



*The Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Executive Office of Health and Human Services  
Department of Public Health*

**Information for Coaches, Athletic Directors and Parents about the New Law  
Regarding Sports-Related Head Injury and Concussions:  
*An Act Relative to Safety Regulations for School Athletic Programs***

**August 27, 2010**

**What does the law do?**

This law requires that all schools subject to the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA) rules make sure that student athletes and their parents, coaches athletic directors, school nurses and physicians and others learn about the consequences of head injuries and concussions through training programs and written materials. The law requires that athletes and their parents inform their coaches about prior head injuries at the beginning of the season. If a student athlete becomes unconscious during a game or practice, the law now mandates taking the student out of play or practice, and requires written certification from a licensed medical professional for "return to play". The law also prohibits coaches, trainers and others from encouraging or permitting a student athlete from using sports equipment as a weapon or engaging in sports techniques that unreasonably endanger the health and safety him/herself or other players.

**What schools are covered by this new law?**

The law specifically states that public and other schools subject to MIAA rules are required to participate. However, because sports related head injuries and concussions can have such serious consequences for students, including long term health and educational issues if they are not properly managed, the Department strongly encourages all schools whose students engage in extracurricular athletics to include these trainings as part of their athletic programs.

**Who needs to participate in a Sports Head Injury and Concussions Awareness Course?**

The law says that the following people must participate in this training program:

- Coaches
- Athletic trainers
- Parent volunteers for any extracurricular athletic activity
- Physicians employed by the school or who volunteer for any extracurricular athletic activity
- School nurses or nurses who volunteer for any extracurricular athletic activity
- Athletic Directors
- School marching band directors

- Parents or legal guardians of children who participate in any extracurricular athletic activity.

The Department of Public Health also recommends that student athletes themselves participate in such a course or receive printed materials with information about concussions.

### **How can I take this Course?**

Two **free** on-line courses are available and contain all information required by the law, including the signs and symptoms of concussion, how to respond to a suspected concussion, what you need to do to help an athlete when s/he is cleared to safely return to play, and what you can do to prevent sports related head injuries.

The first is available on-line through the National Federation of High School Coaches. You will need to click the “order here” button and complete a brief information form to register. At the end of the course, you will receive a completion receipt. Keep this receipt for the files your school will maintain to comply with the law. The entire course, including registration, can be completed in less than 30 minutes.

<http://www.nfhslern.com/electiveDetail.aspx?courseID=15000>

The second on-line course will be available Monday, August 30, through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at:

[www.cdc.gov/Concussion](http://www.cdc.gov/Concussion)

The training uses expert interviews and interactive elements to train coaches and others on concussion. This course includes additional materials for coaches, parents, athletes and school nurses. It is expected that these materials will be available in Spanish as well.

### **How would I know if an athlete may have a concussion?**

While the symptoms of concussions vary from person to person, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have developed helpful materials that can assist you understanding the signs. Go to: [http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/signs\\_symptoms.html](http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/signs_symptoms.html)

There is information available for specific individuals:

- Coaches: [http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/Coach\\_Guide-a.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/Coach_Guide-a.pdf)
  - and [http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/coaches\\_Engl.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/coaches_Engl.pdf)
- School nurses: <http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/HeadsUp/schools.html>
- Athletes: [http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/athletes\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/athletes_Eng.pdf)
- Parents: [http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/parents\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/parents_Eng.pdf)

Additional materials on concussion and their impact can be found at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/>

### **What should I do if one of my players may have suffered a concussion or head injury during practice or a game?**

If a student has suffered, or is suspected of having suffered, a concussion during a game or practice, the student **MUST** be removed from play. The student may not go back into that game or practice even if the athlete says “I feel fine.”

### **When can an athlete be “returned to play”?**

The law is clear that a student who may have suffered a head injury may not return to the same game or practice. It also requires that student athletes be certified for return to play by a physician. The Department of Public Health is drafting regulations that will be available by the end of the calendar year. In addition, DPH is working with the medical community on guidelines and protocols for certifying an athlete’s return to play.

### **How will medical professionals be informed of the law?**

The Department is working with the Massachusetts Medical Society, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and others to inform athletic trainers, nurses, physicians, emergency room personnel, and primary care physicians around the state about this new law.

### **How will parents learn about this law?**

The law requires that schools make sure that *parents* of athletes and marching band members and parent volunteers are provided with the sports concussion awareness course, either on-line or through written materials. To comply with this component of the law, schools may provide parents with information on the 2 online courses described above or schools may provide copies of the materials found at

- [http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/parents\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/parents_Eng.pdf)
- [http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/quiz\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/quiz_Eng.pdf)
- [http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/quiz\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/pdf/quiz_Eng.pdf)

(Note that these materials will be available in Spanish shortly.)

### **Do coaches or trainers have other obligations under the law?**

Yes. As noted above, coaches, trainers or volunteers for an extracurricular athletic activity are not allowed to encourage or permit a student to engage in any dangerous athletic technique that unnecessarily endangers the health of him/herself or another player, including using a helmet or any other sports equipment as a weapon.

### **Who is responsible for keeping track of compliance with this law?**

The superintendent of the school district or the director of the school must maintain complete and accurate records of the district’s or school’s compliance with the law.

### **Do parents and athletes have other responsibilities under this law?**

Yes. Students and their parents or legal guardians must provide information to the school regarding any previous sports head injury at the start of each sports season. The Department of Public Health will be developing a sample form for this purpose. In the interim, parents and athletes can be asked to provide this information in a format

selected by the school. However, these forms must require the signature of both the student and the parent or legal guardian. Coaches must receive this information prior to allowing any student to participate in an extracurricular athletic activity so they can identify students who are at greater risk for repeated head injuries.

**What does the new law say about the liability of a school district, its officers or employees if one of my players gets hurt?**

This new law does not change the existing law regarding lawsuits and legal liability. School districts are advised to consult with their legal advisor as needed.

**What does the new law say about the legal liability of other people who volunteer to assist with extracurricular sports, if a player gets hurt?**

The new law clearly states that volunteers who assist with extracurricular athletic activities will not be liable for civil damages for any acts or omissions related to the law *unless they are willfully or wantonly negligent*.

**Where can I get more information about the law?**

The full text of the law is available at:  
[www.mass.gov/legis/laws/seslaw10/sl100166.htm](http://www.mass.gov/legis/laws/seslaw10/sl100166.htm)

**Where can I get more information about concussions and how to respond if they occur?**

[www.sportsconcussions.org](http://www.sportsconcussions.org)  
[www.sportslegacy.org](http://www.sportslegacy.org)  
<http://www.biama.org/whatdoes/playsmart.html>