Holderness School Concussion Policy and Procedures

updated May 2017

Introduction

Central to a Holderness education is participation in competitive athletics and vigorous outdoor activities. Our coaches aim to challenge their athletes, to help them learn to reach beyond themselves, and to teach them a life-long love of their sports. Inherent in sport is the risk of injury, including head injury and concussion. To optimize the health and safety of our students Holderness School has the following policies and procedures for concussion prevention, baseline neurocognitive testing, head injury assessment, and concussion management. Holderness School is a boarding environment, and it should be noted that not all concussions occur within an athletic arena.

Definitions:

**Concussion** - A mild traumatic brain injury that disrupts the neurochemical and neurometabolic processes within the brain. Concussions are induced by a biomechanical force to the brain caused by either a direct blow to the head, face, neck, or elsewhere on the body with an impulsive force transmitted to the head. Typically, but not always, a concussion results in rapid onset of neurological impairments, however symptoms can be delayed a day or more. Most concussions do not involve a loss of consciousness and there are no identifiable abnormalities on imaging.

**Post Concussion Syndrome** – A set of symptoms which may last for weeks, months, or years following a concussion.

**Second Impact Syndrome** – Rare condition when an athlete sustains a second head injury before symptoms from the first have resolved, often fatal.

**Student Health Services Team:** The team consists of the school physician, nurse-practitioners, athletic trainers, school counselor, and the school nursing staff. The physicians, nurse-practitioners and certified athletic trainers are trained and experienced in the assessment and management of concussions.

**Written Permission to Return to Sport:** As of 2012, New Hampshire law requires “written permission from a parent or guardian to return to play” after a concussion. As Holderness School is a boarding school with students from many countries, acceptable “written permission” includes an e-mail, fax, or phone call to the athletic trainer who will document the conversation in the patient’s chart. Efforts to communicate with both parents will be routinely made by health team staff, particularly when communication between parents is difficult; however permission regarding health care treatments including when to return to sport after a
concerns will be *required* from only one parent. Holderness views that it is the parents' responsibility to communicate with each other about the well-being of their child.

### Signs and Symptoms of Concussion

Students, coaches, parents, athletic trainers and other staff need to be aware of the potential signs and symptoms of concussion in order to properly identify students suffering from a concussion. Every concussion is different and symptoms can be subtle. Symptoms may occur immediately after an injury or not present until the next day. The majority of concussions DO NOT involve loss of consciousness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Emotional</th>
<th>Sleep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Headache</td>
<td>Difficulty remembering</td>
<td>Behavioral changes</td>
<td>Sleep more than usual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatigue</td>
<td>Difficulty concentrating</td>
<td>Irritability</td>
<td>Sleep less than usual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dizziness</td>
<td>Feeling slowed down</td>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>Drowsiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photophobia</td>
<td>Feeling in a fog</td>
<td>Feeling emotional</td>
<td>Trouble falling asleep</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sensitivity to noise</td>
<td>Slowed reaction times</td>
<td>Nervousness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nausea</td>
<td>Altered attention</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Balance problems</td>
<td>Amnesia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>LOC</td>
<td>Vision difficulty</td>
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Concussions often take 1-2 weeks to fully recover, but some may heal more quickly and others may take far longer. Holderness uses state-of-the-art tools to monitor recovery and ensure full resolution of the concussion prior to returning the student to activity.

### Concussions at Holderness School

Holderness School has a comprehensive set of policies and procedures to optimize students' safe participation in athletics and other vigorous activities. Relative to concussions, our strategy includes staff, parent and student education; pre-participation health evaluations; and the use of evidence-based guidelines and tools for assessment, management and return to play decisions. Our approach is informed by the *Consensus Statement on Concussion in Sport: the 3rd International Conference on Concussion in Sport held in Zurich, November 2008* and a thoughtful review of available literature. Our approach is continuously updated so we stay current as new information becomes available.

**Education:**

Appropriate education about concussion prevention, evaluation and management is
provided to students, parents, coaches and other staff.

