

# WHEN IN DOUBT Take Them Out!

## Fact Sheet for Coaches and Sports Officials

### WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

A concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury (TBI) caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head that can change the way the brain normally works. Concussions can occur from a fall, impact to the body, or collision that causes the head and brain to move quickly back and forth. Even a “ding” or “getting your bell rung” can result in a concussion and should be evaluated by a health care professional.

Concussions can happen in any sport, but most often occur in contact sports, such as football, rugby, or ice hockey.

Every year, about 4,000 New York children age 19 and younger are treated at hospitals for sports-related TBIs. Concussions are often treated elsewhere, such as by a school nurse or primary care physician.

### HOW DO I RECOGNIZE A POSSIBLE CONCUSSION?

If you observe the following two things, the athlete may have a concussion:

A forceful blow to the head or body that results in rapid movement of the head

AND

Any change in the athlete’s behavior, thinking, or physical functioning

Here are signs and symptoms of a concussion:

#### SIGNS EXHIBITED BY ATHLETE AND OBSERVED BY COACH/SPORTS OFFICIAL

- Dazed or stunned
- Confusion about game assignment, position, score, and/or opponent
- Forgets sports plays
- Clumsy movement
- Delayed response to questions
- Loss of consciousness (even briefly)
- Behavior or personality changes
- Inability to recall events before or after a hit or fall

#### SYMPTOMS REPORTED BY ATHLETE

- Headache or “pressure” in head
- Nausea or vomiting
- Dizziness or balance problems
- Double or blurred vision
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy
- Concentration or memory loss
- Confusion
- Doesn’t “feel right”

## WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SUSPECT A CONCUSSION?

If an athlete experiences *any* signs or symptoms after a bump or blow to the head, be sure you take these precautions:

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

Look for the signs and symptoms of a concussion. If the athlete experiences any of the signs or symptoms, he or she should not be allowed to return to play. When in doubt, sit the athlete out of play.

**2. Ensure that the athlete is immediately evaluated by a health care professional.**

Do not try to judge the seriousness of the injury for yourself. You can't see a concussion and some athletes may not experience and/or report symptoms until hours or days after the injury.

**3. Notify the athlete's parents or caregivers about the possible concussion and give them the fact sheet on concussions.** Be sure they know that the athlete should be seen by a health care professional who is experienced in evaluating concussions.

**4. Permit the athlete to return to play only after he or she is symptom-free for at least 24 hours and has been evaluated and cleared by a licensed physician.\***

A repeat concussion that occurs before the brain heals from a previous concussion can slow recovery or increase the likelihood of having long-term problems. Delaying an athlete's return to play until he or she receives appropriate medical evaluation can help prevent further problems in the future.

*\*This is a specific guideline stated in the Concussion Management and Awareness Act. Your local school district may have additional guidelines.*

## HOW CAN I HELP PREVENT CONCUSSIONS?

As a coach/sports official, you play a vital role in preventing concussions among athletes. And when an athlete does experience a concussion you can protect against further injury with a quick and effective response. Here are steps you can take to keep your athletes safe:

- **Get trained!** Learn how to recognize, monitor, and respond appropriately to athletes who sustain a concussion.
- **Educate athletes and their parents and caregivers about concussions.** Talk with them about prevention as well as the dangers and potential long-term consequences of concussions.
- **Make safety your team's #1 priority.** Ensure all athletes wear the right protective equipment for their sport (like helmets, padding, shin guards, and eye and mouth guards). Protective equipment must fit properly, be in good condition, and be worn consistently and correctly. Teach athletes safe playing techniques and encourage them to follow the rules of the game.
- **Teach athletes and parents that it's not safe to play with a concussion.** Every athlete needs to know how crucial it is to let their coach, athletic trainer, sports official or parent know if they have hit their head or have symptoms of a head injury – even if it means stopping play. Never ignore a head injury, no matter how minor.
- **Prevent possible long-term problems.** Delaying athletes' return to play until they receive appropriate medical evaluation can help prevent problems in the future.

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