

What is a Concussion?

A concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury that changes the way the brain normally works. A concussion is caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head. Concussions can also occur from a fall or blow to the body that causes the head and brain to move rapidly back and forth. Even what seems to be a mild bump to the head can be serious.

Concussions can have a more serious effect on a young, developing brain and need to be addressed correctly. Proper recognition and response to concussion symptoms in the school environment can prevent further injury and can help with recovery.

What are the signs and symptoms of a concussion?

You can't see a concussion. Signs and symptoms of concussion can show up right after an injury or may not appear or be noticed until hours or days after the injury. It is important to watch for changes in how your child or teen is acting or feeling, if symptoms are getting worse, or if s/he just "doesn't feel right." Most concussions occur without loss of consciousness.

If your child or teen reports *one or more* of the symptoms of concussion listed, or if you notice the symptoms yourself, seek medical attention right away. Children and teens are among those at greatest risk for concussion.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF A CONCUSSION

SIGNS OBSERVED BY PARENTS OR GUARDIANS

- Appears dazed or stunned
- Is confused about events
- Answers questions slowly
- Repeats questions
- Can't recall events *prior* to the hit, bump, or fall
- Can't recall events *after* the hit, bump, or fall
- Loses consciousness (even briefly)
- Shows behavior or personality changes
- Forgets class schedule or assignments

SYMPTOMS REPORTED BY YOUR CHILD OR TEEN

Thinking/Remembering:

- Difficulty thinking clearly
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering
- Feeling more slowed down
- Feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy

Physical:

- Headache or "pressure" in head
- Nausea or vomiting
- Balance problems or dizziness
- Fatigue or feeling tired
- Blurry or double vision
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Numbness or tingling
- Does not "feel right"

Emotional:

- Irritable
- Sad
- More emotional than usual
- Nervous

Sleep*:

- Drowsy
- Sleeps *less* than usual
- Sleeps *more* than usual
- Has trouble falling asleep

*Only ask about sleep symptoms if the injury occurred on a prior day.

What parents can do:

A—Assess the situation

B—Be alert for signs and symptoms

C—Contact a health care professional

School's Athletic Trainer, School Nurse, Family Physician, Concussion trained physicians – Dr. Joel Brenner, Dr. Stephen Miller, School System Neuropsychologist (Dr. Nancy Comoleski),

If you suspect your child has sustained a concussion, please also notify the school's Student Activities Coordinator.

DANGER SIGNS

Be alert for symptoms that worsen over time. Your child or teen should be seen in an emergency department right away if s/he has:

- One pupil (the black part in the middle of the eye) larger than the other
- Drowsiness or cannot be awakened
- A headache that gets worse and does not go away
- Weakness, numbness, or decreased coordination
- Repeated vomiting or nausea
- Slurred speech
- Convulsions or seizures
- Difficulty recognizing people or places
- Increasing confusion, restlessness, or agitation
- Unusual behavior
- Loss of consciousness (even a brief loss of consciousness should be taken seriously)

Children and teens with a concussion should NEVER return to sports or recreation activities on the same day the injury occurred. They should delay returning to their activities until a healthcare professional experienced in evaluating for concussion says they are symptom-free, they have gone through the mandatory gradual return to play protocol – and a healthcare professional trained in concussion management says it's OK to return to play. This means, until permitted, not returning to:

- Physical Education (PE) class
- Sports practices or games (both school and non-school sponsored events), or
- Physical activity at recess.

Plan of Action for concussion sustained in school sponsored sports:

If the athletic trainer (ATC) is present at the time of the incident, the ATC will monitor the student for 15 minutes. The student will not return to play that day. The parent will be called to pick up the student (**PLEASE BE SURE – AND THIS IS SO IMPORTANT – that you provide your most recent phone number to the coach and or student activities coordinator - please be available by phone during the hours that your child is participating in both practice and games**) and will be given the Home Care instructions form. If the symptoms went away within 15 minutes, and the student experienced no other symptoms overnight; the ATC can clear the student to begin the gradual return to play progression the day after the incident, without seeing a physician. If the symptoms persisted longer than 15 minutes and/or returned overnight, the student must see a physician – there is a specific form that must be completed by the physician in order for the student to be considered “cleared to start progression”.

If the ATC is not present and the coach suspects the athlete has sustained a concussion, the student is to be removed from participation and won't return the same day. The parent will be called to pick up the student (**again - PLEASE BE SURE – AND THIS IS SO IMPORTANT – that you provide your most recent phone number to the coach and or student activities coordinator - please be available by phone during the hours that your child is participating in both practice and games**) and will be given the Home Care instructions form. We will not expect the coach to play the role of the ATC. The coach will not re-evaluate the athlete after 15 minutes. That is the ATC's job. If the ATC is not present, the student will be sent home and will see the ATC the next day. When the student arrives at school the next day, he/she will see the nurse who may clear the student to remain in school that day. The ATC will evaluate the student later that day at practice. If the student's symptoms persisted into the previous evening or if they are currently experiencing symptoms, the ATC will refer the student to a physician - there is a specific form that must be completed by the physician in order for the student to be considered “cleared to start progression”. If the symptoms have gone away, the ATC may clear the student to enter the graduated return to play protocol.

What should you do if your child or teen has a concussion?

1. **Seek medical attention right away.**

A health care professional experienced in evaluating for concussion can determine how serious the concussion is and when it is safe for your child or teen to return to normal activities, including physical activity and school (concentration and learning activities).

2. **Help them take time to get better.** If your child or teen has a concussion, her or his brain needs time to heal. Your child or teen may need to limit activities while s/he is recovering from a concussion. Exercising or activities that involve a lot of concentration, such as studying, working on the computer, or playing video games may cause concussion symptoms (such as headache or tiredness) to reappear or get worse. After a concussion, physical and cognitive activities—such as concentration and learning—should be carefully managed and monitored by a health care professional.

3. **Together with your child or teen, learn more about concussions.** Talk about the potential long-term effects of concussion and the dangers of returning too soon to normal activities (especially physical activity and learning/concentration). For more information about concussion and free resources, visit: www.cdc.gov/Concussion.

How can I help my child return to school safely after a concussion?

Help your child or teen get needed support when returning to school after a concussion. Talk with your child's school nurse, teachers, coach, speech-language pathologist, or counselor about your child's concussion and symptoms (in Virginia Beach schools, your child's school nurse will work with you to coordinate return to school limitations and guidelines).

Your child may feel frustrated, sad, and even angry because s/he cannot return to recreation and sports right away, or cannot keep up with schoolwork. Your child may also feel isolated from peers and social networks. Talk often with your child about these issues and offer your support and encouragement. As your child's symptoms decrease, the extra help or support can be removed gradually. Children and teens who return to school after a concussion may need to:

- Take rest breaks as needed,
- Spend fewer hours at school,
- Be given more time to take tests or complete assignments,
- Receive help with schoolwork, and/or
- Reduce time spent reading, writing, or on the computer.

To learn more about concussion and to order materials FREE-OF-CHARGE, go to: www.cdc.gov/Concussion or call 1.800.CDC.INFO.

Information presented was gathered from both the school systems emergency policy for handling concussions and the CDC.

Are there any questions?