

CONCUSSIONS GUIDELINES FOR THE TEACHER



NB Trauma Program
Programme de
traumatologie du NB

Horizon Health Network Réseau de santé Horizon Vitalité Health Network Réseau de santé Vitalité Ambulance NB New Brunswick Department of Health Ministère de la santé du Nouveau-Brunswick

www.nbtrauma.ca

WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

A concussion is a brain injury that cannot be seen on routine x-rays, CT scans, or MRIs. It affects the way a person may think and remember things, and can cause a variety of symptoms.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS AND SIGNS OF CONCUSSION?

A STUDENT DOES NOT NEED TO BE KNOCKED OUT (LOSE CONSCIOUSNESS) TO HAVE HAD A CONCUSSION.

THINKING PROBLEMS	STUDENT'S COMPLAINTS	OTHER PROBLEMS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does not know time, date, place, period of game, opposing team, score of game• General confusion• Cannot remember things that happened before and after the injury• Knocked out	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Headache• Dizziness• Feels dazed• Feels “dinged” or stunned; “having my bell rung”• Sees stars, flashing lights• Ringing in the ears• Sleepiness• Loss of vision• Sees double or blurry• Stomachache, stomach pain, nausea	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poor coordination or balance• Blank stare/glassy eyed• Vomiting• Slurred speech• Slow to answer questions or follow directions• Easily distracted• Poor concentration• Strange or inappropriate emotions (ie. laughing, crying, getting mad easily)• Not playing as well

WHAT CAUSES A CONCUSSION?

Any blow to the head, face or neck, or a blow to the body which causes a sudden jarring of the head may cause a concussion (ie. a ball to the head, being checked into the boards in hockey).

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF A STUDENT GETS A CONCUSSION?

You will most often have students who have sustained a concussion outside of school, but it is important to know how to deal with a student whom you suspect has sustained a concussion while participating in a sport or activity at school. **IF YOU SUSPECT A CONCUSSION, THE STUDENT SHOULD STOP PLAYING THE SPORT OR ACTIVITY RIGHT AWAY.** He/she should not be left alone and should be seen by a doctor as soon as possible that day. If a student is knocked out for more than a minute, call an ambulance to take him/her to a hospital immediately. Do not move him/her or remove athletic equipment like a helmet; wait for paramedics to arrive.

Anyone with a concussion should not go back to play that day, even if he/she says he/she is feeling better. Problems caused by a head injury can get worse later that day or night. He/she should not return to activity until he/she has been seen by a doctor.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE FOR THE STUDENT TO GET BETTER?

The signs and symptoms of a concussion often last for 7-10 days but may last much longer. In some cases, children may take many weeks or months to heal. Having had previous concussions may increase the chance that a person may take longer to heal.

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HOW IS A CONCUSSION TREATED?

IT IS CLEAR THAT EXERTION, BOTH PHYSICAL AND MENTAL, WORSENS CONCUSSION SYMPTOMS AND MAY DELAY RECOVERY. THUS, THE MOST IMPORTANT TREATMENT FOR CONCUSSION IS REST. Many students find that attending school aggravates their symptoms, and may have to stay home and rest. It is not possible to know when symptoms will improve, as each concussion is unique. Therefore, a specific return date to school may not initially be possible for the student, their parents, or doctor to provide. Once they feel better, they can try going back to school, initially part time (e.g. half days at first) and, if their symptoms do not return, then they can go back full time. Remember that mental exertion can make symptoms worse, so the student's workload may need to be adjusted accordingly.

IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT A STUDENT DOES NOT GO BACK TO ACTIVITY IF HE/SHE HAS ANY CONCUSSION SYMPTOMS OR SIGNS.

Return to sport and activity must follow a step-wise approach:

- STEP 1)** No activity, complete rest. Once back to normal and cleared by a doctor, go to step 2.
- STEP 2)** Light exercise such as walking or stationary cycling, for 10-15 minutes.
- STEP 3)** Sport specific aerobic activity (ie. skating in hockey, running in soccer), for 20-30 minutes. **NO CONTACT.**
- STEP 4)** "On field" practice such as ball drills, shooting drills, and other activities with **NO CONTACT** (ie. no checking, no heading the ball, etc.).
- STEP 5)** "On field" practice with body contact, once cleared by a doctor.
- STEP 6)** Game play.

NOTE: **EACH STEP MUST TAKE A MINIMUM OF ONE DAY.** If a student has any symptoms of a concussion (e.g. headache, feeling sick to his/her stomach) that come back either during activity, or later that day, he/she should stop the activity immediately and rest for a minimum of 24 hours. The student should be seen by a doctor and cleared again before starting the step wise protocol again. The protocol needs to be individualized to the patient: their injury, and the types of activities they are returning to. This protocol is used for all physical activities, including Physical Education classes. Therefore P.E. teachers should speak with the child's parents in order to determine what kind of participation the child can have in class.

WHEN CAN A STUDENT WITH A CONCUSSION RETURN TO SPORT?

It is very important that a student not play any sports, including P.E. class activities if he/she has any signs or symptoms of concussion. The student must rest until he/she is completely back to normal. When he/she has been back to normal and has been seen by a doctor, he/she can then go through the steps of increasing activity described above. When the student has progressed through these steps with no symptoms or problems, and has received clearance from a doctor, he/she may return to play. If you are unsure if a student should participate, remember...**when in doubt, sit them out!**