

## **Sports-Related Head Injury & Concussions**

All schools subject to the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA) rules are required, by state law, to have their student-athletes and their parents/guardians, coaches, athletic directors, school nurses, and physicians learn about the consequences of head injuries and concussions through training programs and written materials. The law requires that athletes and their parents/guardians inform their coaches about prior head injuries at the beginning of the season. Massachusetts Department of Public Health regulations promulgated under the state law provide, in pertinent part, that “[a]ny student, who during a practice or competition, sustains a head injury or suspected concussion, or exhibits signs and symptoms of a concussion, or loses consciousness, even briefly, shall be removed from the practice or competition immediately and may not return to the practice or competition that day.” 105 C.M.R. 201.010(A). Additionally, the regulations provide that a “student shall not return to practice or competition unless and until the student provides medical clearance and authorization” in accordance with the requirements of state law and regulations. 105 C.M.R. 201.010(B).

Parents/guardians and students who plan to participate in any athletic program at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School (“CRLS”) must also take a free on-line course. Two free on-line courses are available and contain all the information required by the law. The first is available through the National Federation of High School Coaches. You will need to click the “order here” button and complete a brief information form to register. At the end of the course, you will receive a completion receipt. The entire course, including registration, can be completed in less than 30 minutes.

<http://www.nfhslearn.com/electiveDetail.aspx?courseID=15000>

The second on-line course is available through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at:

[www.cdc.gov/Concussion](http://www.cdc.gov/Concussion)

A concussion is an alteration of mental status resulting from the brain being jolted inside of the skull due to a blow to the head or body. It is one of the most complicated injuries faced by medical professionals as the signs and symptoms are not always straightforward and the effects and severity of the injury can be difficult to determine. Among the symptoms associated with concussion are: headache, dizziness, confusion, amnesia, nausea, and disorientation. Loss of consciousness occurs in less than ten percent of all injuries and is not an indicator of concussion severity. Following an injury, the athlete may also experience other difficulties such as sensitivity to light and sound, forgetfulness, fatigue and emotional changes such as anxiety or depression.

Most athletes who sustain a concussion can fully recover as long as the brain has had time to heal before sustaining another hit; however, relying only on an athlete’s self-report of symptoms to determine injury recovery is inadequate as many student athletes are not aware of the signs and symptoms of injury, the severity concussive injuries pose or they may feel pressure from coaches, parents/guardians, teammates or others to return to play as quickly as possible. One or more of these factors will likely result in under-diagnosing the injury and a premature return to play. Research has shown that young concussed athletes who return to play before their brain has healed are highly vulnerable to more prolonged

post-concussion syndrome or, in rare cases, a catastrophic neurological injury known as Second Impact Syndrome. Therefore, the Cambridge Public Schools encourages the following care when an athlete sustains a concussion in a school-sponsored sporting event:

1. When any injury occurs, the injured athlete should promptly report the injury to the athletic trainer, coach and school nurse.
2. When any injury occurs, including a head injury or suspected concussion, or signs or symptoms of a concussion are exhibited or a there is a loss of consciousness, the injured athlete should visit the local hospital emergency room or review his/her condition with his/her primary care physician to ensure there is not a need for emergency medical care.
3. ***Communication is vital.*** Subsequently a care team consisting of the injured athlete's primary care physician and parents/guardians along with the Cambridge Public Schools' athletic trainer, school nurse, teachers, head coach and athletic director should monitor the symptoms of injury.
4. Engage the injured athlete in a battery of tests that include a combination of self-report symptoms, balance and neuro-cognitive testing. The combined assessment will provide a more sensitive and objective evaluation of the effects of the concussion that will help better determine when it is safe for the athlete to return to play.
5. The injured athlete will not be allowed to return to play or practice until a certified licensed athletic trainers from CRLS has authorized his/her return to play.