

CSAA Concussion Policy and Protocol

The American Association of Neurological Surgeons describes a concussion as “an injury to the brain that results in temporary loss of normal brain function. The injury is usually caused by a blow to the head. Cuts or bruises may be present on the head or face, but in many cases, there are no signs of trauma”.¹ Though many people assume concussions involve a loss of consciousness, that is not always true. In many cases, a person with a concussion never loses consciousness. Due to the severity of the cumulative effects of repeated concussions, every case or potential occurrence should be handled with the utmost care. Growing concern and increased awareness has prompted many states to enact laws governing the handling head traumas such as concussions. “Between 2009 and 2013, all 50 states, and the District of Columbia, passed laws on concussions in sports for youth and/or high school athletes”.² In 2012 Kentucky passed House Bill 281 now known as Kentucky Revised Statute 160.445.³ In accordance with a corresponding resolution to KRS 160.445 regarding non-scholastic youth sports (HR 58⁴), the Catholic School Athletic Association (CSAA) has developed the following concussion policy and protocol.

Preventive Measures

The first line of defense against concussions is prevention. In an effort to combat concussion occurrences, all coaches, officials and youth participants in CSAA sports are required to:

- Strictly follow the rules of play established by the CSAA for individual sports.
- Wear protective equipment as dictated by the sport. Protective and standard equipment should be periodically examined, replaced when necessary per manufacturer standards and well maintained at all times. Although safety equipment such as helmets can reduce the severity of injuries, it does not eliminate the risk of a concussion.
- Always practice good sportsmanship.

Recovery from a concussion may require the limitation of certain activities as directed by a medical professional. These limitations may include physical and mental activity as well as avoidance of specific activities (television viewing, texting, computer use etc.). Physical activity includes but is not limited to sport-related participation (practice and competition), recreational activity and school-based physical education classes. Mental activity includes but is not limited to school-based assignments and quizzes.

Education & Preparation

With preventive measures and recovery needs in mind, education and preparation are paramount. The following actions are recommended:

1. All coaches annually complete the “Concussions & Head Injuries” module of the KHSAA online safety course found at www.khsaa.org.
2. Have at least one coach, who has successfully completed CSAA approved concussion training, present during all practices and competitions.
3. Identify any athlete on the current roster who has a history of medically diagnosed concussions. Athletes who have had previous concussions may be at a higher risk to experience additional concussions or to suffer the adverse effects of another concussion.

Mandatory Requirements:

- 1.** The Norton Sports Health “Sports Concussion Reference Guide and Action Plan” and “Could it be a concussion?” guide must be available on-site at all practices and competitions for reference. Both documents can also be found on the CSAA website.
- 2. For Football Coaches Only:** It is mandatory all coaches annually complete USA Football’s *Heads Up Football* program online certification course, and at all times maintain one specifically designated and certified “Player Safety Coach” per school or merged school.
- 3. All Coaches and Parents/Guardians:** Review and comply with all aspects of this concussion policy and protocol.

Education of student-athletes is key in concussion management. Athletes should feel comfortable reporting suspected injuries to themselves or a teammate. To this end, it is the responsibility of school athletic personnel to work with coaches, parents and licensed medical providers to provide the proper education material to athletes.

Officials: All CSAA event contest officials per NFHS guidelines are responsible for knowing the signs and symptoms of a concussion and immediately removing from play any athlete suspected of a concussion. Once the athlete has been removed and referred to a team coach, officials have no further role in the diagnosis or subsequent treatment of the athlete.

Protocol

If a student-athlete is suspected of suffering head trauma (possible concussion) while attending a CSAA organized team activity (OTA), regardless of whether the injury occurred during or outside of the OTA, the mandatory protocol is as follows:

- 1.** The athlete is immediately removed from practice or competition.
- 2.** If a physician or licensed health care provider, whose scope of practice includes training in concussion evaluation and management, is on-site such an individual is empowered to make a determination of concussion signs or symptoms. The determination and subsequent instructions of such an individual are final and not appealable. Acceptable medical professionals generally include MD (Medical Doctor), DO (Doctor of Osteopathy), PA (Physician’s Assistant), ARNP (Advanced Registered Nurse Practitioner), ATC (Certified Athletic Trainer), or LAT (Licensed Athletic Trainer). Any licensed health care provider not included in this list is not empowered to make on-site determinations without advanced approval from the CSAA office.
- 3.** If one of the medical professionals listed in (2.) above are not available on-site, coaches should consult the CSAA approved Norton Sports Health “Could it be a concussion?” guide to determine if concussion signs or symptoms are present. When possible, have two coaches/school athletic personnel observe the athlete to confirm and document observations.
 - a. If there are any signs or symptoms present:** A concussion is presumed even if symptoms appear to improve/clear during the OTA. The athlete will only be allowed to return to activity (including practice) once cleared by a physician or licensed health care provider, whose scope of practice includes training in concussion evaluation and management.

b. If there are no immediate signs or symptoms present:

The athlete is not allowed to return to practice or competition for the remainder of the day. The athlete's parents/guardians are notified of the incident and informed to observe the athlete for possible delayed symptoms. Direct the athlete's parents/guardians to follow the Norton Sports Health "Sports Concussion Reference Guide and Action Plan". In this instance, **it is the responsibility of the athlete's parents/guardians to decide whether to have the athlete evaluated by a medical professional prior to the next CSAA OTA.** If the athlete returns to activity without a medical evaluation and concussion signs/symptoms develop, the athlete must immediately cease all activity until a medical evaluation is provided.

3. For athletes who are formally diagnosed with a concussion, a physician/health care provider statement (including diagnosis and recommendations) must be received by the coach prior to the athlete's return to practice or competition. The physician's statement may include a "gradual return to play" process. If so, this process must be strictly followed. If at any time during the "gradual return to play" process or after the athlete has returned to normal activity, he/she exhibits concussion-like symptoms, the athlete must immediately stop all activity and refer to their attending health care provider.

4. Confirmed concussions must be documented by school athletic department personnel. A copy of the documentation and physician/health care provider statement must be sent to the CSAA office within 5 business days.

It is the policy of the CSAA that safety of the student-athlete comes first. The decision of the on-site coaches, contest officials and/or school athletic personnel to remove from play an athlete suspected of suffering a head trauma (possible concussion) stands as the final ruling.

WHEN IN DOUBT, TAKE THE PLAYER OUT!

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Footnotes:

1. From "Patient Information" by the American Association of Neurological Surgeons, 2011. Retrieved from www.aans.org/Patient%20Information/Conditions%20and%20Treatments/Concussion.aspx.
2. From "Get a Heads Up on Concussion in Sports Policies" by the Center for Disease Control, 2013. Retrieved from www.cdc.gov/concussion/policies.html.
3. House Bill 281 can be found at Title XIII of the Kentucky education law in the Kentucky Revised Statutes (K.R.S.) section 160.445 dealing with school district officers and employees.
4. Resolution HR 58 may be retrieved from www.lrc.ky.gov/record/12rs/HR58.htm.