

To help coaches prepare and know what to do when a concussion occurs, we at HEADCHECK Health have created a checklist. This checklist aligns with the [CDC guidelines](#) and [Canada's Parachute guidelines](#) to ensure that coaches are taking the appropriate steps to mitigate risk and aid in the safe return-to-play of their athletes.

STEP 1: IMMEDIATELY REMOVE THE ATHLETE FROM PLAY

The following are signs that coaches can look for on and off the field when they suspect an athlete may have sustained a head injury:

- On the Field
 - Confusion
 - Clumsy movement
 - Lethargy
 - Forgetfulness of the game, play, position, etc.
- Off the Field
 - Mood or behavior changes
 - Loss of memory

Athletes may report one or more of the following symptoms:

- Headache
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Feeling off, foggy, or "not right"

The CDC recommends: "When in doubt, sit them out." In other words, if you suspect your athlete has suffered a concussion, err on the side of caution and remove them from play.

Do not return the athlete to play until they have been provided clearance by a qualified healthcare professional who is specialized in concussion management

STEP 2: KEEP THE ATHLETE OUT OF PLAY

Do not try to evaluate the concussion yourself. Each athlete will present differently and should only be evaluated by a qualified healthcare professional.

STEP 3: REFER THE ATHLETE TO A QUALIFIED HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

- If an athletic trainer is available onsite, have them evaluate the athlete as soon as possible.
- If an athletic trainer is not available, call the athlete's parent/guardian and recommend that their child be seen by a healthcare professional that specializes in concussion management (i.e., sports medicine physician)
 - Check out our Checklist for Parents on the HEADCHECK Health blog

STEP 4: PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION TO THE PARENT/GUARDIAN:

- Document the following:
 - How the injury happened
 - Symptoms that the athlete is/was experiencing
 - Any loss of consciousness or memory problems
 - Physical signs, such as abnormal behavior, balance, or coordination issues

STEP 5: RECORD DETAILS OF THE INCIDENT

- What happened and what was done related to this head injury?

STEP 6: SEEK EMERGENT CARE FROM FIRST RESPONDERS, WHEN APPLICABLE

- The following signs and symptoms may indicate bleeding on the brain or more serious injury. Seek emergent care if one or more of the following are present:
 - Slurred speech, weakness, numbness, or decreased coordination
 - Excessive vomiting or nausea
 - Drowsiness or inability to wake up
 - Convulsions or seizures
 - Unusual and growing behavior, confusion, restlessness, or agitation
 - Loss of consciousness (knocked out)
 - Neck pain

STEP 7: SUPPORT THE ATHLETE DURING THEIR RECOVERY

Concussion recovery takes time and patience. Remember that returning athletes to sport too soon can severely delay their recovery and increase the chances of sustaining another concussion.

Support the athlete by following guidance from their athletic trainer, healthcare providers, and parents/guardians.

An athlete diagnosed with a concussion will go through a period of being unable to participate in sport and physical activity. This can make the athlete feel frustrated and lonely. So offer opportunities to the athlete to continue to sit in on practices and cheer on their teammates at games.

STEP 9: FOLLOW GUIDANCE FROM THE ATHLETIC TRAINER OR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER TO HAVE THE ATHLETE PARTICIPATE IN A GRADUAL RETURN-TO-PLAY PROTOCOL

Most return-to-play protocols involve a 6- or 7-step progression, with each step lasting a minimum of 24 hours. Your child must pass each step of the progression symptom-free to proceed to the next step.

These progressions include:

- Returning to school and sedentary activities
- Gradual return to physical activity (light to moderate to intense physical activity)
- Gradual return to sport (practice and contact training, then full competition)

If at any point during their recovery the athlete demonstrates signs/symptoms of concussion, remember to "when in doubt, sit them out." And refer appropriately.

STEP 8: DO NOT ALLOW THE ATHLETE TO RETURN-TO-PLAY UNTIL RE-EVALUATED BY A QUALIFIED HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL WHO CAN MAKE RETURN-TO-PLAY DECISIONS AND PROVIDE WRITTEN MEDICAL CLEARANCE

Do not make return-to-play decisions on your own.

Note that in the US, the healthcare professional who can provide medical clearance can vary from state to state. Be sure to check your local state guidelines for who can and cannot provide medical clearance.

STEP 10: DECREASE THE RISK OF YOUR CHILD SUSTAINING ANOTHER CONCUSSION

After one concussion, the risk of sustaining another concussion increases.

Make sure your child's helmet and equipment fit properly. Do not "size-up."

Teach your athletes proper form and safety at practices and games to minimize risk of head injury. (For example, "heads up" positioning during football tackles.)

Ensure playing conditions are safe (proper mats for stunts, the padding on goalposts, etc.)

Talk with your athletes about concussions. Athletes look to their coaches as role models. Create an environment where athletes can talk to you about head injuries or concussion symptoms. That way you can get them the proper care they need and reduce risk of more serious injury.