

VIRGINIA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF AND THE BLIND

Title: Concussion Policy

Policy Number: SH14

POLICY STATEMENT:

Pursuant to the *Code of Virginia* § 22.1-271.5 and § 22.1-271.6 and the Student Athlete Protection Act, the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind (VSDB) has developed a policy regarding the identification and appropriate handling of suspected concussions in student-athletes. Our goal, is to inform and educate coaches, students, and their parents/guardians, of the nature and risks of concussion. We also aim to ensure that student-athletes are properly diagnosed, given adequate time to heal, and are comprehensively supported until they are symptom free.

DEFINITIONS:

Appropriate licensed health care provider: a physician, physician assistant, osteopath or athletic trainer licensed by the Virginia Board of Medicine; a neuropsychologist licensed by the Board of Psychology; or a nurse practitioner licensed by the Virginia State Board of Nursing. The VSDB has contracted physicians that are on call 24 hours a day while the students are on campus.

Cognitive rest: limiting cognitive exertion and careful management of neurometabolic demands on the brain during recovery.

Concussion: a traumatic brain injury that is characterized by an onset of impairment of cognitive and/or physical functioning, and is caused by a blow to the head, face or neck, or a blow to the body that causes a sudden jarring of the head. A concussion can occur with or without a loss of consciousness, and proper management is essential to the immediate safety and long-term future of the injured individual. A concussion can be difficult to diagnose, and failing to recognize the signs and symptoms in a timely fashion can have dire consequences.

Most athletes who experience a concussion can recover completely as long as they do not return to play prematurely. The effects of repeated concussions can be cumulative, and after a concussion, there is a period in which the brain is particularly vulnerable to further injury. If an athlete sustains a second concussion during this period, the risk of permanent brain injury increases significantly and the consequences of a seemingly mild second concussion can be very severe, and even result in death (i.e., “second impact syndrome”).

Return to Learn: instructional modifications that support a controlled, progressive increase in cognitive activities while the student recovers from a brain injury (i.e., concussion) allowing the student to participate in classroom activities and learn without worsening symptoms and potentially delaying healing.

Return to Play: participation in a non-medically supervised practice or athletic competition.

CONCUSSION PROCEDURES:

1. Recognize a concussion:

All coaches and athletic trainers should become familiar with the signs and symptoms of concussions. Concussion symptoms may include the following:

- a. Physical symptoms
 - Headache
 - Nausea and vomiting
 - Balance/Gait disturbance
 - Visual disturbances
 - Sensitivity to noise
 - Fatigue
- b. Cognitive symptoms
 - Difficulty concentrating or following instructions
 - Confusion
 - Amnesia
 - Answers questions slowly
 - Repeats questions
- c. Emotional symptoms
 - Change in personality
 - Mood swings
 - Emotions not matching situation
 - Irritability
 - Sadness
 - Nervousness
- d. Sleep
 - Alteration from normal sleep patterns
 - Drowsiness
 - Difficulty falling asleep
 - Sleeping less than usual
 - Sleeping more than usual

2. Remove from activity:

Any student-athlete who exhibits signs, symptoms, or behaviors consistent with a concussion shall be immediately removed from participation in the activity. Any student-

athlete suspected of sustaining a concussion may not return to play until cleared by an appropriate licensed health care provider.

Remember....when in doubt, sit them out!

3. **Refer the athlete for medical evaluation by a licensed health care provider:**

If a head injury occurs during practice or game while at VSDB, please call the VSDB nursing staff immediately. *Please do not let the student walk alone to the Student Health Center if a concussion is suspected.* Any student-athlete with a suspected concussion will initially be evaluated by the VSDB nursing staff.

The nursing staff will be the point of contact for parents, VSDB staff, and additional healthcare providers if a student is suspected to have a concussion.

Further evaluation may be completed by the contract physician or in the emergency room, as appropriate. The parent/guardian should be contacted immediately. They may choose to take the student to his or her own healthcare provider for evaluation.

If a suspected concussion occurs while the team is off-campus, allow the host school's medically trained staff to examine the student. If the VSDB student needs additional evaluation, a VSDB staff member must accompany the student to the nearest hospital. Also, the VSDB Student Health Center should be contacted so that the nursing staff is aware and can notify the student's parent/guardian. Staff should take the student's *Permission to Treat* form.

