as to the permission to return to practice or play.

#### **Can an athlete return to play on the same day as he/she receives a concussion?**

No, under no circumstances can an athlete return to play in that event that day.

## **Why is it so important that an athlete not return to play until they have completely recovered from a concussion?**

Athletes who are not fully recovered from an initial concussion are significantly vulnerable for recurrent, cumulative, and even catastrophic consequences of a second concussion injury. Such difficulties are prevented if the athlete is allowed time to recover from the concussion and return to play decisions are carefully made. No athlete should return-to-sports or other at-risk participation when symptoms of concussion are present and recovery is ongoing.

## **Is a “CAT scan” or MRI needed to diagnose a concussion?**

Diagnostic testing, which includes CT (“CAT”) and MRI scans, are rarely needed following a concussion. While these are helpful in identifying life-threatening brain injuries (e.g. skull fracture, bleeding, swelling), they are not normally utilized, even by athletes who have sustained severe concussions. A concussion is diagnosed based upon the athlete’s story of the injury and the health care provider’s physical examination.

## **What is the best treatment to help my child recover more quickly from a concussion?**

The best treatment for a concussion is rest. There are no medications that can speed the recovery from a concussion. Exposure to loud noises, bright lights, computers, video games, television and phones (including text messaging) all may worsen the symptoms of a concussion. You should allow your child to rest in the days following a concussion. As the symptoms lessen, you can allow increased use of computers, phone, video games, etc., but the access must be lessened if symptoms worsen.

## **How long do the symptoms of a concussion usually last?**

The symptoms of a concussion will usually go away within one week of the initial injury. You should anticipate that your child will likely be out of sports for about two weeks following a concussion. However, in some cases symptoms may last for several weeks, or even more. Symptoms such as headache, memory problems, poor concentration, and mood changes can interfere with school work, work, and social interactions. The potential for such long-term symptoms indicates the need for careful management of all concussions.

## **When in doubt, sit them out!**

All athletes who sustain a concussion need to be evaluated by a health care professional who is familiar with sports concussions. You should call your child’s physician and explain what has happened and follow your physician’s instructions. If your child is vomiting, has a severe headache, is having difficulty staying awake or answering simple instructions he or she should be taken to the emergency department immediately.