

Associated Public Schools of Victoria

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Concussion in Sport Policy and Procedures

1. Introduction

Sport Related Concussion (**SRC**) is a growing health concern in Australia. It affects athletes at all levels of sport, from the part-time recreational athlete to the full-time professional. Concerns about the incidence, and possible health ramifications for athletes, have led to an increased focus on the importance of diagnosing and managing the condition safely and appropriately.

Participant safety and welfare is paramount when dealing with all concussion incidents, both in the short term and long term.

Complications can occur if a player continues playing before they have fully recovered from a concussion.

2. Definition

Concussion is a complex process caused by trauma that transmits force to the brain either directly or indirectly and results in temporary disturbance or impairment of brain function. It can happen from an impact that is not directly to the head, and concussion does not always cause loss of consciousness.

Most commonly, it causes temporary impairment and the symptoms may develop over the hours or days following the injury. This means that it may be difficult to determine, by either staff, parents or medical practitioners, immediately after the injury whether a person is concussed. Cognitive functions in children and adolescents typically take up to 4 weeks to recover.

Concussion occurs most often in sports which involve body contact, collision or high speed.

3. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to raise awareness about concussion related issues and ensure APS Sport Member Schools carefully follow a suitable and appropriate course of management for a suspected concussion sustained during APS sporting matches or activities.

4. Accountability

All APS Sport Member Schools are required to develop and maintain a Concussion Policy or a concussion section in a broader safety policy that outlines the management procedures they are able to follow in the event of a concussion related incident.

All Concussion Policies shall be developed and maintained taking into account the APS Sport Concussion in Sport Procedures/Guidelines.

5. Reference Points / Background Papers

The Management of Concussion in Australian Football, with specific provisions for children aged 5-17 years

http://www.aflcommunityclub.com.au/fileadmin/user_upload/Health_Fitness/2017_Community_Concussion_Guidelines.pdf

Concussion In Sport Australia Position Statement

An initiative of the Australian Institute of Sport, Australian Medical Association, Australasian College of Sport and Exercise Physicians and Sports Medicine Australia

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https://www.concussioninsport.gov.au/home#position_statement

Concussion in Sport Policy, Issued by Sports Medicine Australia v1.0 January 2018

<https://sma.org.au/resources-advice/concussion/>

Guidelines for the Management of Concussion in Rugby League, National Rugby League

https://www.playrugbyleague.com/media/3102/guidelines-for-the-management-of-concussion-in-rugby-league_final_v20.pdf

Pocket Concussion Recognition Tool 5 -

http://www.aflcommunityclub.com.au/fileadmin/user_upload/Health_Fitness/2017_Community_Concussion_CRT.pdf

Role of Helmets and Mouthguards in Australian Football -

http://www.aflcommunityclub.com.au/fileadmin/user_upload/Health_Fitness/Role_of_helmets_and_mouthgaurds.pdf

APS Sport Concussion in Sport Procedures/Guidelines

6. Implications for Practice

6.1 At Board Level

To properly implement this Policy, APS Sport must:

- ensure that this Policy and the APS Sport Concussion in Sport Procedures/Guidelines (Guidelines) are endorsed on an annual basis and following significant incidents if they occur;
- ensure that copies of this Policy and the Guidelines are made available to all staff;
- ensure that this Policy and the Guidelines are incorporated into the Board's record of current policies;
- ensure that this Policy and the Guidelines are incorporated into APS's induction program, to ensure that all staff are aware of the Policy and Guidelines, have read and understood the Policy and Guidelines, and acknowledge their commitment to comply with the Policy and Guidelines;
- ensure that this Procedure is accessible to the public (including children and parents).

6.2 At Other Levels

To properly implement this Policy, all APS Sport staff must ensure that they abide by this Policy and the Guidelines and assist APS in the implementation of the Policy and Guidelines; and

6.3 At APS Sport Member School level

APS Sport will require Member Schools to sign an annual attestation of compliance with this policy (see Appendix 1).

Concussion in Sport

PROCEDURES/GUIDELINES

Introduction

These guidelines have been created to assist members of APS Sport in the management of concussion.

Sport Related Concussion (**SRC**) is a growing health concern in Australia. It affects athletes at all levels of sport, from the part-time recreational athlete to the full-time professional. Concerns about the incidence, and possible health ramifications for athletes, have led to an increased focus on the importance of diagnosing and managing the condition safely and appropriately.

Participant safety and welfare is paramount when dealing with all concussion incidents.

Complications can occur if a player continues playing before they have fully recovered from a concussion.

Member schools of The Associated Public Schools of Victoria Inc. (**APS Sport**) must take their duty of care to students seriously.

What is concussion?

Concussion is a complex process caused by trauma that transmits force to the brain either directly or indirectly and results in temporary disturbance or impairment of brain function. It can happen from an impact that is not directly to the head, and concussion does not always cause loss of consciousness.

Most commonly, it causes temporary impairment and the symptoms may develop over the hours or days following the injury. This means that it may be difficult to determine, by either staff, parents or medical practitioners, immediately after the injury whether a person is concussed. Cognitive functions in children and adolescents typically take up to 4 weeks to recover.

