

Recognizing And Managing Concussions

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is making available a new multimedia educational toolkit to protect teen athletes from a serious but often underestimated health threat—concussion.

Concussions are a type of traumatic brain injury (TBI) caused by a blow or jolt to the head that can range from mild to severe and can disrupt the way the brain normally works. More than 300,000 sports-and recreation-related TBI's occur in the United States each year.

This initiative, "Heads Up: Concussion in High School Sports," includes information to prevent concussions and identify symptoms and immediate steps to take when an athlete is showing signs of a concussion.

"Organized sports play an important role in helping kids stay healthy. However, we need to recognize that sometimes there are health risks like concussions in sports where collisions are part of the game," said CDC Director Dr. Julie Gerberding. "Athletic directors, trainers, and coaches play a key role in preventing concussions and managing them correctly and this kit provides them with a variety of helpful tools to assist them in making good decisions about their players."

The centerpiece of the toolkit is a video and DVD featuring a high school football player who was permanently disabled after sustaining a second concussion during a game. This player's post-injury perspective emphasizes that it's better to miss one game than to miss the entire season – or the promise of a healthy future.

His experience highlights a rare but potentially fatal condition called second-impact syndrome, which occurs when a person who has had a concussion experiences a second blow while the brain is vulnerable. This second blow does not have to be violent or strong for its effects to be deadly or permanently disabling.

The toolkit also contains practical, easy-to-use information for coaches, athletic directors and trainers, teens, and parents:

- A coach's guide with information about preventing and managing concussion and how to implement a concussion action plan;
- A wallet card and clipboard sticker for coaches, which include signs and symptoms and emergency contacts;
- Posters targeting athletes, which can be placed in high school locker rooms or heavily trafficked areas at school or in the community;
- Fact sheets for parents and athletes, in English and Spanish; and
- A CD-ROM with downloadable kit materials and other concussion-related resources.

"Concussions can happen to any athlete, male or female, in any sport, and they should never be ignored," said CDC Injury Center director Dr. Ileana Arias. "It's not smart to play injured. This toolkit will provide coaches and parents with a common sense approach to help raise awareness and prevent sports-related concussions among athletes."

To prevent these life-changing and life-threatening events, coaches, athletic directors, parents and teens should:

- Use the right protective equipment during all practices and games.
- Know the signs and symptoms of concussion.

- Make sure their school has a year-round concussion action plan that can be used during games and practices.
- Keep athletes with known or suspected concussion from play until appropriate medical personnel have evaluated them and given them permission to return to play.

Toolkits can be ordered and downloaded free-of-charge online at:

http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/tbi/Coaches_Tool_Kit.htm. For more information about concussions, traumatic brain injury, or injury in general, visit the CDC Injury Center's website at www.cdc.gov/injury.