



# HEADS UP: CONCUSSIONS IN YOUTH SPORTS

## A FACT SHEET FOR COACHES

### Thurston County Recreation Services

#### The Facts

- ◆ A concussion is a **brain injury**
- ◆ All concussions are **serious**
- ◆ Concussions can occur **without** 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

#### What is a Concussion?

A concussion is an injury that changes how the cells in the brain normally work. A concussion is caused by a blow to the head or body that causes the brain to move rapidly inside the skull. Even a "ding," "getting your bell rung" or what seems to be a mild bump or blow to the head can be serious. Concussions can also result from a fall or from players colliding with each other or with obstacles, such as a goalpost.

The potential for concussions is greatest in athletic environments where collisions are common. Concussions can occur, however, in **any** organized or unorganized sport or recreational activity. As many as 3.6 million sports and recreation-related concussions occur in the United States each year.

#### Recognizing a possible Concussion

To help recognize a concussion, you should watch for the following two things among your athletes:

1. A forceful blow to the head or body that results in rapid movement of the head.
- AND**
2. Any change in the athlete's behavior, thinking or physical functioning (see the signs and symptoms of a concussion).

#### Signs Observed by Coaches/Volunteers/Staff

If an athlete has experienced a bump or blow to the head during a game or practice, look for any of the following signs and symptoms of a concussion:

- ◆ Appears dazed or stunned
- ◆ Is confused about assignment or position
- ◆ Forgets an instruction
- ◆ 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"

Athletes who experience any of these signs or symptoms after a bump or blow to the head should be kept from play until given permission to return to play by a health care professional with experience in evaluating concussions. Signs and symptoms of a concussion can last from several minutes to days, weeks, months or even longer in some cases.

Remember, you can't see a concussion and some athletes may not experience and/or report symptoms until hours or days after the injury. If you have any suspicion that your athlete has a concussion, you should keep the athlete out of the game or practice.

#### 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 team:

##### 1. Educate athletes and parents

Talk with athletes and parents about the dangers and potential long-term consequences of a concussion, view the following online video at [http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/tbi/Coaches\\_Tool.htm#Video](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/tbi/Coaches_Tool.htm#Video). Explain your concerns about concussions and your expectations of safe play to athletes, parents and assistant coaches. Pass out the Concussion Fact Sheet for Athletes and Parents at the beginning of the season and again if a concussion occurs.

##### 2. Insist that safety comes first

Talk with athletes and parents about the dangers and potential long-term consequences of a concussion, view the following online video at [http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/tbi/Coaches\\_Tool.htm#Video](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/tbi/Coaches_Tool.htm#Video). Explain your concerns about concussions and your expectations of safe play to athletes, parents and assistant coaches. Pass out the Concussion Fact Sheet for Athletes and Parents at the beginning of the season and again if a concussion occurs.

- ◆ 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 worn consistently and correctly.
- ◆ Review the athlete Fact Sheet with your team to help them recognize the signs and symptoms of a concussion.

**CONTINUE OVER ➔**



## **HEADS UP: CONCUSSIONS IN YOUTH SPORTS**

# **A FACT SHEET FOR COACHES** *Continued. . .*

### **Thurston County Recreation Services**

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 on concussions and information regarding when athletes can safely return to play following a concussion (i.e., an athlete with known or suspected concussion would 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 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*. Keep athletes with a 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 a concussion. Remind your athletes: *"It's better to miss one practice/game than the whole season."*

### **ACTION PLAN**

#### **What Should a Coach Do When a Concussion is Suspected?**

1. **Remove the athlete from play.** If an athlete shows any signs or symptoms of a concussion, he/she 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 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 concussions.** Make sure they know the athlete should be seen by a health care professional experienced in evaluating for a concussion.
4. **Allow the athlete to return to play with permission from a health care professional with experience in evaluation 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 *Second Impact Syndrome* by delaying the athlete's return to the activity until the player receives an appropriate medical evaluation and approval for return to play.

#### **If You Think Your Athlete has Sustained a Concussion. . .**

Take him/her out of play **and** seek the advice of a health care professional experienced in evaluating concussions.

For more detailed information on concussions and traumatic brain injury, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/injury>.



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