Concussion occurs most often in sports which involve body contact, collision or high speed.

Concussion in Children and Adolescents

The management of SRC in children (aged 5 to 12 years) and adolescents (aged 13 to 18 years) requires unique considerations suitable for the developing child.

Children have physical and developmental differences, including less developed neck muscles, increased head to neck ratio, and brain cells and pathways that are still developing.

Children and adolescents may have greater susceptibility to concussion. They may also take longer to recover and they may be at risk of severe consequences such as second impact syndrome. Managing concussion in children and adolescents therefore requires different standards and a more conservative approach.

Guidelines: Pre-Match Procedures

Education

APS Member Schools should conduct an annual process to educate staff members involved in sport about concussion. This should include information regarding:

- what is concussion;
- causes of concussion;
- common signs and symptoms;
- steps to reduce the risk of concussion;
- procedures if a student has suspected concussion or head injury; and
- return to school and sport medical clearance requirements.

Information

APS Sport Member Schools should also maintain information regarding students' concussion history to help identify players who fit into a high-risk category. Such information should be handled and treated confidentially and in accordance with the School's relevant privacy policy.

Prior to any event or match, APS Member Schools should ensure that all relevant staff are provided with information regarding local health services in the event of an incident, including:

- local doctors or medical centres;
- local hospital emergency departments; and
- ambulance services.

Designation

While all staff members have a role to play recognising and managing concussion, APS Member Schools should designate a coordinator at a game or event who can ensure that concussion protocol is communicated and followed. Ideally and when resources permit, a medical practitioner, first aid provider or sports trainer should be assigned this task.

Guidelines: Match Day Procedures

In the early stages of injury, it is often not clear whether you are dealing with a concussion or there is a more severe underlying structural head injury. For this reason, the most important steps in initial management and beyond include:

1. **Recognise** – recognising a suspected concussion
2. **Remove** – removing the person from the game or activity
3. **Refer** – referring the person (parents/guardian) to a qualified doctor for assessment
4. **Return** – returning to either training or games

Any player who has suffered a concussion or is suspected of having a concussion must be medically assessed as soon as possible after the injury and must NOT be allowed to return to play in the same game/practice session.

1. RECOGNISE - Recognise a suspected concussion

Recognising concussion can be difficult. The signs and symptoms vary, are not always specific, and may be subtle. Onlookers should suspect concussion when an injury results in a knock to the head or body that transmits a force to the head. A hard knock is not required – concussion can occur from minor knocks. Watch for when a player collides with another player, a piece of equipment, or the ground.

One or more individuals at a sporting event should be identified as the person responsible for concussion related activity. However, all individuals including other staff members, parents and other students should report any suspected concussion.

The following steps should be used as a guide to help the identification of concussion. However, these guidelines only provide brief sideline evaluations of concussion and it is still imperative that a comprehensive medical assessment is conducted by an appropriately experienced medical practitioner.

Step 1: Red Flags

If there is concern after an injury, including whether any of the following signs are observed or complaints are reported, then the player should safely be removed from the game or activity. If no licensed healthcare professional is available, call an ambulance for urgent medical assessment:

Neck pain or tenderness	Loss of consciousness
Double vision	Deteriorating conscious state
Weakness or burning/tingling in arms or legs	Vomiting
Severe or increasing headache	Increasingly restless, agitated or combative
Seizure or convulsion	

Where a player is suspected of sustaining a severe head or spinal injury, call an ambulance immediately to take them to an Emergency department. Do not attempt to move the player (other than required for airway support) unless trained to do so.

If, at any time, there is any doubt regarding a student's health, they should be referred to hospital.

Step 2: Observable Signs

Sometimes there will be clear signs that a player has sustained a concussion. If they display any of the following clinical features, immediately remove the player from sport:

Lying motionless on ground or slow to get up after a direct or indirect hit to the head	Dazed, blank or vacant look
Inability to appropriately respond to questions	Disorientation, confusion or no awareness of game/events
Unsteady on feet or balance problems or Falling over (incoordination)	Facial injury after head trauma

Note: Loss of consciousness, confusion and memory disturbance are clear features of concussion. The problem with relying on these features to identify a suspected concussion is that they are not present in every case.

Step 3: Symptoms

Suspect a concussion and act immediately if a player displays any of these **symptoms**:

Headache	Dizziness	Feeling slowed down
'Don't feel right'	Confusion	Sadness
'Pressure in the head'	Blurred vision	Feeling like 'in a fog'
Difficulty concentrating	Drowsiness	Nervous or Anxious
Neck pain	Balance problems	More emotional
Difficulty remembering	Sensitivity to light	
Nausea or Vomiting	Sensitivity to noise	
Fatigue or Low energy	Irritability	

Step 4: Memory

Where players are older than 12 years, they may be asked a number of questions to recognise suspected concussion. If a player fails to answer any of the following questions (modified as required) correctly, this may suggest a concussion:

"What venue/location are we at today?"	"What team did you play last week/last game?"
"Which half is it now?"	"Did your team win the last game?"
"Who scored last in the game?"	

