

# HEAD INJURIES AND CONCUSSIONS IN EXTRACURRICULAR ATHLETIC ACTIVITIES<sup>1</sup>POLICY

## INTRODUCTION

The Gardner Public Schools seeks to prevent concussion and provide a safe return to activity for all students after injury, particularly after a head injury. In order to effectively and consistently manage these injuries, the Athletic Department abides by the following procedures that have been developed to aid in ensuring that concussed athletes are identified, treated and referred appropriately, receive appropriate follow-up medical care during the school day, including academic assistance, and are fully recovered prior to returning to athletic activity.

### **Section 1: Person Responsible for Implementation of School Policy and Procedures.**

The Gardner School District has designated its Athletic Director to oversee the implementation of policies and protocols governing the prevention and management of sports-related head injuries. In addition, the AD will be responsible for:

- (1) Supporting and enforcing the protocols, documentation, required training and reporting
- (2) Assuring that all documentation is in place
- (3) Reviewing, updating and implementing policy every two years and including updates in annual training and student and parent handbooks.

### **Section 2: Annual Training Requirement.**

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts requires annual safety training on sports related concussion, including second impact syndrome, for coaches, certified athletic trainers, trainers, volunteers, school nurses, school and team physicians, athletic directors, directors responsible for a school marching band whether employed by a school or school district or serving as a volunteer, parent or legal guardian of a child who participates in an extracurricular athletic activity and student who participates in an extracurricular athletic activity. At the Gardner Public Schools, the above-named school personnel are required to complete free, on-line training (either the National Federation of High Schools or the CDC's Heads Up Concussion training) or attend a training event organized by the athletic department and approved by the Department of Public Health. For student athletes and their parents, this training can be provided in the regular pre-season meetings where written materials are also available. Attendance can be taken at such meetings and the attendance roster serves as a record of verification for participants who are trained. If parents or students are unable to attend this training, they must complete one of the

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<sup>1</sup> Extracurricular Athletic Activity means an organized school sponsored athletic activity generally occurring outside of school instructional hours under the direction of a coach, athletic director or marching band leader including, but not limited to, Alpine and Nordic skiing and snowboarding, baseball, basketball, cheer leading, cross country track, fencing, field hockey, football, golf, gymnastics, horseback riding, ice hockey, lacrosse, marching band, rifle, rugby, soccer, skating, softball, squash, swimming and diving, tennis, track (indoor and outdoor), ultimate Frisbee, volleyball, water polo, and wrestling. All interscholastic athletics are deemed to be extracurricular athletic activities.

approved on-line trainings and submit a certificate of completion to the athletic director to meet this participation requirement. Alternatively, parents may review DPH-approved written materials (provided by the athletic department) and sign a verification form that they have read and understood these materials.

### **Section 3: Documentation of Physical Exam.**

Each student athlete must have a physical examination on an annual basis, i.e. within 12 or 13 months of the student's last physical examination (to allow for insurance coverage of the examination). Any student athlete who does not have a current physical on file with the nurse prior to the first day of try-outs/practice, is not eligible until a new/updated physical is submitted. If the student's physical examination expires during the sports season, they must have an updated physical examination to continue to participate in the sports season. All physical forms are to be turned in to the nurse, not the coach.

### **Section 4: Pre-Participation Head Injury Reporting Form, Submission and Review.**

#### Concussion History Form Submission

The Massachusetts concussion law requires athletes and their parents to inform their coaches about prior head injuries at the beginning of each sports season. This reporting is done via the **Pre-Participation Head Injury/Concussion Reporting for Extracurricular Activities** form and should be completed by the student's parent(s) or legal guardian(s) and the student. It must be submitted to the Athletic Director *prior to the start of each season a student plans to participate in an extracurricular athletic activity.*

**Until the pre-participation form is completed and signed by the parent/guardian and student and returned to the Athletic Director prior to the start of each sports season, the student cannot participate in the extracurricular sports activity.**

### **Section 5: Medical/Nursing Review of Pre-Participation Forms.**

At the start of each sports season, the Athletic Director will review all pre-participation forms and forward to the school nurse those forms indicating a history of head injury. The school nurse will be responsible for:

- reviewing or having the school physician review completed pre-participation forms
- addressing any questions raised by the Athletic Director
- communicating with the coach regarding the student's concussion history and discussing concerns
- following up with parents and students as needed prior to the student's participation in extracurricular athletic activities.

## **Section 6: Medical/Nursing Review of Reports of Head Injury During the Season**

The following procedures will be followed when an athlete receives a head injury:

- Athlete is removed from the contest or practice.
- Coach completes the **Report of Head Injury During Sports Season Form**
- The Coach will give **Report of Head Injury During Sports Season Form** to Athletic Director.
- Athletic Director will notify school nurse who will review the Report of Head Injury form.
- School nurse will contact athlete's teachers, guidance counselor, and principal.

