

ILLINOIS HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

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IHSA Protocol for Implementation of NFHS Sports Playing Rule for Concussions

“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.”

The above language, which first appeared in all National Federation sports rule books for the 2010-11 school term, 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 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.

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/herself.

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

This protocol is intended to provide the mechanics to follow during the course of contests/matches/events when an athlete sustains an apparent concussion. For the purposes of this policy, appropriate health care professionals are defined as: physicians licensed to practice medicine in all its branches in Illinois and certified athletic trainers.

1. During the pre-game conference of coaches and officials, the official shall remind the head coaches that a school-approved appropriate health care professional (who meets the description above) will need to clear for return to play any athlete removed from a contest for an apparent head injury.
2. The officials will have no role in determining concussion other than the obvious situation where a player is unconscious or apparently unconscious as is provided for under the previous rule. Officials will merely point out to a coach that a player is apparently injured and advise the coach that the player should be examined by the school-approved health care provider.
3. If it is confirmed by the school's approved health care professional that the student did not sustain a concussion, the head coach may so advise the officials during an appropriate stoppage of play and the athlete may re-enter competition pursuant to the contest rules.
4. Otherwise, if an athlete cannot be cleared to return to play by a school-approved health care professional as defined in this protocol, that athlete may not be returned to competition that day and is then subject to his or her school's Return to Play (RTP) protocols before the student-athlete can return to practice or competition.
5. Following the contest, a Special Report shall be filed by the contest official(s) with the IHSA Office through the Officials Center.
6. In cases where an assigned IHSA state finals event medical professional is present, his/her decision to not allow an athlete to return to competition may not be over-ruled.

Additional information regarding concussion has been made available to IHSA member schools and licensed officials and can be accessed on the IHSA Sports Medicine website at <http://www.ihsa.org/Resources/SportsMedicine.aspx>.

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Concussion Information

Return to Play (RTP) and Return to Learn (RTL)

Background: With the start of the 2010-11 school term, the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) implemented a new national playing rule regarding potential head injuries. The rule requires “any player 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 game and shall not return to play until cleared by an appropriate health care professional.” In applying that rule in Illinois, it has been determined that only certified athletic trainers, advanced practice nurses (APN), physician’s assistants (PA) and physicians licensed to practice medicine in all its branches in Illinois can clear an athlete to return to play the day of a contest in which the athlete has been removed from the contest for a possible head injury.

In 2015, the Illinois General Assembly passed the Youth Sports Concussion Safety Act, and this legislation, among other items, required schools to develop Concussion Oversight Teams and create Return to Play (RTP) and Return to Learn (RTL) protocols that student-athletes must meet prior to their full return to athletic or classroom activity

Mandatory Concussion Education

Required concussion education for all athletic coaches and marching band directors is another component of the Youth Sports Concussion Safety Act passed by the Illinois General Assembly in the fall of 2015.

The IHSA program includes two video presentations and other supplementary materials that ALL high school athletic coaches, marching band directors, and Concussion Oversight Team members need to review prior to taking a required exam over the curriculum. Individuals will be required to demonstrate proficiency on the exam by scoring at least 80% in order to serve as an athletic coach or marching band director at an IHSA member school.

The program offers training in the subject matter of concussions, including evaluation, prevention, symptoms, risks, and long-term effects. Coaches will be able to access the program after logging into the IHSA Schools Center and clicking on the “CON” tab, which will be located under the ‘Departments’ heading on the Schools Center homepage.

For more information on the Youth Sports Concussion Safety Act, including specific requirements of the law and other concussion education providers besides IHSA, individuals can access Sports Medicine resources on the IHSA website at <http://www.ihsa.org/Resources/SportsMedicine.aspx>.

For those first adopters of this training, new curriculum from the IHSA/IESA is expected to be released in March of 2018 so those whose training will expire in 2018 will be able to remain in compliance with the law.