

Brain Waves

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GOVERNOR SIGNS NEW STATE CONCUSSION LAW

It is estimated that up to 3.8 million sports and recreation-related traumatic brain injuries occur in the United States yearly. The highest rates of emergency department visits for sports concussion occur among young people from ages 10 to 19 years old. This suggests that youth athletes are especially vulnerable to the effects of concussion, which includes cognitive difficulties such as memory and attention problems.

The Alabama High School Athletic Association (AHSAA) and The Alabama Statewide Sports Concussion Taskforce (ASCT) have been working since 2007 with top experts to do something about this problem issue in Alabama. The details were finalized this past August when Alabama Governor, Robert Bentley, hosted a signing ceremony to enact Alabama's new Concussion Law.

The goal of the new law is to reduce the incidence of head injuries and avoid the adverse, long-term consequences of concussions. The first step toward reaching that goal begins by proper on-sight identification of the injury when it actually occurs. The next steps include immediate medical attention and management followed by physical and mental rest.

The new law helps to ensure these steps are taken by requiring all state athletic organizations and programs to:

- 1 provide information on sports concussions to all participating athletes and their families,
- 2 ensure that all coaches have training in the

recognition of concussions,

- 3 immediately remove from participation any athlete suspected of having a concussion;
- 4 see a doctor as soon as possible; and
- 5 that athlete shall not return to any form of participation until he/she has a medical release issued by a medical doctor

Once the law was signed, the focus shifted to educating parents and professionals in the schools and athletic organizations. The AHSAA Coaches have been required to complete an education program on concussions since the 2010-11 school year. Additionally, each student athlete and his/her parent(s) are required to sign a Concussion Information Form that includes the concussion policies.

Those who were essential in getting this law written and passed include experts from:

- ◆ The Alabama Department of Rehabilitative Services;
- ◆ The Alabama Head Injury Foundation;
- ◆ The Alabama Psychological Association;
- ◆ The Alabama Athletic Trainers Associations;
- ◆ Hoover High School;
- ◆ The University of Alabama;
- ◆ The University of Alabama at Birmingham;
- ◆ The University of West Alabama;
- ◆ The University of South Alabama; and
- ◆ Children's Hospital of Alabama.

A total of 24 States have similar laws, and another 18 States have pending legislation. All of the information and materials needed to comply with Alabama law can be obtained free of charge at <http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/HeadsUp/youth.html>.

A concussion is a brain injury, and all brain injuries should be taken seriously. Brain injuries are caused by a bump, blow, jolt to the head, or a blow to another part of the body with the force transmitted to the head. Brain injuries can range from mild to severe. Even though most concussions are classified as “mild,” all concussions can disrupt the way the brain normally works. The damage can potentially result in serious complications including prolonged brain damage and death if not recognized and managed properly. In short, a seemingly harmless “ding” or a bump on the head can be serious. You cannot 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 symptoms of concussion do appear, medical attention should be sought right away.

A person who has a concussion may experience one or more of the following symptoms:

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

Any health care professional or AHSAA certified coach may identify concussive signs, symptoms or behaviors of a student athlete during any type

of athletic activity. Once concussive signs are identified, only a medical doctor can clear an athlete to return to play. Any school in violation of the AHSAA policy application of the National Federation rule will be subject to sanctions. Others, such as teammates, parents and coaches need to watch for symptoms that include:

- ◆ appears dazed
- ◆ vacant facial expression
- ◆ confused about assignment
- ◆ forgets plays
- ◆ is unsure of game, score, or opponent
- ◆ moves clumsily or displays incoordination
- ◆ 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 change in typical behavior or personality
- ◆ loses consciousness

SOURCE: Alabama High School Athletic Association Concussion Information Form



CONCUSSION IN SPORTS - WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

In this free online course you are provided information on the impact sports-related concussion can have on young athletes. You can learn how to recognize a suspected concussion, the proper protocols to manage a suspected concussion, and steps to help injured players return to play safely after experiencing a concussion.

