



*The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Public Health*

**Guidance for Coaches, Athletic Directors and Parents regarding the New Law
Regarding Sports-Related Head Injury and Concussions:
An Act Relative to Safety Regulations for School Athletic Programs**

Updated October 22, 2010

This Updated Guidance is being offered in advance of regulations to protect the safety and wellbeing of young athletes in Massachusetts. The law became effective August 19, 2010. Proposed regulations will be available for public comment by the middle of the school year. In the interim, this Guidance is intended to assist schools and individuals comply with their obligations under the new law.

What does the law do?

This law requires that public schools and, in addition, any other schools subject to the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA) rules make sure that student athletes and their parents, coaches, athletic directors, school nurses and physicians and others learn about the consequences of head injuries and concussions through training programs and written materials. The law requires that athletes and their parents inform their coaches about prior head injuries at the beginning of the season. If a student athlete becomes unconscious or suffers a known or suspected concussion during a game or practice, the law mandates removing the student from play or practice, and requires written certification from a licensed medical professional for "return to play".

The law also prohibits coaches, trainers and others from encouraging or permitting a student athlete to use sports equipment as a weapon or to engage in sports techniques that unreasonably endanger the health and safety of him/herself or other players, such as helmet to helmet hits.

What schools are covered by this new law?

The law applies to all public middle and high schools. It also applies to other schools that are subject to MIAA rules. These schools are required to participate in an interscholastic athletic head injury safety training program. However, because sports related head injuries and concussions can have such serious consequences for students, including long term health and educational issues if they are not properly managed, the Department strongly encourages all schools whose students engage in extracurricular athletic activities to include these trainings as part of their athletic programs.

Who needs to participate in an interscholastic athletic head injury safety training program?

The law says that the following people must participate in this training program:

Coaches

Athletic trainers

Parent volunteers for any extracurricular athletic activity

Physicians employed by the school or who volunteer for any extracurricular athletic activity

School nurses or nurses who volunteer for any extracurricular athletic activity

Athletic Directors

School marching band directors

Parents or legal guardians of children who participate in any extracurricular athletic activity.

Written materials described below can be used as an alternative for those individuals without access to the online trainings or for whom English is not a first language.

The Department of Public Health also recommends that student athletes themselves participate in such a course or receive printed materials with information about concussions.

How can I complete this interscholastic athletic head injury safety training?

Two **free** on-line courses are available and contain all information required by the law, including the signs and symptoms of concussion, how to respond to a suspected concussion, what you need to do to help an athlete when s/he is cleared to safely return to play, and what you can do to prevent sports related head injuries. Both courses provide certificates of completion. You should keep this certificate because schools may be collecting that information in order to comply with the law.

Heads Up: Concussion in Youth Sports from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The first on-line course is available through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at:

http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/HeadsUp/online_training.html

The training uses expert interviews and interactive elements to train coaches and others on concussion. This course includes additional materials for coaches, parents, athletes and school nurses. Additional educational materials on concussion and their impact can be found at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/>

CDC has information available for individuals, including parents and athletes whose first language is Spanish and may not find the on-line course accessible:

Coaches: http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/Coach_Guide-a.pdf
and http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/coaches_Engl.pdf

School nurses: <http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/HeadsUp/schools.html>

Athletes: http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/Athletes_Fact_Sheet-a.pdf
http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/Athletes_Fact_Sheet_Spanish-a.pdf

Parents: http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/Parents_Fact_Sheet-a.pdf

http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/Parents_Fact_Sheet_Spanish-a.pdf

Concussion in Sports: What You Need to Know from the National Federation of State High School Associations

This on-line course is available through the NFHS. You will need to click the “order here” button and complete a brief registration form to take the course. However, you do not need to be a member of NFHS to access this course. Go to: <http://www.nfhslearn.com/electiveDetail.aspx?courseID=15000>

How would I know if an athlete may have a concussion?

While the symptoms of concussions vary from person to person, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have developed helpful materials that can assist you in understanding the signs. Go to: http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/signs_symptoms.html

What should I do if one of my players may have suffered a concussion or head injury during practice or a game?

If a student has become unconscious, suffered, or is suspected of having suffered, a concussion during a game or practice, the student **MUST** be removed from play. The student may **not** go back into that same game or practice even if the athlete says “I feel fine.”

When can an athlete be “returned to play”?

The law is clear that a student who may have suffered a head injury *may not return to the same game or practice*. It also requires that student athletes be certified for return to play by a licensed medical professional. It is strongly recommended that this professional have familiarity with concussion diagnosis and management. Formal regulations will be available for public comment mid-way through the school year. In addition, DPH is working with the medical community on guidelines and protocols for certifying an athlete’s return to play.

How will medical professionals be informed of the law?

The Department is working with the Massachusetts Medical Society, the American Academy of Pediatrics, Athletic Trainers of Massachusetts and others to inform physicians, athletic trainers, nurses, emergency room personnel around the state about this new law.

How will parents learn about this law?

The law requires that schools make sure that parents of athletes and marching band members and parent volunteers are provided with the sports concussion awareness course, either on-line or through written materials. To comply with this component of the law, schools may provide parents with information on the 2 online courses described above or schools may provide copies of the materials found at

http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/Parents_Fact_Sheet-a.pdf
http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/Parents_Fact_Sheet_Spanish-a.pdf

http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/quiz_Eng.pdf

Do coaches or trainers have other obligations under the law?

Yes. As noted above, coaches, trainers or volunteers for an extracurricular athletic activity are not allowed to encourage or permit a student to engage in any dangerous athletic technique that unnecessarily endangers the health of him/herself or another player, including using a helmet or any other sports equipment as a weapon.

Who is responsible for keeping track of compliance with this law?

The superintendent of the school district or the director of the school must maintain records of the district's or school's compliance with the law.

Do parents and athletes have other responsibilities under this law?

Yes. Students and their parents or legal guardians must provide information to the school regarding any previous sports head injury at the start of each sports season. The Department of Public will be developing a sample form for this purpose. In the interim, parents and athletes can be asked to provide this information in a format selected by the school. However, these forms must require the signature of both the student and the parent or legal guardian. Coaches must receive this information prior to allowing any student to participate in an extracurricular athletic activity so they can identify students who are at greater risk for repeated head injuries.

What does the new law say about the liability of a school district, its officers or employees if one of my players gets hurt?

This new law does not change the existing law regarding lawsuits and legal liability. School districts are advised to consult with their legal advisor as needed.

What does the new law say about the legal liability of other people who volunteer to assist with extracurricular sports if a player gets hurt?

This new law clearly states that volunteers who assist with extracurricular athletic activities will not be liable for civil damages for any acts or omissions related to the law unless they are willfully or wantonly negligent.

Where can I get more information about the law?

The full text of the law is available at: www.mass.gov/legis/laws/seslaw10/sl100166.htm

Where can I get more information about concussions and how to respond if they occur?

Information about sports related concussions is available at the following websites:

<http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/>

www.sportsconcussions.org

www.sportslegacy.org

<http://www.biama.org/whatdoes/playsmart.html>