

Concussions: What's New This Year?

During the 2011 Legislative Session, Wyoming joined many other states by passing a law to protect student athletes who suffer concussions while playing middle school and high school sports. Each state has a slightly different law. The most important elements of Wyoming's new law are included below:

Each school district in the state must develop plans to take address possible concussions and other head injuries that occur during athletic events. This means:

- Now, schools must ensure that coaches and athletic trainers receive sufficient training to recognize concussion symptoms;
- Parents and students will receive information about head injuries and concussions at the beginning of the season; and
- There are new rules for when players with concussions can return to playing:
 - In the past, if an athlete had symptoms of a concussion and the symptoms went away, sometimes athletes could go back to playing. This practice is no longer legal.
 - If an athlete receives a head injury and the coach or athletic trainer thinks the athlete may have a concussion,
 - ✓ The athlete should be removed from practice/competition and should not return to competition that day,
 - ✓ Coaches or the athletic trainer should contact the athlete's parent/guardian,
 - ✓ The athlete should be seen by a doctor, PA, or nurse practitioner the same day,
 - ✓ If the athlete has a concussion, he/she must have permission from a doctor, PA, or nurse practitioner before resuming practice and competition, and
 - ✓ The athlete should ease back into practice and then later into competition.

It is important that you know the PHS athletic department, including the coaches and training staff, are dedicated to providing a safe experience for these young athletes by following the state law and recommendations. We hope you will partner with us in this cause by thoroughly reading through this packet so that you too can recognize the symptoms of concussions and take action if needed.

The coaching and training staff have always been conservative when dealing with potential concussions and will continue to be so. If you have concerns at any time during the season that your child may have a concussion or is showing signs, please report this information to your athlete's coach or the athletic trainer immediately.

Concussions: The Facts

What is a concussion?

A concussion is a traumatic brain injury that changes the way the brain works. When the brain moves quickly, twists, or bounces forcefully inside the skull, the brain's cells stretch and tear causing brain damage that cannot usually be seen on an x-ray, MRI, or CAT Scan. These changes in the brain can last anywhere from days to months and can be permanent in some cases. The changes can cause loss of certain brain functions and death (only in rare cases).

What are the signs and symptoms of a concussion?

The signs and symptoms are often confused for other things because they are common complaints of the general public. They are often excused as minor complaints. Symptoms are what athletes feel and might report to a coach, trainer, or parent; signs are what parents or coaching staff may notice.

Someone with a concussion might say they have	YOU may notice that a person with a concussion
A Headache	Appears dazed or confused
A headache that gets worse & won't go away**	Lacks facial expression
Neck pain	Has clumsy movements
Pressure in their head	Weakness, numbness, or decreased coordination**
Nausea or Vomiting	Speaks with slurred speech**
Can't sleep or overly tired	Answers questions slowly
Sadness or irritability	Shows personality changes
Feeling dizzy or off-balance	Drowsiness or cannot be awakened **
Vision problems	Is unable to remember just before or just after the hit
Sensitivity to light or sounds	Has seizure or convulsions**
Feeling sluggish, groggy, "out of it"	Loses consciousness **
Feeling foggy, or confused	Has pupils of different sizes** (the black part in the center of the eye)
Concentration problems	Is unaware of the score or opponent
Memory problems	Forgets instructions, position or play
Constant nervousness or anxiety	Has difficulty recognizing people or places**
Fatigue or low energy	
Increased emotions	

** These signs are 'red flags' and mean the injured person should be brought to a hospital or doctor right away

How do concussions happen?

Any forceful injury to the head or body can cause the brain to contact the skull and result in a concussion. These kinds of hits are most common in full contact sports like football, wrestling, and hockey, but happen in other sports too. Young athletes' brains are more sensitive to effects of a concussion than adult brains.

Minor "dings" or "bell-ringers" aren't really concussions, are they?

YES, they can be. Even the most minor blow or head injury can cause a concussion. It all depends on the movement of the brain inside the skull. Sometimes it doesn't take much force to cause a concussion, so any possible concussions should be taken seriously. It is also important to know that even though adolescents rarely die from concussions, the brain changes can cause problems later in life with things like concentration, learning, and coordination.

It's only a concussion if they get knocked out, right?

