

TO: NJSIAA Member Schools and Officials' Associations
FROM: Larry L. White, Assistant Director
RE: State Concussion Policy Law

At the last meeting of the NJSIAA Medical Advisory Committee in May, 2011, the committee approved to change the NJSIAA Concussion Policy to mirror the state law as it pertains to the development of interscholastic athletic head injury safety training program, required measures to protect student athletes with concussions, and the continuing education for athletic trainers.

The major difference between the State Statute and the previous NJSIAA Concussion Policy is contained within the law and reads accordingly:

“A student who participates in an interscholastic sports program and who sustains or is suspected of having sustained a concussion or other head injury while engaged in a sports competition or practice shall be immediately removed from the sports competition or practice. A student-athlete who is removed from competition or practice shall not participate in further sports activity until he is evaluated by a physician or other healthcare provider trained in the evaluation and management of concussions, **and receives written clearance from a physician trained in the evaluation and management of concussions to return to competition or practice.**” **Bold added.**

As this reads, written clearance may take place at game site on game day, if so given by trained physician as stated above. This is the marked difference between the prior NJSIAA Concussion Policy and the State law on Concussions, which the Executive Committee of NJSIAA has approved on June 1, 2011 and will be written in the 2011-2012 NJSIAA Constitution and Bylaws.

From the schools' perspective, written release forms, must be present at all practices and competitions. However, once a student-athlete is removed from competition or a practice, only a physician **trained in the evaluation and management of concussions** can sign off on a written clearance that would allow a concussed or suspected concussed athlete to return. NJSIAA has created a standardized written, **RTP**, form that will be available on our website. When a student athlete is evaluated by a trained physician and is NOT cleared to return to play or practice that day/night, the school district's Return to Play guidelines shall be followed.

Game officials will follow the protocol previously established and disseminated on September 1, 2010, namely upon observing any signs, symptoms or behaviors that are consistent with a concussion, and the signs, symptoms or behaviors are a result of an impact or contact of the player with another person, an object or the ground, the student athlete is immediately removed from play and may not return to play without a written clearance from a physician trained in the evaluation and management of concussions. The mechanics to enforce the rule are as follows:

- Using sound game management procedures and judgment, upon observing a player who exhibits the signs, symptoms or behaviors that are consistent with a concussion, the official shall follow the sport specific guidelines for handling an injured player.
- When appropriate, call time out. If the player's safety is in jeopardy, call time out immediately.
- **Beckon the physician/ATC onto the playing surface.**
- **Observe the injured player.**
- Other game officials keep players/others away from the injured player.
- Apprise the physician/ATC of your observations as to the signs, symptoms, behaviors that are consistent with a concussion, including any conversation that you had with the injured player (any questions and answers that took place prior to the physician/ATC arriving).
- Note the game time, score, period or half, player name/number, etc when injury and removal took place (for those sports that officials do not normally keep a game card on their person, begin doing so).
- If the prescribed written clearance form is signed by a physician, and the player returns to play that day/night, the official in charge must obtain a copy of the signed written clearance form and subsequently submit it to the association's keeper of records.

Schools and officials are reminded that NJSIAA is a 100% state, meaning that we follow the playing rules established by the NFHS. Every NFHS sports rule book contains the following:

...Any player who exhibits signs, symptoms or behaviors consistent with a concussion (such as loss of consciousness, headache, dizziness, confusion or balance problems) shall be immediately removed from the game and shall not return to play until cleared by an appropriate health-care professional.

Remember that under NJ Law the only “appropriate health-care professional” who can authorize return-to-play under the rule is a physician trained in the evaluation and management of concussions.

Thank you for your attention and cooperation in the most important matter.