



****2010-11 NFHS CONCUSSION RULE INFORMATION FOR MEMBER STATE ASSOCIATIONS****

2010-11 NFHS Rule Book Changes on Concussion

Portion to go into the rules section and replace current language:

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).

Approved by NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC) – October 2009
Approved by the NFHS Board of Directors – October 2009

****NOTE: The above rules language on concussion will be formatted for each particular sport. For example, the word “athlete” may be replaced with player, contestant, competitor and the word “contest” may be replaced with the game, match or event. Please refer to each specific NFHS rules book for the exact concussion language that has been approved for that particular sport.**

****NOTE: The persons who should be alert for such signs, symptoms or behaviors consistent with a concussion in an athlete include appropriate health-care professionals, coaches, officials, parents, teammates, and if conscious, the athlete him or herself.**

The rules language above, which will appear in all NFHS Rules Books for the 2010-11 school year, reflects a strengthening of rules regarding the safety of athletes suspected of having a concussion, but not a revision in primary responsibilities in these areas. Previous rules required officials to remove any athlete from play who was “unconscious or apparently unconscious.” This revised language reflects an increasing focus on safety, given that the vast majority of concussions do not involve a loss of consciousness. However, the revised language does not create a duty that officials are expected to perform a medical diagnosis. The change in this rule simply calls for officials to be cognizant of athletes who display signs, symptoms or behaviors of a concussion from the lists below, and remove them from play. At that point, the official’s job is done.

The determinations of who qualifies as an appropriate health-care professional, the length of time required before a return to play can be approved and the method of verification of clearance for return to play will be left to individual school districts, subject to controlling state law and/or rules promulgated by individual state associations.

Definition of a Concussion:

A concussion is a traumatic brain injury that interferes with normal brain function. An athlete does not have to lose consciousness (be “knocked out”) to have suffered a concussion.

Behavior or signs observed indicative of a possible concussion:

- Loss of consciousness
- Appears dazed or stunned
- Appears confused
- Forgets plays

- Unsure of game, score or opponent
- Moves clumsily
- Answers questions slowly
- Shows behavior or personality changes
- Can't recall events prior to or after the injury

Symptoms reported by a player indicative of a possible concussion:

- Headache
- Nausea
- Balance problems or dizziness
- Double or fuzzy vision
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Feeling sluggish
- Feeling foggy or groggy
- Concentration or memory problems
- Confusion

The following items need to be addressed as the 2010-11 NFHS Concussion Rule comes out for each sport:

STATE ASSOCIATIONS:

1. Need to define who is an appropriate health-care professional.

Past NFHS rules books have been inconsistent in the use of terminology for health-care professionals. Various terms have been used, including “physician (MD/DO),” “medical professional,” “medical staff,” and “medical provider.” Over the past year, the NFHS SMAC has led the effort to use the generic term “appropriate health-care professional” throughout all NFHS rules books.

The intent behind this effort is that the NFHS does not have a role in determining what a specific “level” of health-care professional can do, as this is dependent upon state law. In some states, nurse practitioners can practice independently of MD/DOs and often serve as primary care providers, as do physicians’ assistants. Certified athletic trainers provide a majority of sports medicine services in many high schools and may also be considered appropriate health-care professionals.

There are different methods in which state associations may handle this apparent dilemma. Both Oregon and Washington have state laws which require athletes to be cleared to return to play by a “health-care professional” or “health-care provider,” respectively, following a concussion. In Oregon, the state association (OSAA) chose to let this definition be made at the school district level, while in Washington, the state association (WIAA) **defined these individuals as certified athletic trainers, physicians (MD/DO), nurse practitioners, and physicians’ assistants**. In the specific case of concussion, state associations and school districts may also consider including neuropsychologists in addition to the aforementioned health-care professionals. If in doubt, state associations and school districts may choose to seek clarification from their state boards of healing arts.

2. Need to define return to play criteria.

The NFHS cannot mandate or dictate activity that occurs inside or outside the confines of a game, match, event or contest. The NFHS SMAC does suggest protocols to follow after an athlete sustains a concussion

during competition or practice. The following management protocol is based upon current research and expert opinion, and is included in the Appendix in the back of all 2010-11 NFHS rules books:

Suggested Concussion Management:

1. No athlete should return to play (RTP) or practice on the same day of a concussion.
2. Any athlete suspected of having a concussion should be evaluated by an appropriate health-care professional that day.
3. Any athlete with a concussion should be medically cleared by an appropriate health-care professional prior to resuming participation in any practice or competition.
4. After medical clearance, return to play should follow a step-wise protocol with provisions for delayed return to play based upon the return of any signs or symptoms.

