



Ohio High School Athletic Association  
and OHSAA Member Schools

IMPLEMENTATION OF NFHS PLAYING RULES CHANGES  
RELATED TO CONCUSSION AND CONCUSSED ATHLETES AND  
RETURN TO PLAY PROTOCOL

In its various sports playing rules, the National Federation of High Schools (NFHS) has implemented a standard rule change in all sports dealing with concussions in student-athletes. The basic rule in all sports (which may be worded slightly differently in each rule book due to the nature of breaks in time intervals at contests in different sports) states:

*Any athlete who exhibits signs, symptoms, or behaviors consistent with a concussion (such as loss of consciousness, headache, dizziness, confusion, or balance problems) shall be immediately removed from the contest and shall not return to play until cleared by an appropriate health-care professional. (Please see NFHS Suggested Guidelines for Management of Concussion in the Appendix in the back of each NFHS Rules Book).*

**It is important for all adults involved in interscholastic athletics to recognize the potential for catastrophic injury and even death from concussions. Thus it is extremely important that each coach, administrator, contest official and medical support personnel review their responsibilities in protecting students.**

Last year the OHSAA Board of Directors adopted a sports regulation which incorporated the NFHS rules change. This regulation reads:

*Any athlete who exhibits signs, symptoms or behaviors consistent with a concussion (such as loss of consciousness, headache, dizziness, confusion or balance problems) shall be immediately removed from the contest and shall not return to play until cleared **with written authorization** by an appropriate health care professional. In Ohio, an "appropriate health care professional" shall be a **physician**, as authorized under ORC Chapter 4731 and includes both doctors of medicine (M.D.) and doctors of osteopathy (D.O.) and an **athletic Trainer, licensed** under ORC Chapter 4755*

In January, 2011, the OHSAA Board of Directors has further defined the following parameters to guide OHSAA licensed officials, medical personnel and member school representatives in implementing this change.

1. **What are the "signs, symptoms, or behaviors consistent with a concussion"?** The National Federation rule lists some of the signs, symptoms and behaviors consistent with a concussion. The U.S. Department of Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has published the following lists of signs, symptoms and behaviors that are consistent with a concussion:

| SIGNS OBSERVED BY OTHERS  | SYMPTOMS REPORTED BY ATHLETE   |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appears dazed or stunned</li> <li>• Is confused about assignment</li> <li>• Forgets plays</li> <li>• Is unsure of game, score, or opponent</li> <li>• Moves clumsily</li> <li>• Answers questions slowly</li> <li>• Loses consciousness</li> <li>• Shows behavior or personality changes</li> <li>• Cannot recall events prior to hit</li> <li>• Cannot recall events after hit</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headache</li> <li>• Nausea</li> <li>• Balance problems or dizziness</li> <li>• Double or fuzzy vision</li> <li>• Sensitivity to light or noise</li> <li>• Feeling sluggish</li> <li>• Feeling foggy or groggy</li> <li>• Concentration or memory problems</li> <li>• Confusion</li> </ul> |

2. **Who is responsible for administering this new rule?**  
All adults who have responsibilities and duties in the interscholastic athletics environment are responsible: coaches, contest official, administrators and medical personnel.
3. **What is the role of coaches in administering this new rule?**
  - Coaches are to review and know the signs and symptoms of concussion and to prohibit any athlete who displays these signs or symptoms from participating in a practice or a contest.
  - Coaches are not medical professionals and have no authority to determine whether or not a student has sustained a concussion. The coach is responsible for insuring that the student's parents are notified and the student is referred to a medical professional
4. **What is the role of contest officials in administering the new rule?**
  - Officials are to review and know the signs and symptoms of concussion and to direct immediate removal of any athlete who displays these signs or symptoms,

- An official shall not permit the athlete who has been removed under this rule to return to competition without written medical authorization presented to the head official.
  - If a contest official is aware that a student has been permitted to return to competition without written authorization from a physician or licensed athletic trainer, that official shall immediately stop play and remove that student from competition and report the incident to the Ohio High School Athletic Association
  - Note that officials are not medical professionals and have no authority to determine whether or not student has sustained a concussion. The official is responsible for directing removal when he or she observes signs and symptoms that may indicate a student is concussed.
5. **Who decides if an athlete has not been concussed (~~has had a concussion~~) and/or who has recovered from a concussion?**
- Only an MD (Medical Doctor), DO (Doctor of Osteopathy), or LAT (Licensed Athletic Trainer) is empowered to make the onsite determination that an athlete has not received a concussion.
  - If any one of these individuals has answered that "yes" there has been a concussion, **that decision is final.**
6. **Can an athlete return to play on the same day as he/she receives a concussion?**
- No, under no circumstances can that athlete return to play that day.
  - When in doubt, hold them out.
  - If the event continues over multiple days, then the designated event physician has ultimate authority over return to play decisions.
  - However, if the health care professional (MD, DO or LAT) has evaluated the athlete, who has been removed from competition due to exhibiting the signs and symptoms of a concussion, and has determined that the **athlete did not sustain a concussion**, that student may return to play with the submission of the written authorization by the health care professional.
  - The written authorization shall be submitted to the school administration; however, if there is no administrator on site at the competition, the authorization may be held by the host site manager or the head coach.
7. **Once the day has concluded, who can issue authorization to return to practice / competition in the sport?**
- Once a concussion has been diagnosed by one of the above listed on site providers, only an MD, DO or LAT can authorize subsequent return to play, and such authorization shall be in writing to the administration of the school. This written RTP authorization shall be kept at the school until the statute of limitations expires, which is four years from the date of the student's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.
  - School administration shall then notify the coach as to the permission to return to practice or play.
8. **What should be done after the student is cleared by an appropriate health care professional?**
- After a clearance has been issued, the student's actual return to practice and play should follow a graduated protocol.
  - The National Federation has included the following graduated protocol in its *Suggested Guidelines for Management of Concussion in Sports*: (This is simply a suggested protocol. The appropriate health care professional who issues the clearance may wish to establish a different graduated protocol.)