2. REMOVE — Remove the person from the game or activity

Any player suspected of having concussion must be removed from the game/training and should have no further involvement. Do not be swayed by the opinion of the player, trainers, coaching staff, parents or others regarding the return of the student to play.

Organise the player to be assessed and monitored by a medical doctor or a qualified first aider. Initial management must adhere to the first aid rules, including airway, breathing, circulation and spinal immobilisation.

A student with concussion or suspected concussion should not be left alone or be sent home by themselves, and needs to be with a responsible adult. Students should not take prescription medication, including aspirin, anti-inflammatory medication, sedative medications or strong pain relieving medications. The student's parents or guardian should be contacted to inform them of the incident.

An Incident Report must be completed for a concussion related incident.

3. REFER – Refer the person to a qualified doctor for assessment

The player should be assessed by a medical doctor present at the game or training session.

Where possible, the initial responder should describe the incident to the doctor or qualified first aider and notify them of the player's responses to any questions asked of them.

If a doctor is **not** present, the player should be assessed by a qualified first aider at first chance. They then should be sent to a local general practice or local hospital emergency department, particularly if there is any doubt on the condition.

At this time, ensure the player is closely monitored and escorted for referral. Students should not be sent home by themselves and should not drive a motor vehicle. Stay with the student until a thorough hand over is made to their parent or guardian and it is clear that the person can be collected.

4. RETURN – Return to either training or games, and school

A student should only return to school and/or sport once they have received medical clearance to do so. Only a medical doctor should provide medical clearance for the person to return to **school** or the **game** or **training**. A qualified first aider **should not** provide medical clearance.

Returning to learning and school should take precedence over returning to sport. A student must wait a minimum of 14 days after the complete resolution of all concussion symptoms before seeking formal clearance from a medical practitioner to return to contact activities (not full training). The student will then be reviewed by a medical practitioner before returning to full training that includes contact/collision. If there is no recurrence of symptoms 24 hours after full contact training, then a return to contact sport can be considered.

Even if medical clearance has been obtained, the school/staff member should not allow the player to return to play if their condition deteriorates or if the student advises that they are still feeling any symptoms of concussion.

Where there is uncertainty about a student's recovery, always adopt a more conservative approach, **"if in doubt sit them out"**.

Medical Clearance:

Parents are required to provide the school with medical clearance in writing.

As a matter of course and follow up, the APS Sport Member School must contact parents for consent to participate in subsequent training or games.

During the next training session or game, a staff member should closely monitor the player. If they show any signs of concussion, the staff member should remove them from the game or training session and follow the procedures outlined above.

Managing concussion is a shared responsibility between the player, coach, sports trainer/medic, parents and medical practitioner. Open communication is essential and information should be shared. Always refer the player and, if they are a child, their parents, to a qualified medical practitioner with some expertise in the management of concussion. A player who has suffered a concussion should return to sport gradually. They should increase their exercise progressively, as long as they remain symptom-free.

Return to Learn

Children require a different approach from adults because their brains are developing, and they need to continue learning and acquiring knowledge.

The priority when managing concussion in children should be returning to school and learning, ahead of returning to sport. Concussion symptoms can interfere with memory and information processing. This can make it hard for children to learn in the classroom.

Parents should discuss with their doctor and child's school, an appropriate return-to-school strategy.

Rest and Recovery

Rest is very important after a concussion because it helps the brain to heal. Concussions affect people differently. While most athletes with a concussion recover quickly and fully, some will have symptoms that last for days or even weeks. A more serious concussion can last for months or longer.

Most people will recover from a concussion within 10 to 14 days. Children and adolescents often take longer to recover from a concussion than adults, and it is not abnormal for symptoms to last up to 4 weeks for children or adolescents.

For children and adolescents, it is suggested the graduated return to play protocol should be extended such that a child does not return to contact/collision activities less than 14 days from the resolution of all symptoms.

Rest is recommended immediately following a concussion (24–48 hours). Rest means not undertaking any activity that provokes symptoms. However, anyone who has suffered a concussion should be encouraged to become gradually and progressively more active as long as they do not experience any symptoms.

It is important that athletes do not ignore their symptoms and in general a more conservative approach be used in cases where there is any uncertainty.

References

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https://www.playrugbyleague.com/media/3102/guidelines-for-the-management-of-concussion-in-rugby-league_final_v20.pdf

Pocket Concussion Recognition Tool 5

http://www.aflcommunityclub.com.au/fileadmin/user_upload/Coach_AFL/Injury_Management/2013_Pocket_Concussion_Recognition_Tool_CRT_.pdf

Role of Helmets and Mouthguards in Australian Football -

http://www.aflcommunityclub.com.au/fileadmin/user_upload/Health_Fitness/Role_of_helmets_and_mouthgaurds.pdf

Disclaimer

These guidelines do not create any binding obligations on APS Sport. APS Sport has no control over the implementation of these guidelines and cannot be held liable where schools or individuals fail to follow any aspect of these guidelines, during participation in school sport, personal sport, or club sport.