- Sport-specific strategies to reduce the chance of injury are incorporated in teaching athletic techniques (i.e. tackling in football, heading in soccer) and use of appropriate equipment
- Annual concussion education will be provided to Holderness faculty members/coaches.
- Coaches annually will attest that he or she understands the Holderness concussion policies and procedures and the rationale behind these documents. Coaches also must attest to abide by the following: 1) any athlete who sustains an injury that potentially could lead to a concussion will be immediately removed from play; 2) the injured athlete will be promptly evaluated by an appropriate health professional and will not return to sport until evaluated; 3) any athlete suspected of or diagnosed with a concussion by a certified athletic trainer or another licensed healthcare professional will not return to the practice or game that day; 3) the coach will ensure parents/guardians/staff are notified of the injury; 4) the coach will abide by the health care professionals’ recommendations for return to play; and 5) students who sustain a concussion will not be returned to competitive athletics until permission is obtained from a parent.
- Information regarding concussion education will be made available to parents and students on an annual basis.

Pre-participation evaluation:

All students are required to undergo a comprehensive health assessment by a licensed health care provider prior to matriculating at Holderness. Additionally, families complete an “Annual Health Update” that includes any interim injuries and illnesses, including relevant concussion history. The assessments and updates are reviewed by school nursing staff. Those students with health conditions that may compromise their safe participation in athletics are brought to the attention of the school physician for review and further assessment.

All new students and returning juniors are required to complete baseline computerized neurocognitive testing using the ImPACT test prior to his or her arrival on campus. Students are not allowed to participate in athletics until the appropriate documents have been reviewed by the health team.

Injury Recognition
- Any student-athlete sustaining a worrisome blow will be evaluated by a health professional proficient in concussion diagnosis and management before any further participation in athletic activity.
- The athletic training staff or physician will assess the potentially injured student on the sidelines using appropriate techniques.
No student/athlete will participate in any practice or athletic event the same day that he or she:
1. Exhibits signs, symptoms or behaviors symptomatic of a concussion; or
2. Has been diagnosed with a concussion.

Concussion Management
- If it is determined that a student-athlete has a concussion he/she will remain out of physical activity until cleared to return by Health Team.
- Parents, adviser, and coaches will be notified
- The athletic training staff is responsible for initial assessment and management of concussions following current professional guidelines.
- If loss of consciousness or worsening neurological status occurs after the initial injury, emergent care will be arranged
- Close monitoring will be coordinated with staff including dorm parents.
- Every student who sustains a concussion will be evaluated by a physician or nurse-practitioner at a time deemed appropriate by the athletic training staff and prior to returning to activity. The management plan will be individualized to the clinical situation and collaboratively developed by the physician or nurse-practitioner, the athletic training staff, the advisor, the student and his or her parents. A follow up evaluation by a nurse-practitioner or physician will be arranged if symptoms continue for more than 2 weeks or at the athletic trainer’s recommendation or parental or student request.
- Rest is critical to allow for healing. Minimizing physical, cognitive and psychologic stress and promoting sleep are important elements of treatment.
- Academic accommodations may be made as deemed appropriate by the school.

Return to Physical Activity
- The patient needs to rest until completely symptom free.
- Once the student is symptom-free for 24 hours he/she will take a post-injury ImPACT test to ensure that neurocognitive scores have returned to baseline levels.
  - If ImPact test scores are below baseline levels the student-athlete will remain physically inactive and the test will be re-administered at a future time deemed appropriate by the Health Team.
  - When ImPact test scores are at baseline levels the student-athlete will be given an exertion test to determine if symptoms return with physical activity.
  - If the student-athlete experiences concussion-related symptoms during the exertion test, they will remain physically inactive and the test will be re-administered at a future time deemed suitable by Health Services.
- Once the student is symptom-free both at rest and with exercise AND has a
normal post-injury ImPACT test, parent(s) will be notified and written permission obtained to begin a stepwise return to activity progression:
  ○ Level 1: Light aerobic exercise
  ○ Level 2: Sport specific exercises and non-contact drills (i.e. skating, running, cutting, jumping, but no contact)
  ○ Level 3: Return to practice. If a contact sport the first practice must be a non-contact practice
  ○ Level 4: return to competition after completion of a non-restricted practice

- Generally, each step should take about 24 hours. Should the athlete become symptomatic during the progression, he or she should drop back to the previous asymptomatic level and try to progress after a 2 days symptom free at the lower level of activity.

Holderness students are welcome to consult with a health professional outside of Holderness Health Services, and we welcome and value outside input. However, Holderness School Health Services has the final say about a student’s ability to participate safely in athletics at Holderness School.