

Concussion Policy

Purpose

This protocol covers the recognition, medical diagnosis, and management of BCPFA participants who may sustain a suspected concussion during a BCPFA member activity. It aims to ensure that athletes with a suspected concussion receive timely and appropriate care and proper management to allow them to return back to their sport safely. This protocol may not address every possible clinical scenario that can occur during an activity but includes critical elements based on the latest evidence and current expert consensus.

Pre-Season Education

Despite recent increased attention focusing on concussion there is a continued need to improve concussion education and awareness. Optimizing the prevention and management of concussion depends highly on education of all BCPFA stakeholders (athletes, parents, coaches, officials, trainers) on current evidence-informed approaches that can prevent concussion and more serious forms of head injury and help identify and manage an athlete with a suspected concussion. Concussion education should include information on:

- the definition of concussion,
- possible mechanisms of injury (MOI),
- common signs and symptoms,
- steps that can be taken to prevent concussions and other injuries from occurring in sport,
- what to do when an athlete has suffered a suspected concussion or more serious head injury,
- what measures should be taken to ensure proper medical assessment,
- Return-to-Sport Strategies, and
- Return to sport medical clearance requirements

As part of this education, all coaches and trainers are mandated by Football Canada and BCPFA to successfully complete the following NCCP courses:

1. Making Headway
2. Safe Contact

All players and their guardians (as applicable) must be supplied with a Concussion Information Sheet that outlines symptoms, signs and risks associated with concussions. (A sample is attached to this policy.)

ONSITE MEDICAL ASSESSMENT

- Depending on the suspected severity of the injury, an initial assessment may be completed by emergency medical professionals or by an on-site licensed healthcare professional where available. In cases where an athlete loses consciousness, or it is suspected an athlete might have a more severe head or spine injury, Emergency Medical Assessment by emergency medical professionals should take place. If a more severe injury is not suspected, the athlete should undergo sideline medical assessment.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL ASSESSMENT

- If an athlete is suspected of sustaining a more severe head or spine injury during a game or practice, an ambulance should be called immediately to transfer the patient to the nearest emergency department for further Medical Assessment.
- Stakeholders should not make any effort to remove equipment or move the athlete until an ambulance has arrived and the athlete should not be left alone until the ambulance arrives. After the emergency medical services staff has completed the Emergency Medical Assessment, the athlete should be transferred to the nearest hospital for Medical Assessment. In the case of youth (under 18 years of age), the athlete's parents should be contacted immediately to inform them of the athlete's injury. For athletes over 18 years of age, their emergency contact person should be contacted if one has been provided.

SIDELINE MEDICAL ASSESSMENT

If an athlete is suspected of sustaining a concussion and there is no concern for a more serious head or spine injury, the athlete should be immediately removed from the field of play.

Scenario 1: If a licensed healthcare professional is present

- The athlete should be taken to a quiet area and undergo Sideline Medical Assessment using an accepted Sport Concussion Assessment Tool, such as a SCAT5 or the Child SCAT5. The Concussion Assessment tools should only be used by a practitioner that has experience using these tools. It is important to note that the results of SCAT5 and Child SCAT5 testing can be normal in the setting of acute concussion. These tools can be used to document initial neurological status but should not be used to make sideline return- to-sport decisions in youth athletes. Any youth athlete who is suspected of having sustained a concussion must not return to the game or practice and must be referred for Medical Assessment.
- If a youth athlete is removed from play following a significant impact and has undergone assessment but there are NO visual signs of a concussion and the athlete reports NO concussion symptoms, then the athlete can return to play but should be monitored for delayed symptoms.

Scenario 2: If there is no licensed healthcare professional present

- The athlete should be referred immediately for medical assessment by a medical doctor or nurse practitioner, and the athlete must not return to play until receiving medical clearance.

CONCUSSION MANAGEMENT

- When an athlete has been diagnosed with a concussion, it is important that the athlete's parent/legal guardian is informed. All athletes diagnosed with a concussion must be provided with a standardized Medical Assessment Letter that notifies the athlete and their parents/legal guardians/spouse that they have been diagnosed with a concussion. and may not return to any activities with a risk of concussion until medically cleared to do so by a medical doctor or nurse practitioner. Because the Medical Assessment Letter contains personal health information, it is the responsibility of the athlete or their parent/legal guardian to provide this documentation to the athlete's coaches/club or employers.
- Athletes diagnosed with a concussion should be provided with education about the signs and symptoms of a concussion, strategies about how to manage their symptoms, the risks of returning to sport without medical clearance and recommendations regarding a gradual return to sport activities. Athletes diagnosed with a concussion are to be managed according to their Return-to-Sport Strategy under the supervision of a medical doctor or nurse practitioner. When available, athletes should be encouraged to work with the team athletic therapist or physiotherapist to optimize progression through their Return-to-Sport Strategy. Once the athlete has completed their Return-to- Sport Strategy and are deemed to be clinically recovered from their concussion, the medical doctor or nurse practitioner can consider the athlete for a return to full sports activities and issue a Medical Clearance Letter.

