

**CONCUSSION REGULATIONS**

**Implementation of NFHS Playing Rules Changes Related to Concussion and Concussed Athletes and Return to Play Protocol**

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.

**Note:** 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.

The OHSAA Board of Directors has adopted a sports regulation which incorporates the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) rules. 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 (A.T.), licensed under ORC Chapter 4755.”

In January 2011, the OHSAA Board of Directors 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 officials, 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. When informing the head coach about removal of an athlete, the official shall be accompanied by a fellow (second) official.
  - 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 OHSAA.
  - Note that officials are not medical professionals and have no authority to determine whether or not a 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 and/or who has recovered from a concussion?
  - **Only** an M.D. (Medical Doctor), D.O. (Doctor of Osteopathy), or A.T. (Athletic Trainer) is empowered to make the on-site 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 (M.D, D.O. or A.T.) 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, and the head official shall forward a copy of the written authorization form within 48 hours to the OHSAA office, retaining a copy for himself/herself. 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 M.D., D.O. or A.T. can authorize subsequent return to play (RTP),

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 seven years from the date of the student’s 18th 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: (**Note:** This is simply a suggested protocol. The appropriate health care professional who issues the clearance may wish to establish a different graduated protocol.)

**NFHS Suggested Medical Clearance Return To Play 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 running or skating, 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 asymptomatic 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. Other Resources
- The NFHS has developed a 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 and the NFHS *Sports Medicine Handbook*; there are materials from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) “Heads Up” program, and there are other materials that schools are highly encouraged to make available to officials, parents and students.
  - 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. Go to [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 who were concussed and returning to school, an important aspect of concussion management that is often overlooked.

**TOBACCO, ALCOHOL, ILLEGAL DRUGS AND STEROIDS**

1. **Tobacco**  
School participants (coaches, players, trainers, managers, statisticians, scorekeepers, cheerleaders, etc.) and contest officials in an athletic contest are prohibited from using any form of tobacco at the