***Please note: Any student-athlete who exhibits any of the following symptoms should be transported immediately to the nearest emergency department by rescue squad:**

- Deterioration of neurological function; not recognizing people or places
- Decreasing level of consciousness or unresponsiveness
- Decrease or irregularity in respirations
- Any signs or symptoms of associated injuries (spine injury, skull fracture, or bleeding)
- Mental status changes: lethargy, confusion, agitation, difficulty maintaining arousal
- Seizure activity
- Headaches that worsen
- Vomiting
- Slurred speech
- Neck pain, weakness/numbness in arms and legs
- Bleeding/clear fluid leakage from ears or nose

4. **Return to Play:**

The VSDB must receive a written release or clearance from a licensed health care provider before permitting a student-athlete to return to play. The VSDB nursing staff will inform appropriate VSDB school staff when the student-athlete may return to sports activities and/or if the student has additional restrictions.

Once a student has been medically cleared by a licensed health care provider to return to normal activities any decline in the student's behavior or ability to function in class should immediately be reported to the VSDB nursing staff. The VSDB nursing staff will re-assess the student and promptly notify the parents/guardians of continuing signs/symptoms.

5. **Return to Learn:**

During the period of recovery, it is important for the student-athlete, parents/guardians, and school staff to understand that physical and cognitive rest is required in the first few days after an injury. Those activities that require concentration and attention may exacerbate the symptoms and delay recovery. Activities that involve increased levels of concentration or focus, such as watching television, playing video games, working on a computer work, and texting on a cell phone may cause concussion symptoms to reappear or worsen. While studying is an important component of receiving an education, it should be done in a limited fashion, to avoid aggravating symptoms.

Many student-athletes will report increased symptoms with cognitive activities after a concussion. Student-athletes with concussions often have difficulty attending school, focusing on schoolwork, taking tests, and keeping up with assignments, especially in Math, Science, and Language classes. Reading, even for pleasure, often worsens symptoms. Gradual return to full participation in academic activities should also be guided by the licensed healthcare provider in collaboration with school staff.

To allow for recovery, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends “cognitive and physical rest” during a variety of phases. The Virginia Board of Education has an example of phases found in, *Guidelines for Policies on Concussions in Students*.

These phases may include:

- Temporary leave and/or absence from school
- Shortening the student's school day
- Reduction of workload in school
- Receive teacher approved help with schoolwork
- Allowance of built-in breaks throughout the school day
- Avoid taking standardized tests during recovery
- Allowing adequate time to make up missed work upon return to school
- Reduce time spent on the computer, reading, or writing
- Modified environment (identifying quiet areas)

School personnel will be aware of cognitive and academic issues that may be experienced by a student who has suffered a concussion or other head injury, including (1) difficulty

with concentration, organization, and long-term and short-term memory; (2) sensitivity to bright lights and sounds; and (3) short-term problems with speech and language, reasoning, planning, and problem solving. Any student, who returns to school while still experiencing symptoms of a concussion, may need to have some classroom and/or studying modifications. School personnel will accommodate the student's gradual return to full participation in academic activities, based on the recommendation of the student-athlete's licensed health care provider. The student may be required to have a reduced workload until concussion symptoms are resolved. The VSDB nursing staff will notify the student's teachers, administrators, and other staff of necessary accommodations.

CONCUSSION EDUCATION:

1. Parents and Student-Athletes:

In order to participate in any extracurricular athletic activity, each student and the student's parent/guardian will annually review information on concussions provided by the VSDB athletic department. After having reviewed concussion policy and materials describing the short and long-term effects of concussions, students and their parent/guardian will sign a statement acknowledging receipt, review, and understanding of such information. The concussion policy is posted on the VSDB website.

2. Faculty and Staff:

The VSDB Concussion Policy is located in the VSDB Policy Manual and located on the VSDB website. Each employee is responsible for reading the policy annually.

VSDB nurses may assist with additional concussion training for coaches and administration, as requested.

All athletic team coaches and physical education teachers are required to complete a free online course, provided by the National Federation of High Schools, entitled, "*Concussions in Sports*". (This course can be accessed through the NFHS website at www.nfhslearn.com. Once on the website, click on "Courses" and find the course listed above.) The Principal or designee will assure that all coaches and PE teachers complete this course prior to the start of his or her coaching season and/or class. A copy of all course completion certificates will be given to Human Resources and filed in the employee's personnel file.

Rescission: Created: May 10, 2016 BOV Approved: September 21, 2016; Revised August 1, 2022