#### Medical Clearance RTP Protocol

1. No exertional activity until asymptomatic.
  2. When the athlete appears clear, begin low-impact activity such as walking, stationary bike, etc.
  3. Initiate aerobic activity fundamental to specific sport such as skating or running, and may also begin progressive strength training activities.
  4. Begin Non-contact skill drills specific to sport such as dribbling, fielding, batting, etc.
  5. Full contact in practice setting.
  6. Game play/competition
    - **ATHLETE MUST REMAIN ASYMTOMATIC TO PROGRESS TO THE NEXT LEVEL.** (It is often suggested that an athlete not be allowed to progress more than one level per day.)
    - **IF SYMPTOMS RECUR, ATHLETE MUST RETURN TO PREVIOUS LEVEL AND SHOULD BE REEVALUATED BY AN APPROPRIATE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL.**
    - **MEDICAL CHECK SHOULD OCCUR BEFORE CONTACT.**(Final written clearance from the medical professional shall be obtained before the athlete engages in any unrestricted or full contact activity)
9. **Fundamental Reminder about this change**
- It has always been the ultimate responsibility of the coaching staff, in all sports, to ensure that players are only put into practice or contests if they are physically capable of performing; however, all adults involved in the conduct of interscholastic competition have responsibilities in this endeavor.

## Other Resources

- The NFHS has developed a new **20-minute online coach education course – *Concussion in Sports – What You Need to Know***, the NFHS *Suggested Guidelines for Management of Concussion in Sports* brochure, the NFHS *Sports Medicine Handbook*, materials from the CDC “Heads Up” program and other materials should all be made available to officials, parents, students and schools.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a publication entitled **“Heads up to Schools: Know your Concussion ABC’s” – A Fact Sheet for Teachers, Counselors and School Professionals**, available on its web site. Click onto [www.cdc.gov/concussion](http://www.cdc.gov/concussion) to obtain this valuable publication that will assist teachers and other school personnel in making accommodations for students returning to school after a concussion.
- **The following form may be used by schools to educate parents and students about this issue:**

(INSERT SCHOOLNAME HERE)

### Concussion Information Form

A concussion is a brain injury and all brain injuries are serious. They are caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head, or by a blow to another part of the body with the force transmitted to the head. They can range from mild to severe and can disrupt the way the brain normally works. Even though most concussions are mild, **all concussions are potentially serious and may result in complications including prolonged brain damage and death if not recognized and managed properly.** In other words, even a “ding” or a bump on the head can be serious. You can’t see a concussion and most sports concussions occur without loss of consciousness. Signs and symptoms of concussion may show up right after the injury or can take hours or days to fully appear. If your child reports any symptoms of concussion, or if you notice the symptoms or signs of concussion yourself, seek medical attention right away.

**Symptoms may include one or more of the following:**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headaches</li> <li>• “Pressure in head”</li> <li>• Nausea or vomiting</li> <li>• Neck pain</li> <li>• Balance problems or dizziness</li> <li>• Blurred, double, or fuzzy vision</li> <li>• Sensitivity to light or noise</li> <li>• Feeling sluggish or slowed down</li> <li>• Feeling foggy or groggy</li> <li>• Drowsiness</li> <li>• Change in sleep patterns</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amnesia</li> <li>• “Don’t feel right”</li> <li>• Fatigue or low energy</li> <li>• Sadness</li> <li>• Nervousness or anxiety</li> <li>• Irritability</li> <li>• More emotional</li> <li>• Confusion</li> <li>• Concentration or memory problems (forgetting game plays)</li> <li>• Repeating the same question/comment</li> </ul> |
|--|---|

Adapted from the CDC and the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference in Sport

**Signs observed by teammates, parents and coaches include:**

- Appears dazed
- Vacant facial expression
- Confused about assignment
- Forgets plays
- Is unsure of game, score, or opponent
- Moves clumsily or displays poor coordination
- Answers questions slowly
- Slurred speech
- Shows behavior or personality changes
- Can’t recall events prior to hit
- Can’t recall events after hit
- Seizures or convulsions
- Any change in typical behavior or personality
- Loses consciousness

**What can happen if my child keeps on playing with a concussion or returns too soon?**

Athletes with the signs and symptoms of concussion shall be removed from play immediately. Continuing to play with the signs and symptoms of a concussion leaves the young athlete especially vulnerable to greater injury. There is an increased risk of significant damage from a concussion for a period of time after that concussion occurs, particularly if the athlete suffers another concussion before completely recovering from the first one (second impact syndrome). This can lead to prolonged recovery, or even to severe brain swelling with devastating and even fatal consequences. It is well known that adolescent or teenage athletes will often under report symptoms of injuries. And concussions are no different. As a result, education of administrators, coaches, parents and students is the key for student-athlete's safety.

**If you think your child has suffered a concussion**

Any athlete even suspected of suffering a concussion should be removed from the game or practice immediately. No athlete may return to activity after an apparent head injury or concussion, regardless of how mild it seems or how quickly symptoms clear, without medical clearance. Close observation of the athlete should continue for several hours. You should also inform your child's coach if you think that your child may have a concussion Remember its better to miss one game than miss the whole season. And when in doubt, the athlete sits out.

For current and up-to-date information on concussions you can go to: <http://www.cdc.gov/ConcussionInYouthSports/>

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student-athlete Name Printed

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student-athlete Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent or Legal Guardian Printed

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent or Legal Guardian Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date