MANAGING THE CARE OF STUDENTS SUSPECTED OF ATHLETIC CONCUSSIONS

A concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury that interferes with normal function of the brain. It occurs when the brain is rocked back and forth or twisted inside the skull as a result of a blow to the head or body. What may appear to be only a mild jolt or blow to the head or body can result in a concussion.

The understanding of sports-related concussion has evolved dramatically in recent years. We now know that young athletes are particularly vulnerable to the effects of a concussion. Once considered little more than a “ding” on the head, it is now understood that a concussion has the potential to result in short or long-term changes in brain function, or in some cases, death.

Common sports injuries such as torn ligaments and broken bones are structural injuries that can be seen on MRIs or x-rays, or detected during an examination. A concussion, however, is primarily an injury that interferes with how the brain works. While there is damage to brain cells, the damage is at a microscopic level and cannot be seen on MRI or CT scan. Therefore, the brain looks normal on these tests, even though it has been seriously injured.

**Guidelines**

The Athletic Trainer in consultation with the School Physician shall develop and regularly update guidelines for the recognition and management of sports related concussions. These guidelines shall be in accordance with Massachusetts laws, regulations and guidelines developed by the Department of Public Health, guidelines developed by the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA) and national guidelines developed by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC)**.**

**Athletic Training**

The Athletic Trainer and Athletic Director shall ensure that all coaches have specific training on the City of Malden School Department Guidelines including:

* The type of athletic play, whether intended or inadvertent, that commonly results in concussions;
* The common signs and symptoms of sports-related concussions;
* the appropriate actions to take when an athlete may be suspected to have a concussion;
* management and referral guidelines;
* parental, physician, nursing and educational staff referral procedures;
* follow-up care of the athlete during the school day; and
* return to play requirements and procedures.

Each year all returning coaches shall receive refresher training regarding any updates to the Malden Guidelines.

**Recognition and Management**

All coaches should become familiar with the signs and symptoms of concussion.

If an athlete exhibits any signs, symptoms, or behaviors that make a coach or athletic trainer suspicious that the athlete may have had a concussion, that athlete must be removed from all physical activity, including sports and recreation. Continuing to participate in physical activity after a concussion can lead to worsening concussion symptoms, increased risk for further injury, and even death.

An athlete who has been removed from activity due to a suspected sports-related concussion must be referred for medical evaluation and be cleared by a properly trained medical professional, as well as complete a graduated return-to-play program with the athletic trainer prior to returning to athletic competition.

# Management of Concussions that Occurred Outside of School Athletics

Parents or guardians should receive notice of the Guidelines when they provide permission for an athlete to participate in sports. Such notice should also explain the responsibilities of athletes and parents/guardians in the management of concussions.

That notice should inform athletes and their parents/guardians that they are obligated to inform the coach in the event the athlete suffers a sports-related or any other type of concussion outside of their school sports activities. Upon such notification, the athlete shall be subject to the Guidelines in regards to follow-up care and return to play requirements.

**Reporting and Prevention**

Coaches and athletic trainers shall report on each individual event of a suspected sports-related concussion to the Athletic Director including a summary of the sports action that led to the concussion. Coaches shall annually review the reports with the Athletic Trainer and School Physician to seek to identify the riskiest sports action and ways to prevent such action from resulting in sports-related concussions.

Sources:

1. SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR MANAGEMENT OF CONCUSSION IN SPORTS

National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC)

2. Hallmark Health System Outpatient Rehabilitation Services Guidelines for Management of Sports-related Concussions