

Amateur Athlete Union
CONCUSSION IN AAU SPORTS – A GUIDE FOR AAU Parents,
Coaches and Club Contacts
"The Lystedt Law" HB1824

THE FACTS

- A concussion is a **brain injury**.
- All concussions are **serious**.
- Concussions can occur **without** loss of consciousness.
- Concussions can occur **in any sport**.
- Recognition and proper management of concussions when they **first occur** can help prevent further injury or even death.

WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

Concussions are sometimes called mild traumatic brain injuries (MTBI). They are caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body that causes the brain to move rapidly inside the skull. Even a "ding", "getting your bell rung", or what seems to be a mild bump or blow to the head can be serious.

Concussions can occur in any sport, including these:^{1,2} Baseball, Basketball, Football, Soccer, Softball, Volleyball, Wrestling

The potential for concussions is greatest in athletic environments where collisions are common.³ Environmental factors also can cause injury. For example, a player may collide with an unpadded goalpost or trip on an uneven playing surface.

Sometimes people do not recognize that a bump, blow, or jolt to the head can cause a concussion. As a result, athletes may receive no medical care at the time of the injury, but they may later report symptoms such as headache and dizziness. These symptoms can be a sign of a concussion.⁴

- As many as 3.8 million sports- and recreation-related head injuries of mild to moderate severity occur in the United States each year. Most can be classified as concussions.
- Collegiate and high school football players who have had at least one concussion are at an increased risk for another concussion.^{6,7}
- A repeat concussion that occurs before the brain recovers from the first—usually within a short period of time (hours, days, or weeks)—reportedly can result in brain swelling, permanent brain damage, and even death. This condition is called second impact syndrome.^{8,9}

RECOGNIZING A POSSIBLE CONCUSSION

To help recognize a concussion, you should watch for the following two things among your athletes:

1. A forceful blow to the head or body that results in rapid movement of the head.

- and -
2. Any change in the athletes behavior, thinking, or physical functioning. (See the signs and symptoms of concussion.)

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

One or more of these signs and symptoms may indicate that a concussion has occurred.¹⁰ Remember that concussions can also occur with no obvious signs or symptoms. Any of the symptoms listed below should be taken seriously. Athletes who experience these signs or symptoms after a bump, blow, or jolt

to the head should be kept from play until cleared by a health care professional with experience in evaluating concussions.

Signs observed by AAU Member Coaching Staff

- Appears dazed, confused, or stunned
- Is confused about assignment or position
- Forgets plays
- Is unsure of game, score, or opponent
- Moves clumsily
- Answers questions slowly
- Loses consciousness (even briefly)
- Shows behavior or personality changes
- Can't recall events prior to hit or fall

Symptoms reported by AAU Athlete

- Headache or pressure in the head
- Nausea or vomiting
- Balance problems or dizziness
- Double or fuzzy vision
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Feeling sluggish or hazy
- Feeling foggy or groggy
- Concentration or memory problems
- Confusion
- Does not "feel right"

PREVENTION AND PREPARATION

As a AAU Member Coach, you can play a key role in preventing concussions and managing them properly when they occur. Here are some steps you can take to ensure the best outcome for your athletes, the team, and the school:

- **Educate athletes and parents about concussion.** Talk with athletes and their parents/guardians about the dangers and potential long-term consequences of concussion. Make sure athletes and their parents/guardians:
 - Can recognize signs and symptoms of concussion.
 - Withhold athletes from play until a health care professional has evaluated and cleared their return.
 - Know to take all signs and symptoms of concussion seriously.
 - Inform coaching staff if an athlete receives a blow to the head, experiences symptoms of concussion, or behaves out of the ordinary.
 - Sign and return the concussion and head injury information sheet prior to practice and/or competition.
- **Coordinate with other AAU officials.** Involve other AAU officials—such as event directors, certified athletic trainers, other coaches—to ensure that AAU rules and policies support concussion prevention and management strategies.
- **Insist that safety comes first.**
 - Teach athletes safe playing techniques and encourage them to follow the rules of play.
 - Encourage athletes to practice good sportsmanship at all times.
 - Make sure athletes wear the right protective equipment for their activity (such as helmets, padding, shin guards, and eye and mouth guards). Protective equipment should fit properly, be well maintained, and be worn consistently and correctly.
 - Review the athlete fact sheet with your team to help them recognize the signs and symptoms of a concussion.
- **Teach athletes that it's not smart to play injured.** Sometimes players, parents, and other AAU Member Coaches wrongly believe that it shows strength and courage to play injured. Discourage others from pressuring injured athletes to play. Don't let athletes persuade you that they're "just fine"