## **Section 7: Procedure for Reporting Head Injuries to School Nurse and/or Certified Athletic Trainer**

### Reporting Head Injury

Head injuries or suspected concussions (after a bump, blow or jolt to the head or body) sustained during extracurricular athletic activities must be reported by the coach as soon as possible to the school nurse and the athletic director. **Athletes who experience signs or symptoms of a concussion should not be allowed to return to play.**

## **Section 8: Removing Athletes From Play and Medical Evaluation.**

### Identifying Head Injury or Suspected Head Injury and Removing from Play

In the event that a student athlete receives a head injury, or is suspected of having a head injury, the student will be removed from play and will not be returned to play or practice that day. The coach should report the head injury to the athletic director or school nurse, if available, as soon as possible, for medical assessment and management and for coordination of home instructions and follow-up care. The athletic director or school nurse will be responsible for contacting the athlete's parents and providing follow-up instructions. If the athlete is injured at an away event or if the athletic director or school nurse is unavailable, the coaching staff are responsible for notifying the athlete's parents of the injury and, if warranted, call for emergency care. Coaches should seek assistance from the host site athletic trainer, coach or school nurse if at an away contest.

If the athlete is able to be sent home (rather than directly to MD):

- a. the coach or athletic director will ensure that the athlete will be with a responsible adult, who is capable of monitoring the athlete and understanding the home care instructions, before allowing the athlete to go home;
- b. the coach or athletic director will continue efforts to reach the parents;
- c. if there is any question about the status of the athlete, or if the athlete is not able to be monitored appropriately, the athlete will be referred to the emergency department for evaluation. A coach or athletic director will accompany the athlete and remain with the athlete until the parents arrive, and
- d. athletes with suspected head injuries will not be allowed to drive home.

## **Section 9: Medical Clearance and Return to Play.**

### Medical Clearance for Return to Play

The school physician, if available, should be involved. **Medical clearance is meant to be provided AFTER a student has completed his or her graduated return to play plan.**

The medical provider giving medical clearance for returning to play must use the MDPH Medical Clearance Form, “**Post Sports-Related Head Injury Medical Clearance and Authorization Form**” available on the MDPH website ([www.mass.gov/dph/injury](http://www.mass.gov/dph/injury)). The Medical Clearance Form contains more detailed information than a simple statement that the student is ready to return to athletics. This additional information is necessary as school staff monitor the student returning from a concussion. Athletic staff may consider providing this form to the athlete to share with the physician. The completed forms should be kept in the student’s medical record in the school health office as well as athletic department office.

## **Section 10: Development and Implementation of Post Concussion Graduated Reentry Plans.**

### Graduated Reentry Plan

It is required that all students returning to school and athletics after a concussion have a written plan for reentry. School staff, such as teachers, school nurses, counselors, administrators, speech-language pathologists, coaches and others should work together to develop and implement this plan in coordination with the student, their parent/guardian and the primary care provider.

Graduated return to academic plans are based on the stages of recovery framework that takes a student from rest, to gradual return to full participation in academic activities.

#### **Stages of Recovery:<sup>2</sup>**

The stages of recovery are a framework designed through a collaborative effort by health care professionals. The purpose of this framework is to create common language that will help guide students, families, school personnel and health professionals through the recuperation process. Placement in stages is based on assessment of the student’s medical condition by a licensed medical professional and accompanied by written orders.

Red Stage (Usually 2 – 4 days, but could last weeks)

1. Rest
2. Students typically do not attend school

Orange Stage

1. Rest
2. Attend school half to full days
3. Avoid school bus and heavy backpacks

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<sup>2</sup> Based on the work of Dr. Janet Kent of South Shore Hospital; see [http://www.southshorehospital.org/yhc/HeadSmart\\_Handbook.pdf](http://www.southshorehospital.org/yhc/HeadSmart_Handbook.pdf)

4. Work with designated educational personnel regarding school accommodations
5. No tests in school
6. No sports, band, chorus, physical education or outdoor recess

#### Yellow Stage

1. Attend school full-time if possible
2. Students and families work with teachers regarding homework deadlines (complete as much as possible)
3. See school nurse for pain management and/or rest if needed
4. Limit one quiz/test per day (untimed testing is recommended)
5. Work in 15 minute blocks
6. No sports
7. Licensed medical professional will make decisions regarding band, chorus, physical education and outdoor recess (elementary level) based on medical assessment

#### Green Stage

1. Attend school full time
2. Resume normal activities
3. Resume sports once school work is back on track, student is symptom-free, and has been cleared by a licensed medical professional

Graduated return to athletic plans will begin only after a student has returned to full participation in academics and is completely symptom free at rest.