RETURN TO SPORT

- Athletes who have been determined to have not sustained a concussion and those that have been diagnosed with a concussion and have successfully completed their Return- to-Sport Strategy can be considered for return to full sports activities. The final decision to medically clear an athlete to return to full game activity should be based on the clinical judgment of the medical doctor or nurse practitioner considering the athlete's past medical history, clinical history, physical examination findings and the results other tests and clinical consultations where indicated (i.e. neuropsychological testing, diagnostic imaging). Prior to returning to full contact practice and game play, each athlete that has been diagnosed with a concussion must provide their coach/club with a standardized Medical Clearance Letter that specifies that a medical doctor or nurse practitioner has personally evaluated the patient and has cleared the athlete to return to sports. In geographic regions of the province with limited access to medical doctors (i.e. rural or northern communities), a licensed healthcare professional (such as a nurse) with pre-arranged access to a medical doctor or nurse practitioner can provide this documentation. A copy of the Medical Clearance Letter should also be submitted to sports organization officials that have injury reporting and surveillance programs where applicable.
- Athletes who have been provided with a Medical Clearance Letter may return to full sport activities as tolerated. If the athlete experiences any new concussion-like symptoms while returning to play, they should be instructed to stop playing immediately, notify their parents, coaches, trainer or teachers, and undergo follow-up Medical Assessment. In the event that the athlete sustains a new suspected concussion, the protocol should be followed as outlined here.

CONCUSSION INFORMATION SHEET - SAMPLE

*Parents are encouraged to assess the free online Concussion Awareness Training Tool (CATT) developed by the BC Injury Research & Prevention Unit at www.cattonline.com

A concussion is a brain injury and all brain injuries are serious. They are caused by a bump, blow or jolt to the head, or by a blow to another part of the body with the force transmitted to the head. They can range from mild to severe and can disrupt the way the brain normally works. Even though most concussions are mild, ***all concussions are potentially serious and may result in complications including prolonged brain damage and death if not recognized and managed properly.*** In other words, even a “ding” or a bump on the head can be serious. You can’t see a concussion and most sports concussions occur without loss of consciousness. Signs and symptoms of concussion may show up right after the injury or can take hours or days to fully appear. If you child reports any symptoms of concussion, or if you notice the symptoms or signs of concussion yourself, seek medical attention right away.

Symptoms may include one or more of the following:

- Headaches
- “Pressure in head”
- Nausea or vomiting
- Neck pain
- Balance problems or dizziness
- Blurred, double or fuzzy vision
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Feeling sluggish or slowed down
- Feeling foggy or groggy
- Drowsiness
- Change in sleep patterns
- Amnesia
- “Don’t feel right”
- Fatigue or low energy
- Sadness
- Nervousness or anxiety
- Irritability
- More emotional
- Confusion
- Concentration or memory problems (forgetting game plays)
- Repeating the same question/comment

Signs observed by teammates, parents and coaches include:

- Appears dazed
- Vacant facial expression
- Confused about assignment
- Forgets plays
- Is unsure of game, score, or opponent
- Moves clumsily or displays lack of coordination
- Answers questions slowly
- Slurred speech
- Shows behavior or personality changes
- Can’t recall events prior to hit
- Can’t recall events after hit
- Seizures or convulsions
- Any changes in typical behaviors or personality
- Loses consciousness

What can happen if my child keeps on playing with a concussion or returns too soon?

Athletes with the signs and symptoms of concussion should be removed from play immediately. Continuing to play with the signs and symptoms of a concussion leaves the young athlete especially vulnerable to greater injury. There is an increased risk of significant damage from a concussion for a period of time after that concussion occurs, particularly if the athlete suffers another concussion before completely recovering from the first one. This can lead to prolonged recovery, or even to severe brain swelling (second impact syndrome) with devastating and even fatal consequences. It is well known that adolescents or teenage athletes will often under report symptoms of injuries and concussions are no different. As a result, education of administrators, coaches, parents and students is the key for student-athletes' safety.

If you think your child has suffered a concussion

Any athlete even suspected of suffering a concussion should be removed from the game or practice immediately. No athlete may return to activity after an apparent head injury or concussion, regardless of how mild it seems to how quickly symptoms clear, without medical clearance. Close observation of the athlete should continue for several hours. The BCPFA policy now requires the consistent and uniform implementation of long and well- established return-to-play concussion guidelines. You should also inform your child's coach if you think that your child may have a concussion. **Remember, it's better to miss one game than miss the whole season.**

For further information on Football Canada's Safe Contact and Concussion Education:

www.safecontact.footballcanada.com/concussion-education/concussion-overview/

For current and up-to-date information on concussions, please visit www.injuryresearch.bc.ca.

PARENT-ATHLETE CONSENT FORM

Athlete Name Printed

Athlete Signature

Date

Parent or Legal Guardian Printed

Parent or Legal Guardian Signature Date

By signing above, the signees acknowledge they have read the BCPFA's and Football Canada's concussion policy and understand the risk of head injuries associated with playing a contact sport. The signees also agree to abide by all the guidelines set out by the BCPFA/Football Canada Concussion Policy.

Parents/Athletes: Please return the signed form to your coach.

Coaches: Please collect all signed forms from your team and keep them in your records. You will need to produce these forms to BCPFA if/when requested.