3. Need to determine the mechanics for removal or re-entry for return to play for the same contest.

The NFHS concussion rule calls for the immediate removal of the participant from the contest. **It is important to note that the responsibility of the official is limited to activities that occur on the field, court, or mat. Once the participant has been removed from a contest due to a suspected concussion, the coach or appropriate health-care professional(s) assumes full responsibility for that athlete's further evaluation and safety.**

4. Need to educate member schools on concussion recognition and management.

State associations should continue to provide member schools with access to current information regarding concussion recognition and management. Such materials will be regularly updated and made available on Web sites maintained by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), NFHS SMAC and/or each state association's SMAC.

5. Need to educate officials, parents, schools and athletes on concussion.

Information about the new NFHS 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, athletes and schools. Particular note should be made of the fact that some materials from the CDC are available in Spanish.

6. Need to be aware of current state laws on concussion.

Washington, Oregon and New Mexico have all passed laws mandating specific procedures in the management of high school athletes who have had a suspected concussion. At this time, at least 15 other states are considering similar legislation. We strongly suggest that state associations keep abreast of all such legislative initiatives in their states, and when at all possible, work with legislators in developing legislation.

COACHES:

1. Educate coaches on concussion recognition and management.

The new NFHS 20-minute online coach education course – *Concussion in Sports – What You Need to Know*, is a useful tool for providing concussion education to coaches in all sports. The course contains supplemental information from the NFHS and the CDC. Also, information about 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 all coaches. Particular note should be made of the fact that some materials from the CDC are available in Spanish.

2. Need to understand the role of the official and appropriate health-care professional(s).

Coaches should be presented with information regarding the role of the official in recognizing signs, symptoms and behaviors of a possible concussion, and respect any decision made by an official in this regard. In addition, coaches should respect the decisions made by appropriate health-care professionals regarding removal from play. Coaches should also be empowered to not allow athletes to return to practice or competition if they are still suffering signs and symptoms of a concussion, *even if they have been cleared to return to play by an appropriate health-care professional.*

3. Need to understand that they share a responsibility in recognition of concussion in competition and practice.

While the role of the official in the recognition of a suspected concussion has been emphasized in the 2010-11 rules books, **coaches must share this role with officials during contests, and are expected to play the lead role in recognizing possible concussions during all practices.** This message is emphasized repeatedly in the new NFHS 20-minute online coach education course – *Concussion in Sports – What You Need to Know*.

4. Need to follow school district and state association policies on return to play.

The NFHS *Suggested Concussion Management Guidelines* are highlighted in this and other NFHS documents, including the NFHS online coach education course – *Concussion in Sports – What You Need to Know*. While the NFHS SMAC believes these guidelines are well-drafted, state law and state association rules may differ. Coaches must be made aware of any such rules or policies that have been enacted at the state association or school district level.

OFFICIALS:

1. Need to be aware of current NFHS rules, state laws and state association rules in regard to the signs and symptoms of a concussion.

State officials' organizations should keep in close contact with state associations regarding any directives in concussion management that differ from NFHS rules and recommendations, as well as new developments in state laws.

2. Follow protocol from state association for compliance with Concussion Rule.

Officials must be aware of the protocol for their state for each sport they officiate. The actual protocol may vary from state to state.

APPROPRIATE HEALTH-CARE PROFESSIONALS:

1. Need to be aware of current NFHS rules, state laws and state association rules in regard to concussion management.

Each state SMAC should endeavor to educate appropriate health-care professionals throughout the state on NFHS and state association rules and regulations, as well as state laws, regarding concussion management.

2. Need to understand that they share a responsibility for recognition, removal and proper management of concussion in competition.

Coaches and officials must be supported by appropriate health-care professionals in the effort to identify and properly manage athletes with suspected concussions.

3. Need to update knowledge.

Concussion evaluation and management continues to evolve. It is important that appropriate health-care professionals keep up-to-date on the most current data and guidelines.

NFHS CONCUSSION RESOURCES:

The following NFHS Concussion Resources can be found on the NFHS Web site (www.nfhs.org) under Sports Medicine unless otherwise noted:

1. 2010 NFHS – *Concussion in Sports – What You Need to Know* (www.nfhslern.com)-
2. 2008 NFHS Sports Medicine Handbook (Every State Association should have a copy)-
3. 2009 NFHS Concussion Brochure – *Suggested Guidelines for Management of Concussion in Sports-*
4. 2010-11 NFHS Rules Books Appendix – *Suggested Guidelines for Management of Concussion-*
5. 2010 NFHS SMAC Information – *A Parent’s Guide to Concussion in Sports-*
6. 2010 Summer Issue of NFHS Officials’ Quarterly Magazine – “*Concussion Recognition and Management*”
7. National Center for Catastrophic Injury Research- (2010)-
8. National High School Sports Injury Surveillance System- (2010)-
9. 2010 CDC - *Heads Up to Schools: Know Your Concussion ABCs* (www.cdc.gov/Concussion)-
10. 2010 CDC – *Concussion in Sports* (www.cdc.gov/concussion/sports/index.html)-
11. 2010 CDC – *Head Up: Concussion in High School Sports* (www.cdc.gov/concussion/HeadsUp/high_school.html)-

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