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

Please cut along dotted line surrounding the Concussion pin-up (on page 3). Hang the pin-up in your local school, gym or library. Copy freely or print out freely from <http://www.cdc.gov/concussion>

CONCUSSION

For more information about concussion and other types of traumatic brain injuries, go to WWW.CDC.GOV/CONCUSSION
A part of CDC's Heads Up series

A MUST READ FOR YOUNG ATHLETES

LET'S TAKE BRAIN INJURIES OUT OF PLAY

CONCUSSION FACTS...

- ... A concussion is a brain injury that affects how your brain works.
- ... A concussion is caused by a blow to the head or body:
 - .. from contact with another player, hitting a hard surface such as the ground, ice, or court; or
 - .. being hit by equipment such as a lacrosse stick, hockey puck, or field hockey ball.
- ... A concussion can happen even if you haven't been knocked unconscious.
- ... If you think you have a concussion, you should not return to play on the day of the injury and until a health care professional says you are OK to return to play.

CONCUSSION SYMPTOMS...

- Headaches
- Feeling foggy or groggy
- Drowsiness
- Fatigue or low energy
- Nervousness or anxiety
- "Pressure" in head
- Blurred, double, or fuzzy vision
- Concentration or memory problems
- Nausea or vomiting
- Irritability
- Confusion
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Feeling sluggish or slowed down
- Balance problems or dizziness
- Sadness
- Change in sleep patterns
- Amnesia
- Repeating the same question/comment
- More emotional

WHY SHOULD I REPORT MY SYMPTOMS?

- ... Unlike with some other injuries, playing or practicing with concussion symptoms is dangerous and can lead to a longer recovery and a delay in your return to play.
- ... While the brain is healing, you are much more likely to have another concussion. Repeat concussions can add to the time it takes to recover and the likelihood of long term problems.
- ... In rare cases, repeat concussions in young athletes can result in brain swelling or permanent damage to your brain. They can even be fatal.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I HAVE A CONCUSSION?

Don't hide it, report it! Ignoring symptoms and trying to "tough it out" often makes symptoms worse. Talk to a coach, parent, or athletic trainer if you think you or one of your teammates may have a concussion. Good friends and teammate help each other - not pressure each other into continuing to practice or play with a concussion.

Get checked out! Only a medical doctor can tell if you have a concussion and when it's OK to return to play. Sports have injury timeouts and player substitutions so that you can get checked out and the team can perform at its best.

Take care of yourself! A concussion can affect your ability to do schoolwork and other activities. Most athletes with a concussion get better and return to sports, but it is important to rest and give your brain time to heal. A repeat concussion that occurs while your brain is still healing can cause long-term problems that may change your life forever.



CONSUMER FACT SHEETS

The UAB-TBIMS web site (www.uab.edu/tbi) also offers Fact Sheets from the Model System Knowledge Translation Center, which summarizes research, identifies health information needs and develops information resources to support the Model Systems programs. Seventeen topics are currently available with four more coming soon.

1. Understanding TBI, Part 1: What happens to the brain during injury and in the early stages of recovery from TBI?
2. Understanding TBI, Part 2: Brain injury impact on individuals' functioning
3. Understanding TBI, Part 3: The recovery process
4. Understanding TBI, Part 4: The impact of a recent TBI on family members and what they can do to help with recovery
5. Sleep and TBI
6. Driving after TBI
7. Cognitive Problems after TBI
8. Emotional Problems after TBI
9. Fatigue and TBI
10. Seizures after TBI
11. Headaches after TBI
12. Returning to School After TBI
13. TBI and Acute Inpatient Rehabilitation
14. Depression after TBI
15. Balance Problems after TBI
16. Sexuality after TBI
17. Facts about the Vegetative and Minimally Conscious States after Severe Brain Injury



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