

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## Head Injury in Athletes

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Sports are an important part of our society and play an essential role in ensuring the health of young people. The possibility of concussion, however, is a significant concern that requires greater attention by all involved in youth sports.

The long-term effects of head injury in professional athletes have been widely documented; these injuries are affecting younger athletes participating in a wide range of sporting activities as well. The under-diagnosis of concussion is becoming problematic, and greater awareness of the effects of repeated head injury or concussion is critical.

Second impact syndrome is potentially the most serious consequence of an injury resulting from a concussion. Second impact syndrome occurs when a second head injury occurs within the first week of a primary head injury. Therefore, the decision to allow the athlete to return to play is made cautiously.

A concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury that may be caused by a direct blow to the head, face, neck or elsewhere on the body that creates a force to the head such as a whiplash-type injury. Concussions typically result in short-term neurologic impairment or memory loss and may or may not involve loss of consciousness. Because a concussion can occur without loss of consciousness, concussions are often under-diagnosed.

Symptoms of a concussion may include any of the following:

- Symptoms: somatic (headache, nausea/vomiting, blurred vision, dizzy), cognitive (feeling foggy, sluggish, hazy or "like in a fog"), or emotional (mood-swings)
- Physical signs (loss of consciousness, amnesia)
- Behavioral changes (irritability)



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- Cognitive impairment (slowed reaction times, difficulty concentrating, confusion)
- Sleep disturbance (drowsiness)

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The pre-participation physical examination or sports physical, required for all student athletes, is an integral component of the athlete's health care. It is imperative that the health care provider know of any previous head injury or concussion the student athlete has experienced. Failure to disclose previous head injuries, concussion, or neurologic symptoms related to any injury can be detrimental.

"Return-to-play guidelines" is the plan under which an athlete may re-engage in the activity that resulted in the injury. It would include a graduated increase in participation over a period of time, as well as a clear understanding of the parameters that would cause the athlete to be removed from play again if necessary.

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