



## Concussion Guidelines

### What is a Concussion?

A concussion is a complex pathophysiological process affecting the brain, induced by traumatic biomechanical forces.

It is a clinical syndrome characterised by immediate and transient post-traumatic impairment of neural function, such as alteration of consciousness, disturbance of vision and/or balance due to cerebral or brainstem involvement.

*(Consensus Statement on Concussion in Sport: The 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Concussion in Sport, Zurich, November 2008)*

### Objective of the Concussion Guidelines

To standardise the management of rugby players who suffer a concussion while playing rugby.

### How a Player Can Get Concussed

Concussion can be sustained through the following actions:

- A direct blow to the head
- A blow to the jaw
- Sudden twisting or shearing force to the head
- Sudden deceleration of the head (blow to the body).

The player may not fall to the ground and may not lose consciousness.

### Signs and Symptoms

#### Cognitive

- Unaware of the score, opposition, etc
- Confusion
- Amnesia
- Unaware of time, date and place.

#### Symptoms

- Headache
- Dizziness, giddiness
- Nausea
- Unsteadiness
- Feeling stunned or dazed



- Seeing stars or flashing lights
- Ringing in the ears
- Visual disturbance
- Sleepiness or a sleep disturbance
- Feeling slowed down
- Fatigue

### **Physical Signs**

- Impaired consciousness
- Poor coordination and balance
- Seizures (fits)
- Slowness in processing info (for example answering questions or following directions)
- Easily distracted or poor concentration
- Inappropriate emotions (laughing, crying)
- Nausea or vomiting
- Vacant stare or glassy eyed
- Slurred speech
- Personality changes
- Inappropriate behaviour (running in the wrong direction)
- Decreased playing ability.

### **How to Manage Concussion**

#### **On the field**

If any of the above symptoms are present, remove the player from the field of play (*err on side of caution*). If the player is unconscious, suspect a neck injury and treat the player as such (immobilise his cervical spine and remove him from the field as per standard protocol for head and neck injuries).

#### **Off the field**

Do not allow the player to return to the field of play. Arrange for him to be evaluated by a doctor either at the field side or an emergency room. Do not leave the player alone. Monitoring for deterioration is essential. Follow the Return to play guidelines below.

### **Return to Play Guidelines**

All players who suffer a concussion must be assessed by a general practitioner as soon as reasonably possible after the concussion. Players sustaining a concussion involving convulsions or loss of consciousness, or who experience a deterioration of their symptoms, should be evaluated more urgently by a doctor, preferably immediately or after the game.

All age grade players have to adhere to a mandatory three week lay-off period.



Return to play should be graduated and take place over a five-day period:

- No activity, complete rest until asymptomatic
- Light exercise (walking, stationary cycling)
- Jogging to running
- Practice *without* contact
- Practice *with* contact
- Game.

Once the player is *asymptomatic*, he or she can proceed to the next level. If *symptomatic*, he or she should drop back to the level where there are no symptoms and attempt the progression again after 24 hours.

### **How to Prevent Concussion**

Strict application of the rules of rugby by both coaches and referees will assist with the reduction in the number of players suffering from concussion.

Encourage fair and fun play.

Encourage players to adopt measures which increase the strength of their neck muscles as this will help with reducing the forces which cause concussion.

The use of mouth guards should be encouraged.

(There is currently insufficient clinical evidence to suggest that the use of head gear assists with the reduction of concussion.)

*(Reference: Consensus Statement on Concussion in Sport: The 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Concussion in Sport, Zurich, November 2008)*