NO! More than 90% of people who have a concussion remain completely conscious. Of course, if a person does get hit so hard that they become unconscious, the chances of them having a concussion are higher. Many concussions are never reported because of this misconception.

Does having one concussion make it easier to get another one?

Yes. There are many sources that say if an athlete gets a concussion they are more likely to get another one.

Does wearing a helmet prevent concussions?

Helmets DO decrease the risk of getting a concussion and should always be worn, but there is no proven prevention for concussions. They still occur even when the player is wearing a helmet.

Why is it so important to wait before returning to play?

All concussions are serious and should not be taken lightly, but the risk of permanent damage from one single concussion is low as long as there is enough time for the brain to heal properly. Second-impact syndrome is a rapid and severe swelling of the brain and occurs with re-injury if the brain is not given enough time to heal from the initial blow. This injury is much more severe and more life threatening. The majority of deaths due to concussion injuries in student athletes are because of second-impact syndrome. This is why it is so important to allow adequate time to heal from the first concussion and why a release from a doctor, PA, or nurse practitioner is required before resuming practice and competition.

Are there differences between symptoms in boys and girls?

Yes. Recent studies show there is no difference in the time it takes to recover or return to play, but the types of symptoms are different. Girls are more likely to complain of things like vision or hearing changes and emotional changes. Boys are more likely to complain of confusion or disorientation. It is important to remember that boys and girls can show any of the signs or symptoms listed above.

Concussions: A Parent's Role

While coaches and athletic trainers are usually the ones who see an injury happen and make decisions in practices or games, parents play a large part in seeing symptoms of concussion at home. Thus, it is very important to take an active role in helping your child stay free of injury. Here are a few strategies you can use:

- ✓ **Make sure athletes have all the equipment they need and that it works properly**
- ✓ **Take the online training course in concussions made by the CDC**
 - This is the same course that the coaches and athletic trainers take every year. It is free of charge, but you have to sign up to take it. It only takes 20 minutes to complete, and there are many good resources that come with the training.
 - Go to www.nfhslearn.com and click on the free course "Concussions in Sports: What you need to know"
 - * Note* it will seem like you are buying the course, but you will not have to enter any credit card information.
 - It may even be a good idea for you and your athlete to take the course together!
- ✓ Be familiar with all the signs and symptoms of a concussion
- ✓ Talk with your child about the risks of concussions and make sure they understand that they need to tell someone about their symptoms
 - Nearly half of all the concussions in the US are never reported because the athlete never tells the athletic trainer, coach or parents about their symptoms. The most common reasons for that include:
 - Fear they will not be able to play if they report the symptoms
 - They don't believe the symptoms are severe enough to report
 - They are unaware of the risks of not reporting concussion symptoms
 - It is important to be aware of these reasons and discuss with your athlete the risks of not reporting symptoms.
- ✓ If you are concerned at any time about the safety of your athlete, you should feel free to discuss these concerns with the coach or the athletic trainer

Concussions: For the Athlete

As the athlete, you are the person with the most control over your health and safety. Here are a few things you can do to help prevent concussions and stay in competition:

- ✓ **Read the facts about concussions in this packet. The more you know about the signs and symptoms of concussions the better off you'll be.**
- ✓ **Take the online training course in concussions**
 - It would be useful information, and you might even be able to help recognize possible signs of concussions in your teammates. It may even be a good idea to take it with your parents so you can ask questions.
- ✓ **If you take a really hard blow to the body or head, know the symptoms of concussions.**
If you have them, REPORT THEM to someone right away
 - There are athletes who don't tell anyone about their symptoms, and here are some of the reasons why. Please remember these are NOT good reasons to risk your own safety.
 - **Some athletes are afraid of losing playing time**
 - ✓ Remember, it's better to miss one game than the whole season
 - **Some athletes don't know what the symptoms are**
 - ✓ Take the time to read them so you DO know
 - **Some athletes recognize the symptoms but don't think they are bad enough to report**
 - ✓ They are always worth reporting; even the mildest symptoms after an injury could be a concussion
 - If you don't give your brain enough time to heal after a concussion, the next one could be even worse and can cause some serious long-term health problems, possibly even death.
- ✓ **Use the right equipment for your sport and use it right every time**
- ✓ **Follow all the rules of the game; when players choose to ignore the rules more injuries happen**