#### **Return to Play Schedule**

When a student athlete is completely symptom free at rest and has the approval of a medical professional, she/he may begin a graduated return to play protocol. The return to play schedule for the student should proceed as follows:

- Step 1: Light exercise, including walking or riding an exercise bike. No weight-lifting.  
Step 2: Aerobic exercise such as running in the gym or on the field. No helmet or other equipment.  
Step 3: Non-contact training drills in full equipment. Weight-training can begin.  
Step 4: Full contact controlled training followed by practice or training.  
Step 5: Full contact game play.

The written reentry plans will be signed by the student, their parent/guardian, the school nurse, the guidance counselor, principal, athletic director and coach so that all parties are in agreement as to the plan for reentry. Frequent or periodic assessments by the school personnel including the nurse, athletic director, school physician or team physician as appropriate may be necessary until full return to classroom activities and extracurricular athletic activities are authorized by medical staff. A copy of the plan will be kept in the student's medical record.

## **Section 11: Providing Information, Forms and Materials to Parents and Athletes.**

### 11a. Annual Training Requirement.

For student athletes and their parents, this training can be provided in the regular pre-season meetings where written materials are also available. Attendance can be taken at such meetings and the attendance roster serves as a record of verification for participants who are trained. If parents or students are unable to attend this training, they must complete one of the approved on-line trainings and submit a certificate of completion to the athletic director to meet this participation requirement. Alternatively, parents may review DPH-approved written materials (provided by the athletic department) and sign a verification form that they have read and understood these materials.

### 11b. Procedure for the School to Notify Parents When an Athlete Has Been Removed From Play for a Head Injury or Suspected Concussion.

The athletic director or school nurse/physician will be responsible for contacting the athlete's parents and providing follow-up instructions. If the athlete is injured at an away event or if the athletic director or school nurse is unavailable, the coaching staff are responsible for notifying the athlete's parents of the injury and, if warranted, call for emergency care. The student should be sent home with the "Report of Head Injury During Sports Season Form" as well as the "Post Sports-Related Head Injury Medical Clearance and Authorization Form".

### 11c. Protocol for Parents/Students to Obtain Medical Clearance for Return to Play and Academics After a Diagnosed Concussion (see also #8 above).

Parents and students are oriented about the protocol on obtaining medical clearance for return to play after a diagnosed concussion. In addition, our athletic handbook under the section for "Sports Concussion" includes our policies regarding sports concussion including obtaining medical clearance after a concussion. The website of the school at [www.gardnerk12.org](http://www.gardnerk12.org) under the Athletic Department tab has a page on sports concussion that also details these protocols. Finally, parents and students can always call the athletic department office at 978-632-1600, ext. 1800 or the school nurse's office at 978-632-3934 (high school) or 978-632-3324 (middle school) to get further clarification or ask questions. No student will be allowed to return to play until the medical clearance form is signed by authorized medical professional, submitted and reviewed by the school nurse.

### 11d. Parent's Responsibility for Completion of the Pre-Participation Form.

At the schools' annual meeting in the fall, parents and students are oriented about the requirement to submit the pre-participation form or school-based equivalent, signed by both student and parent, which provides a comprehensive history with up-to-date information relative to concussion history. It is the parent's responsibility to tell all the student's coaches and school nurse if the student has ever had a concussion via this form. In addition, our athletic handbook under the section for "Sports Concussion" includes our policies regarding sports concussion including the requirement to complete the pre-participation form by student and parent at the start of every sports season. The website for the school at [www.gardnerk12.org](http://www.gardnerk12.org) under the Athletic Department tab has a page on sports concussion that also details these protocols. Finally,

parents and students can always call the athletic department office at 978-632-1600, ext. 1800 or the school nurse's office at 978-632-3934 (high school) or 978-632-3324 (middle school) to get further clarification or ask questions. These forms should be submitted to the athletic department office which copies and reviews them and then forwards them to the school nurse's office for review. No student will be allowed to participate in athletic activities until the pre-participation form is signed, submitted by parent and student and reviewed by designated staff annually.

### **11e. Parent's Responsibility for Completion of the Report of a Head Injury Form.**

At the schools' annual meeting in the fall, parents and students are oriented about the requirement to submit all forms including the Report of Head Injury Form signed by parent if their child has a head injury related to athletic activities. In addition, our athletic handbook under the section for "Sports Concussion" includes our policies regarding sports concussion including the requirement to complete and sign. The website for the school at [www.gardnerk12.org](http://www.gardnerk12.org) under the Athletic Department tab has a page on sports concussion that also details these protocols. Finally, parents and students can always call the athletic department office at 978-632-1600, ext. 1800 or the school nurse's office at 978-632-3934 (high school) or 978-632-3324 (middle school) to get further clarification or ask questions. These forms should be submitted to the athletic department office which copies and reviews them and then forwards them to the school nurse's office for review. No student will be allowed to participate in athletic activities until all required forms including the report of head injury form has been signed, submitted by parent and student and reviewed by school nursing and athletic department staff.

