

Concussions – A fact sheet for coaches

One of the main jobs of a youth sports coach is keeping athletes safe. This sheet has information to help you protect athletes from concussion or other serious brain injury, learn how to spot a concussion, and know what to do if a concussion occurs.

What is a concussion?

A concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury—or TBI—caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or by a hit to the body that causes the head and brain to move quickly back and forth. This fast movement can cause the brain to bounce around or twist in the skull, creating chemical changes in the brain and sometimes stretching and damaging the brain cells.

How can I help keep athletes safe?

As a youth sports coach, your actions create the culture for safety and can help lower an athlete's chance of getting a concussion or other serious injury. Here are some ways you can help keep your athletes safe:

Talk with athletes about the importance of reporting a concussion:

- Make sure to tell them that safety comes first and you expect them to tell you and their parent(s) if they think they have a concussion.

Create a culture of safety at games and practices:

- Enforce the rules of the sport for fair play, safety, and sportsmanship, and avoid unsafe actions such as striking another athlete in the head or using their own head or helmet to strike another athlete.

Keep up-to-date on concussion information:

- Review your state, league, and/or organization's concussion guidelines and protocols.

Check out the equipment and sports facilities

- Batting helmets that fit well are important, but keep in mind that no helmet is completely “concussion proof.”

Keep emergency contact information handy:

- Bring emergency contact information for parents and health care providers to each game and practice in case an athlete needs to be taken to an emergency department right away for a concussion or other serious injury.

How can I spot a possible concussion?

Athletes who show or report one or more of the signs and symptoms listed below—or simply say they just “don't feel right” after a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body—may have a concussion or other serious brain injury.

Signs observed by coaches or parents:

- Appears dazed or stunned.
- Forgets an instruction, is confused about an assignment or position, or is unsure of the game, score, or opponent.
- Moves clumsily.
- Answers questions slowly.
- Loses consciousness (even briefly).
- Shows mood, behavior, or personality changes.
- Can't recall events prior to or after a hit or fall.



What are serious danger signs to look for?

In rare cases, a dangerous collection of blood (hematoma) may form on the brain after a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body and can squeeze the brain against the skull. Call 9-1-1 or ensure an athlete is taken to the emergency department right away if, after a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body, he or she has one or more of these danger signs:

- One pupil larger than the other.
- Drowsiness or inability to wake up.
- A headache that gets worse and does not go away.
- Slurred speech, weakness, numbness, or decreased coordination.
- Repeated vomiting or nausea, convulsions or seizures (shaking or twitching).
- Unusual behavior, increased confusion, restlessness, or agitation.
- Loss of consciousness (passed out/knocked out). Even a brief loss of consciousness should be taken seriously.

Concussions affect each athlete differently

While most athletes with a concussion feel better within a couple of weeks, some will have symptoms for months or longer. Talk with an athlete's parents if you notice their concussion symptoms come back after they return to play.

What should I do if I think an athlete has a possible concussion?

As a coach, if you think an athlete may have a concussion, you should:

Remove the athlete from play. When in doubt, sit them out!

Keep an athlete with a possible concussion out of play on the same day of the injury and until cleared by a health care provider.

Do not try to judge the severity of the injury yourself. Only a health care provider should assess an athlete for a possible concussion. After you remove an athlete with a possible concussion from practice or play, the decision about return to practice or play is a medical decision that should be made by a health care provider.

Some athletes may not report a concussion because they don't think a concussion is serious.

They may also worry about:

- Losing their position on the team or during the game.
- Jeopardizing their future sports career.
- Looking weak.
- Letting their teammates or the team down.
- What their coach or teammates might think of them.

Why should I remove an athlete with a possible concussion from play?

The brain needs time to heal after a concussion. An athlete who continues to play with concussion has a greater chance of getting another concussion. A repeat concussion that occurs while the brain is still healing from the first injury can be very serious and can affect an athlete for a lifetime. It can even be fatal.

What steps can I take to help an athlete return to play?

An athlete's return to school and sports should be a gradual process that is approved and carefully managed and monitored by a health care provider. When available, be sure to also work closely with your team's certified athletic trainer.

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