

Information for Rockwood School District Parents if your Student-Athlete Suffers a Concussion

What is a concussion?

A concussion is an injury to the brain. It is not an injury that produces swelling or bleeding in the brain. A concussion makes the brain function ineffectively. Because of this, the student-athlete may have troubles at school. For example, they may have a harder time focusing or concentrating in class, take longer to complete tasks such as finishing tests in their normal timeframe, or develop increased symptoms by putting the additional mental stress on their brain.

When can the student-athlete return to play after a concussion?

The student-athlete must be both symptom free at rest and not needing accommodations in school to perform at their normal abilities. They must also complete a return to activity progression as developed by the team physicians who work with our high schools, who have extensive experience in concussion management. At each high school, the athletic trainer typically will supervise the activity progression. Once the athlete has completed this activity progression and remains symptom free, then they will be cleared for practice and games. It is important for the athlete to be honest with the athletic trainer about their symptoms as more serious brain injuries can occur if an athlete returns from a concussion too soon.

By Missouri State Law, the athlete also must have written clearance from a licensed health care professional which, in the state of Missouri, currently includes a physician, a neuropsychologist, or a health care professional under the supervision of a physician such as an athletic trainer, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant.

If there is a concern from the athletic trainers or coaches at the high school that an athlete has not fully recovered, despite already having written clearance to return, the athletic trainers do have the ability to withhold participation if they feel this is in the best interest for the athlete's health. No athlete will be held out unnecessarily, but it is important that we protect the brains of our young student-athletes.

What is 'baseline' test?

The Rockwood School District high schools use a computerized test called ImPACT, which is an assessment of how the student-athlete can perform various tasks related to memory, concentration and speed. Athletes in contact sports typically will take the baseline test either in the 9th or 10th grade, and once again in 11th or 12th grade. This can then be used to reassess their recovery following a concussion.

If an athlete has had a baseline test, they will take the test following their concussion at a time determined by the team physician for that high school and the athletic trainer. Post-injury tests are

interpreted by the high school's team doctor, who have additional training in the interpretation of these tests. The athlete must be back to their baseline on their post-concussion test before any further activity or return is allowed.

This test is only one part of the assessment of an athlete following their concussion and determination regarding returning to play or activity is not based solely on the results of this test.

What can I do to make (help) my student-athlete recover?

Everyone reacts and responds differently to a concussion. Someone may have very short lived and few symptoms, whereas another person may take weeks to months to recover with many symptoms. Even an individual person may have a completely different set of symptoms with each concussion that occurs. The majority of athletes (80%) will recover within 3 weeks of their injury.

The first step is withholding the athlete from physical exertion and activity until symptom free (not just headache free) and given clearance by whomever is managing the student-athlete's concussion. This includes working out, cardio activities, practice, gym class, and competitions for both sports and activities in and out of school.

The second step is to reduce the cognitive stress that an athlete is dealing with. This may include a shortened school day, giving the athlete extra time to complete tests, reducing the workload in school, doing homework in small brief blocks of time with breaks, reducing computer and smartboard use, and avoiding standardized testing, as examples. Outside of school, some things may aggravate symptoms such as texting, computer use, watching TV, playing video games, listening to loud music, and watching live sporting events, also as examples. All of these things don't need to be restricted or eliminated in everyone, but if symptoms worsen with exposure to any of the mentioned items, reducing or eliminating the exposure while the student-athlete is recovering may speed the process of healing.

If class modifications are needed for the student for homework or tests, a doctor's note will be required in all cases by the schools.

One final consideration with high school athletes is considering withholding the student-athlete from driving following their injury. Reaction times are delayed in many student-athletes for a concussion and by keeping them from driving will eliminate the higher risk for accidents or further injury.