



VIRGINIA HIGH SCHOOL LEAGUE

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2010-2011 VHSL Return to Play Policy in Response to Concussions

The National Federation of State High Schools Associations (NFHS) has included the following new rule in all of its 2010-2011 rule books:

“Any contestant who exhibits signs, symptoms or behaviors consistent with a concussion (such as loss of consciousness, headache, dizziness, confusion or balance problems) shall be immediately removed from the [event] and shall not return to competition until cleared by an appropriate health care provider.”

For the 2010-2011 school year VHSL member schools/school divisions should establish a policy that appropriately defines who qualifies as an appropriate health care provider for the sake of determining when those athletes are eligible to return to play. This policy should be thoroughly discussed with -- and understood by -- coaches, athletes and parents/guardians.

Virginia Concussion and Brain Injury Statute

Beginning July 1, 2011, Virginia Code §22.1-271.5 dealing with “Policies on concussions in student-athletes” will go into effect. The basics of this law are:

- Each local school division shall develop policies and procedures regarding the identification and handling of suspected concussions in student-athletes.
- The established policies shall require:
 - o An annual review of concussion information provided by the school division to both student-athletes and parents/guardians.
 - o After reviewing the short and long term health effects of concussions, each student-athlete and the student-athlete’s parent or guardian shall sign a statement acknowledging receipt of such information, in a manner approved by the Board of Education.
 - o Student-athletes suspected by their coach, athletic trainer, or team physician of sustaining a concussion or brain injury in a practice or game shall be removed from the activity at that time. A student-athlete who has been removed from play, evaluated, and suspected to have a concussion or brain injury shall not return to play that same day nor until (i) evaluated by an appropriate licensed health care provider as determined by the Board of Education and (ii) in receipt of written clearance to return to play from such licensed health care provider.

In late August meetings will begin to develop the policies pursuant to this legislation. Representatives of the VHSL have been invited to take part in this process led by the

Board of Education. Information regarding the progress of these meetings and implementation of the legislation will be provided throughout the school year.

2010-2011 Practice Policy Regarding Suspected Concussions

While the NFHS concussion rule additions for 2010-2011 do not reference practice situations, the revised state statute does specifically address this critical area. Therefore, it is strongly encouraged that the language included in any policy adopted by a school/school division for 2010-2011 reference practice as well as contest situations.

Education Related to Concussions

VHSL strongly recommends that all coaches, student-athletes and parents/guardians of athletes take the NFHS “Concussions in Sports – What You Need to Know” Course (<http://www.nfhslearn.com/electiveDetail.aspx?courseID=15000>). It is free, it is available online, and it takes only about 20 minutes to complete. At its September 22 meeting, the VHSL Executive Committee will likely consider a proposal to require that all VHSL coaches take this course.