

Managing concussion risk – Contact sport in schools



The playing of sports in schools brings many benefits for the students involved, enhancing not only their physical health but also their mental and social well-being. This should continue to be encouraged. However, engaging in such activity is not without some risk of injury depending on the nature of the sport being played – with some posing more of a risk than others.

One particular aspect that does need careful consideration though, is managing the risk from concussion when playing contact sports such as, rugby. This note considers this specifically.

As concussion can result from other school activities (e.g. physical education, other sports such as boxing, hockey, cycling etc.), this issue may need to be considered more broadly – particularly where there is a risk of students falling from height or onto hard surfaces.

Managing the risk

The arrangements necessary for managing the risk will be dependent upon a school's individual circumstances and the sports involved. However, in identifying, developing and implementing suitable arrangements it will be necessary to consider the following:

- any **physical safety precautions** that may be necessary to reduce the risk of concussion. For example, where rugby is played it should be ensured that posts and barriers close to or on the pitch are adequately padded; ground conditions are suitable (not frozen or hard due to drought) etc. Here pre-match checks will be essential.
- **arrangements for supervision** during competitive play or any related training activity. This will include ensuring that the required numbers of competent staff and others are available to adequately officiate and coach the activities.
- **emergency arrangements** – this will include the provision of adequate first-aid facilities and appropriate medical support; access to a telephone and any required emergency numbers; and consideration of any transport arrangements where hospital support may be required.
- any required **precautions during the activity** – this will include the correct and consistent application of the rules of the game or the teaching of appropriate skills. For example, where rugby is played or taught, correct tackle techniques should be coached and performed consistently during the game with high, tip and spear tackles being penalised accordingly.
- **concussion management, during the activity** – this must include procedures for:
 - concussion recognition and assessment (including the use of the pocket concussion recognition tool and the sports concussion assessment tools SCAT 3 and Child-SCAT3)
 - allowing those who are injured, but are not suspected of suffering from concussion to return to play
 - safe removal, medical assessment and treatment of individuals who are suspected of suffering from concussion
 - notifying parents or guardians of cases of suspected concussion and any necessary precautions
 - recording of such incidents (for example, in the school accident book) and any necessary follow-up.

- **concussion management, following injury** – to include the arrangements (including any necessary time periods) to allow students to rest sufficiently and return to school, training and competitive play safely. This should take account of any medical advice and/or any graduated return to play (GRTP) protocol; include any expectations in relation to school studies and consider any necessary liaison with parents, guardians and/or the player's doctor.
- **training and information for staff and others** – who are required to coach and train students or officiate during competitive activities. The training and information provided must cover the specific arrangements/responsibilities for managing concussion risk and would include issuing the pocket concussion recognition tool.
- **information for students** – playing contact sports, who should be encouraged to recognise concussion symptoms and report any that occur during games, training or out of school.
- **information for parents or guardians** – this will include information about concussion recognition, the specific arrangements at your school and notification of any suspected concussion/required precautions to them. Some of this information could usefully be posted on your website, with parents and guardians being encouraged to notify you of any concussion that may take place outside of normal school activities.
- **the monitoring of any implemented arrangements** – to ensure that they remain effective and properly reviewed to reflect best practice.
- **the keeping of appropriate records** – including those relating to any training and information provided; incidents of concussion, including any follow-up; and notifications made to parents or guardians.

The specific arrangements and responsibilities for managing concussion from contact sport should be recorded and reviewed (as appropriate) in the form of a policy (perhaps as part of the overall health and safety policy or other supporting documentation).



Useful resources and guidance

- 'Concussion Guidelines for the Education Sector', Sport and Recreation Alliance, available at www.sportandrecreation.org.uk
- 'Concussion is dangerous: Welsh Government guidance on concussion for school and community sport up to age 19', Llywodraeth Cymru: Welsh Government, available at www.learning.gov.wales
- 'If in doubt, sit them out, Scottish Sports Concussion Guidance: Grassroots sport and general public', Sport Scotland, available at <https://sportsotland.org.uk/clubs/scottish-sports-concussion-guidance/>
- Pocket Concussion Recognition Tool™, British Journal of Sports Medicine, available at <https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/bjsports/47/5/267.full.pdf>
- Sports Concussion Assessment Tool (SCAT) 3™ and Child - Sports Concussion Assessment Tool (SCAT) 3, British Journal of Sports Medicine, available at <https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/bjsports/47/5/259.full.pdf> and <https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/bjsports/47/5/263.full.pdf>
- For rugby, other useful guidelines and resources (including interactive web courses) are available at www.englandrugby.com; www.irishrugby.ie; www.wru.co.uk ; www.scottishrugby.org
- For boxing, useful information is available at www.abae.co.uk

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