## **Section 12: Inclusion of Sport-Related Head Injury Policy in the Student and Parent Handbook.**

### Handbook

We have recently modified our student, parent handbook, and athletic handbook that are distributed at the beginning of the school year and now contain:

- Most recent Concussion information fact sheet
- Links and information about annual training
- Gardner Public Schools' protocol/policies on sports-related head injuries
- **Pre-participation Head Injury/Concussion Reporting Form for Extracurricular Activities, Report of Head Injury During Sports Season report form, and Post Sports-Related Head Injury Medical Clearance and Authorization forms.**

Our handbooks with information on sports-related concussions are updated every other year and are available at the school's website or within the school's website under the Athletic Department directory. Hard copies of these manuals are also available at the Athletic Director's Office at 978-632-1600, ext. 1800 and/or School Principal's Office at 978-632-1600 (high school) or 978-632-1603 (middle school).

## **Section 13: Communicating With Parents With Limited English Proficiency.**

### Communicating With Parents

Because of limited English skills, some parents may be unable to communicate with school personnel and may feel isolated from the school community. We make every attempt to communicate effectively with parents with limited English proficiency. We have translated school policies on head injury and concussions in extracurricular athletic activities and the on-line training classes and the mandated forms into Spanish and Portuguese. These documents are listed on the Gardner High School's Athletic Department website at [www.gardnerk12.org](http://www.gardnerk12.org) in these languages. We will translate other materials as requested. In the event a student receives a concussion or is suspected of having a concussion, the Athletic Director's office should notify the parent in the appropriate language. Interpreters are available by contacting the Principal's office.

## **Section 14: Outreach to Parents for Form and Training Completion.**

### Outreach to Parents

Student athletes will not be permitted to participate in extracurricular sport until both the parent and student have completed and returned the signed Pre-Participation Head Injury/Concussion Reporting Form for Extracurricular Activities *before the start of each sports season*. In the event the school has not received the Pre-Participation Head Injury/Concussion Reporting Form or other required forms, including documentation of an annual physical examination and documentation that both the student athlete and their parent/guardian have completed the required annual training, we will make three attempts to contact parent using the school's typical communication methods to parents (email, snail mail, telephone, etc.). The student athlete will not be allowed to play or practice until the appropriate required signed and completed forms are returned to the Athletic Department.

## **Section 15: Sharing Concussion-Related Health Information.**

### Sharing Information

Informal collaboration occurs on a temporary, as-needed basis for information exchange, as when the school nurse informs (while adhering to protocols for confidentiality) the physical education teacher that a particular student may not participate in athletic activities because of a recent injury. There may be circumstances in which there is a need to share information in the student health record with authorized school personnel – either to enhance the educational progress of the student or protect his/her safety or well-being. For example, staff may need to be alerted to signs or symptoms of a medical problem on a need to know basis and offered a course of action. This type of disclosure should be made only to those authorized school personnel who work *directly with* the student in an instructive (academic or athletic), administrative, or diagnostic capacity. Finally, authorized school personnel should be instructed not to re-disclose the information.

If there is any question about the sensitivity of the information, the school nurse should seek the permission of the parent/guardian and student, if appropriate, prior to disclosure to authorized school personnel. Ultimately, however, federal regulations permit information in the student health record to be seen by authorized school personnel on a need to know basis, and the basis for such sharing seems even more compelling when necessary to protect the well-being or safety of the student.

There may be times when a school nurse has a legal obligation to disclose health or related information to protect a student's health or safety. Public policy requires the protection of a patient's right to privacy by medical professionals, unless there is an immediate threat or serious harm to the student or others.

**Section 16 A & B: Requirement that Coaches, Athletic Trainers, Trainers and Volunteers  
a) Teach Strategies That Minimize Sports-Related Head Injury and b) Prohibit Dangerous Play.**

Teaching Form and Techniques

Coaches of Gardner Public Schools are expected to be current with best practices in their sport that reduce the likelihood of head injury. In addition, coaches are prohibited from teaching or promoting dangerous practices such as using a helmet as a weapon. It is expected that all coaches and athletic department staff teach techniques that minimize sports injury and/or concussion such as proper fitting, certified (especially helmets) equipment and protective equipment.

**Section 17: Penalties.**

Gardner Public Schools takes the safety of student athletes seriously. All members of the school staff are expected to follow these policies and protocols to support the health and safety of student athletes. The underlying philosophy of these policies is "when in doubt, sit them out". Failure to comply with the letter or spirit of these policies could result in progressive discipline for staff and/or forfeiture of games. If students or parents have concerns that the policies are being violated, they should contact the Principal and also place their complaint in writing with a request for resolution.