after they have sustained any bump, blow, or jolt to the head. Ask if players have ever had a concussion.

- **Prevent long-term problems.** A repeat concussion that occurs before the brain recovers from the first, usually within a short period of time (hours, days, or weeks), can slow recovery or increase the likelihood of having long-term problems. In rare cases, repeat concussions can result in brain swelling, permanent brain damage, and even death. This more serious condition is called *second impact syndrome*. Keep athletes with known or suspected concussion from play until they have been evaluated and given permission to return to play by a health care professional with experience in evaluating for concussion. Remind athletes: "It's better to miss one game than the whole season."
- **Prepare for concussions year-round.** There are actions you can take throughout the AAU Season that may help prevent concussions. For example:

PRESEASON

- Ensure that players are medically evaluated and are in good condition to participate.
- Establish an action plan for handling concussions that occur. Be sure that other appropriate AAU officials know about your action plan and have been trained in its use.
- Explain your concerns and expectations about concussion and safe play to athletes and their parents/guardians.
- Ask if players have had one or more concussions during the previous season.
- Remind athletes to tell coaching staff if they suspect that a teammate has a concussion.
- Determine whether your AAU Member Club would consider conducting preseason baseline testing of brain function (neuropsychological assessment) in athletes.
- **Your AAU Member Players and parents/guardians must sign and return the concussion and head injury information sheet prior to practice and/or competition.**

DURING SEASON/PRACTICE/GAMES

- Monitor sports equipment for safety, fit, and maintenance.
- Enlist parents to monitor any decrease in grades that could indicate a concussion.
- Be sure appropriate people are available for injury assessment and referrals for further medical care.
- Continue emphasizing with players, coaches, and parents your concerns and expectations about concussion and safe play.
- Report concussions that occurred during the AAU year to appropriate AAU Officials. This will help in monitoring injured athletes as they move to the next AAU season's sports.

POSTSEASON

- Work with appropriate parent to review injuries and illnesses that occurred during the season.
- Discuss any need for improvements in your action plan with appropriate health care professionals and Parents.
- Discuss with other coaches any needs for better sideline preparations.

CREATE AN ACTION PLAN

To ensure that concussions are managed correctly, have an action plan in place before the season starts.

- Identify a health care professional to manage injuries during practice and competition.
- Fill out the clipboard sheet and keep it with you on the field of play so that information about signs, symptoms, and emergency contacts is readily available.
- Be sure that other appropriate parents and coaching staff and health care professionals know about the plan and have been trained in its use.

