



# Concussion Information for Coaches



Concussions are traumatic brain injuries that must be taken seriously. Concussions can occur in any sport or recreational activity. That is why all coaches, parents, and athletes need to learn concussion signs and symptoms and what to do if a concussion occurs. Below you will find information detailing concussion recognition, management and prevention. For more information please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Concussion in Sports website at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/sports/index.html>

## What is a concussion?

- A concussion is a brain injury.
- All concussions are serious.
- Concussions can occur without the loss of consciousness.
- Concussions can occur in any sport.
- Recognition and proper management of concussions when they first occur can help prevent further injury or even death.<sup>1</sup>

## Signs and Symptoms<sup>2</sup>

### Signs Observed by Coaching Staff

- Appears dazed or stunned
- Is confused about assignment or position
- Forgets sports plays
- Is unsure of game, score, or opponent
- Moves clumsily
- Answers questions slowly
- Loses consciousness (even briefly)
- Shows behavior or personality changes
- Can't recall events prior to hit or fall
- Can't recall events after 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
- Does not "feel right"

<sup>1</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Heads Up: Concussion in Youth Sports", A Fact Sheet for Athletes. Available at: [http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/coaches\\_Engl.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/coaches_Engl.pdf).

<sup>2</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Heads Up: Concussion in Youth Sports", A Fact Sheet for Coaches. Available at: [http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/coaches\\_Engl.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/coaches_Engl.pdf).

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## CDC's Concussion Management Action Plan

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### **1. Remove the athlete from play.**

Look for the signs and symptoms of a concussion if your athlete has experienced a bump or blow to the head. Athletes who experience signs or symptoms of concussion should not be allowed to return to play. When in doubt, keep the athlete out of play.

### **2. Ensure that the athlete is evaluated right away by an appropriate health care professional.**

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
- 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. Allow the athlete to return to play only with the permission from a health care professional with experience in evaluating for concussion.**

A repeat concussion that occurs before the brain recovers from the first can slow recovery or increase the likelihood of having long-term problems. Prevent common long-term problems and the rare second impact syndrome by delaying the athlete's return to the activity until the player receives appropriate medical evaluation and approval from return to play.

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### Concussion Prevention and Preparation

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

- **Educate athletes and their parents about concussion.**

Talk with athletes and their parents about the dangers and potential long-term consequences of concussion. For more information, on long-term effects of concussion, view the following online video clip [http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/tbi/Coaches\\_Tool\\_Kit.htm#video](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/tbi/Coaches_Tool_Kit.htm#video). Explain your concerns about concussion and your expectations of safe play to athletes, parents, and assistant coaches. Pass out concussion fact sheets for athletes and for parents at the beginning of the season and again if a concussion occurs.

- **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.
- Make sure athletes 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.
- Review the athlete fact sheet with your team to help them recognize the signs and symptoms of a concussion.

Check with your youth sports league or administrator about concussion policies. Concussion policy statements can be developed to include the league's commitment to safety, a brief description of concussion, and information on when athletes can safely return to play following a concussion (i.e., an athlete with known or suspected concussion should be kept from play until evaluated and given permission to return by a health care professional). Parents and athletes should sign the concussion policy statement at the beginning of the sports season.

- **Teach athletes and parents that it's not smart to play with a concussion.**

Sometimes players and parents wrongly believe that it shows strength and courage to play injured. Discourage others from pressuring injured athletes to play. Don't let athletes persuade you that they're "just fine" after they have sustained any bump or blow to the head. Ask if players have ever had a concussion.

- **Prevent long-term problems.**

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 brain swelling, permanent brain damage, and even death. This more serious condition is called **second impact syndrome**<sup>4</sup>. Keep athletes with known or suspected concussion from play until they have been evaluated and given permission to return to play by a health care professional with experience in evaluating for concussion. Remind your athletes: "It's better to miss one game than the whole season."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Sports-related recurrent brain injuries-United States. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report 1997; 46(10):224-227. Available at: [www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00046702.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00046702.htm).

<sup>5</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Heads Up: Concussion in Youth Sports", A Fact Sheet for Coaches. Available at: [http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/coaches\\_Engl.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/coaches_Engl.pdf).