

## Concussions and Youth Sports

With the football season in full swing, it's a good time to talk about concussions in youth sports. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that between 1.6 million to 3.8 million concussions occur each year in the United States. Sports related concussions account for more than half of all Emergency Room visits by children between the ages of 8-years and 13-years-old.

Concussion comes from the Latin term *to shake violently* and can result from either a direct blow to the head or whiplash-like injury that causes the brain to move rapidly within the skull. The resultant injury to the brain damages delicate neural pathways and disrupts the brain's normal function. While a problem in collegiate and professional sports, concussions are particularly worrisome in youth sports as the brain is still developing throughout adolescence and into young-adulthood.

Football is the most common sport with concussion risk for males, while soccer is the most common sport with concussion risk for females. Female high school basketball players suffer an estimated 240% more concussions than their male counterparts. Lacrosse, wrestling, track and field, and gymnastics are some of the other sports associated with concussions.

Far too long, head injuries and concussions have been minimized by coaches, parents, and especially the young athletes themselves, with youths returning to the game much sooner than they should, often on the very day of their injury. A study in the *Clinical Journal of Sports Medicine* reports 50-percent of high school athletes failed to report concussion symptoms they had sustained while playing football. Experts caution that even our language to describe head injuries—being *dinged*, *a bell-ringer*, or *getting banged up*—minimizes the seriousness of the injury.

Loss of consciousness is not necessary for a concussion to occur, happening only 10-percent of the time. The symptoms of concussion may appear hours, or even days after injury and include difficulty thinking clearly, concentrating, or remembering new information. Headaches, blurred vision, dizziness, nausea or vomiting, irritability and moodiness can also be seen. Concussion victims often display excessive sleepiness or have difficulty falling asleep.

A young person who suffers a concussion is at significant risk of the same injury happening again. A dangerous consequence of failing to detect concussion in a young athlete and allowing time for full recovery before returning to play is *Second Impact Syndrome*—a rapid, catastrophic and life-altering swelling of the brain—should the athlete suffer another concussion.

In 2013, Ohio enacted the *Return to Play Law* which requires schools and youth sports organization to provide parents a head injury and concussion information sheet developed by the Ohio Department of Health, before their child participates in practices or games. The law requires coaches and referees to remove a youth athlete from play who displays signs and symptoms consistent of having sustained a head injury or concussion. The athlete is prohibited from returning to play on the same day they are removed.

For more information about head injuries and concussions, contact the Adams County Health Department at 937-544-5547.

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