ACTION PLAN – WHAT A COACH SHALL DO WHEN A CONCUSSION IS SUSPECTED

1. **Remove the athlete from play.** Look for the signs and symptoms of a concussion if your athlete has experienced a bump or blow to the head. Athletes who experience signs or symptoms of concussion should not be allowed to return to play. When in doubt, keep the athlete out of play.
2. **Ensure that the athlete is evaluated right away by an appropriate health care professional.** Do not try to judge the severity of the injury yourself. Health care professionals have a number of methods that they can use to assess the severity of concussions. As a coach, recording the following information can help health care professionals in assessing the athlete after the injury:
 - Cause of the injury and force of the hit or blow to the head
 - Any loss of consciousness (passed out/knocked out) and if so, for how long
 - Any memory loss immediately following the injury
 - Any seizures immediately following the injury
 - Number of previous concussions (if any)
3. **Inform the athlete's parents/guardians about the possible concussion and give them the fact sheet on concussion.** Make sure they know that the athlete should be seen by a health care professional experienced in evaluating for concussion.
4. **Allow the athlete to return to play only with permission from a health care professional with experience in evaluating for concussion.** A repeat concussion that occurs before the brain recovers from the first can slow recovery or increase the likelihood of having long-term problems. Prevent common long-term problems and the rare second impact syndrome by delaying the athletes return to the activity until the player receives appropriate medical evaluation and approval for return to play.
5. **Health care providers with experience in head injury and concussion authorized to allow the athlete to return to play:**
 - Medical Doctors (MD)
 - Doctor of Osteopathy (DO)
 - Advanced Registered Nurse Practitioner (ARNP)
 - Physicians Assistant (PA)
 - Licensed Certified Athletic Trainers (ATC)

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY ABOUT CONCUSSIONS

It's important to raise awareness about sports-related concussion throughout the AAU community. To educate athletes, parents, coaches, and other AAU officials about concussion prevention, look for opportunities to make presentations to each group.

Video links on sports concussions:

http://www.cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury/ctk_video_wm_bb.html

Video describing a traumatic brain injury to Brandon Schultz a high school football player from Washington State and the long-term effects of his concussion. – 11 minutes

<http://www.wiaa.com/lystedt/default.htm>

Video on concussions for coaches, athletes, and parents/guardians – 14 minutes

<http://www.cdc.gov/concussioninyouthsports>

Youth sports video – Keeping quiet can keep you out of the game – 2 minutes

1. **Athletes.** Show them a video and pass out the concussion fact sheet. Emphasize that you take this issue seriously and that you expect them to do so as well. Consider devoting a regular team meeting to this topic and inviting a health care professional to speak to your team. Use some of the following talking points to guide your discussion with athletes:
 - “Every bump, blow, or jolt to the head is a potential concussion.”
 - “Signs and symptoms of concussion can appear right away or days or weeks after the injury. Know and look for any signs of a concussion, even if you think the injury was minor.”
 - “Tell coaching staff, your parents, or a health care professional if you receive a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or have signs and symptoms of concussion.”
 - “Tell your coach if you received a concussion in another sport.”
 - “You can get a concussion during drills, practices, and games. Injuries that happen during practice can be just as serious as those that happen during competition.”
 - “Do not play through symptoms of concussion. Your risk of having a second concussion and serious injury increases at this time.”
 - “It’s better to miss one game than the whole season.”

2. **Parents.** Send the concussion fact sheet to each athlete’s family during the preseason, and again if a concussion occurs. You might also hold parent forums to let them know about AAU’s plans for concussion prevention and management. Consider using some of the following talking points to guide your discussion with parents:
 - “We know you care about your teen’s health. That is why it is so important that you talk to them about the potential dangers of concussion.”
 - “Every concussion should be taken seriously.”
 - “Know and watch for any signs and symptoms of concussion if your teen has any blow to the head. Signs and symptoms can appear right away, or days or weeks after the injury happens.”
 - “Discourage your teen from playing when experiencing any signs or symptoms of concussion.”
 - “Alert your teen’s coach to any known or suspected concussion. This can help prevent second impact syndrome, which reportedly can happen when an athlete has more than one concussion over a short period of time (hours, days, or weeks).”

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

This website has English and Spanish fact sheets and brochures on concussion and traumatic brain injury. www.cdc.gov/ncipc

Brain Injury Association of America

This organization provides information and resources to improve the quality of life for individuals with brain injuries. www.biausa.org

Washington Interscholastic Activities Association

www.wiaa.com

***If you think your athlete has sustained a concussion –
take him/her out of play, and
seek the advice of a health care professional experienced in evaluating for
concussion.***