

A Fact Sheet for YOUTH SPORTS OFFICIALS



One of the main jobs of a sports official 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?

Sports are a great way for children and teens to stay healthy and can help them do well in school. As a youth sports official, your actions (including strict officiating) help set the tone for safe play and can help lower an athlete's chances of getting a concussion or other serious injury. Aggressive and/or unsportsmanlike behavior among athletes can increase their chances of getting a concussion or other serious injury. Here are some ways you can help keep athletes safe:

Create a culture of safety at a game or competition:

- Enforce the rules of the sport for fair play, safety, and sportsmanship.
- Penalize athletes for unsafe actions such as:
 - › Striking another athlete in the head.
 - › Using their head or helmet to contact another athlete.
 - › Making illegal contacts or checking, tackling, or colliding with an unprotected opponent.
 - › Trying to injure or put another athlete at risk for injury.
- At the pre-game or event meeting, remind coaches to talk with athletes about concussion so that athletes feel that it is their job to report a concussion or other injury right away.

Watch out for possible concussions.

- ▶ Use injury timeouts to ensure that an athlete with a possible concussion is removed from play. When in doubt, sit them out!
- ▶ Enforce the rule that an athlete with a possible concussion *cannot return to play on the same day of the injury and until seen and cleared by a health care provider.*

Keep up to date on concussion information:

- Review your state, league, and/or organization's concussion guidelines.
- Take a training course on concussion. CDC offers concussion training at no cost at www.cdc.gov/HEADSUP.
- Download CDC's *HEADS UP* app or a list of concussion signs and symptoms that you can keep on hand.
- Talk with other sports officials and review game film to help learn about the ways to enforce safe and fair play.

Check out the equipment and sports facilities:

- Work with the game or event administrator to ensure the sports facilities provide a safe playing environment (e.g., remove tripping hazards, ensure goal posts have padding that is in good condition, etc.).
- When appropriate for the sport or activity, work with the game or event administrator and coach to make sure all athletes wear a helmet that fits well and is in good condition. There is no "concussion-proof" helmet, so it is important to enforce rules that protect athletes from hits to the head and when a helmet falls off during a play.



Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention
National Center for Injury
Prevention and Control

To learn more, go to www.cdc.gov/HEADSUP

➤ Enforce Safe Play. You Set the Tone for Safety.

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 Sports Officials, Parents, or Coaches

- 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.

Symptoms Reported by Athletes

- Headache or “pressure” in head.
- Nausea or vomiting.
- Balance problems or dizziness, or double or blurry vision.
- Bothered by light or noise.
- Feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy.
- Confusion, or concentration or memory problems.
- Just not “feeling right,” or “feeling down.”

What Are Some More Serious Danger Signs to Look Out 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 that 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.

➤ Children and teens who continue to play while having concussion symptoms or who return to play too soon—while the brain is still healing—have 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 a child or teen for a lifetime. It can even be fatal.

The information provided in this fact sheet or through linkages to other sites is not a substitute for medical or professional care. Questions about diagnosis and treatment for concussion should be directed to a physician or other health care provider.



To learn more, go to www.cdc.gov/HEADSUP

You can also download the CDC *HEADS UP* app to get concussion information at your fingertips. Just scan the QR code pictured at left with your smartphone.