



**MANAGEMENT OF CONCUSSION AND HEAD INJURIES IN INDIANA HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETES:  
IMPLICATIONS RELATED TO THE INDIANA CONCUSSION LAW (SEA 93) AND IHSAA CONCUSSION  
RETURN TO PLAY PROTOCOL FOR ATHLETIC TRAINERS**

Indiana Athletic Trainers' Association

Indiana's Concussion Law (SEA 93)

The new Indiana law "Student Athletes: Concussions and Head Injuries" (IC 20-34-7) took effect on July 1, 2012. This law requires schools distribute information sheets to inform and educate coaches, student athletes, and parents of student athletes concerning the nature and risk of concussion and head injury to student athletes, including the risks of continuing to play after concussion or head injury.

The law requires that each year, before beginning practice for an interscholastic or intramural sport, a high school student athlete and the student athlete's parents must be given an information sheet, and both must sign and return a form acknowledging receipt of the information to the student athlete's coach.

The law further states that a high school athlete who is suspected of sustaining a concussion or head injury in a practice or game, shall be removed from play at the time of injury and may not return to play until the student athlete has received a written clearance from a licensed health care provider trained in the evaluation and management of concussions and head injuries.

IHSAA Concussion Protocol

For the 2009-2010 school year, the Indiana High School Athletic Association put forth its protocol for the treatment of concussion and head injuries based on the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) guidelines. These guidelines state "Any athlete 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 contest and shall not return to play until cleared by an appropriate health care professional." Further clarification was offered:

- 1) The Official's Role in Recognizing a Concussive Event: If an official observes a player that is exhibiting concussive signs, including appearing dazed, stunned, confused, disoriented, to have memory loss, or the athlete is either unconscious or apparently unconscious, he/she shall notify a coach that a player is apparently injured and advise that the player should be examined by a health care professional.
- 2) If it is confirmed during the contest by the school's **designated health care professional** that the student did not sustain a concussion, the head coach may so advise the officials during

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an appropriate stoppage of play and the athlete may reenter competition pursuant to the contest rules.

- 3) In the event the contest continues and the **designated health care professional** does NOT clear the athlete for return during said contest the athlete is subject to the return to play protocol as listed below:
  - a) Only an MD or DO may clear the individual to return to competition.
  - b) The clearance must be in writing.
  - c) The clearance may not be on the same date on which the athlete was removed from play.
- 4) Regardless of whether the athlete returns to play or not, following the contest, an official's report shall be filed with a removed player's school by the contest official that removed the athlete from play due to an apparent concussive event. This report shall be filed with the athletic director of the school and may be found on the IHSAA website at [www.ihsaa.org](http://www.ihsaa.org).
- 5) In cases where an assigned IHSAA tournament physician (MD/DO) is present, his or her decision to forbid an athlete to return to competition may not be overruled. The IHSAA member school's **designated health care professional** may be one of the following individuals:
  - A medical doctor (MD) or doctor of osteopathic medicine (DO) that holds an unlimited license to practice medicine in the state of Indiana, or;
  - A certified athletic trainer (ATC/L) licensed in the state of Indiana.

## **SUMMARY POINTS**

### **1. What are the pertinent points of SEA 93 and the IHSAA concussion protocol?**

- SEA 93 requires education be given and verified by signature with all athletes and their parents concerning the nature and risk of concussion and head injury each year.
  - It requires schools educate coaches concerning the nature and risk of concussion and head injury to student athletes, including the risks of continuing to play after concussion or head injury.
  - The law further states that a high school athlete who is suspected of sustaining a concussion or head injury in a practice or game, shall be removed from play at the time of injury and may not return to play until the student athlete has received written clearance from a licensed health care provider trained in the evaluation and management of concussions and head injuries.
- This law is a starting point that will evolve within each school district
- School districts can adapt the law to meet their needs as long as they stay within the law
- The IHSAA protocol is not in violation of the law, it is an extension of the law
  - It requires that athletes participating in sanctioned sports be evaluated by a designated health care professional
  - If a concussion is suspected, a written clearance from a physician or osteopathic physician is required before the athlete is allowed to return to sports participation.

### **2. What are the differences between SEA 93 and the IHSAA Concussion Protocol?**

- SEA 93 applies to all interscholastic and intramural high school athletes.
- The IHSAA protocol applies only to interscholastic athletes participating in an IHSAA-sanctioned sport.

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- In accordance to SEA 93, after a licensed athletic trainer determines a concussion has occurred, the law states only a licensed health care provider trained in the evaluation and management of concussions and head injuries may provide a release for an individual who has sustained an injury to return to play.
  - The person that signs the release form must:
    1. Hold a license to practice in their field,
    2. Be listed as a health care provider in Indiana Code 16-18-2-163, and
    3. Be trained in the evaluation and management of concussion and head injuries.
  - Provider must provide written documentation.
    - This documentation can be the form provided by the IDOE or it can be developed and individualized by either the school or provider
    - Example: physician prescription pad, school developed form, etc
  - SEA 93 is silent in regards to time frames for return.
- The IHSAA concussion protocol specifies that after a licensed athletic trainer determines a concussion has occurred that only a physician or osteopathic physician may return the individual to competition.
  - The provider must provide written documentation.
  - Clearance may not be on the same date on which the athlete was removed from play.

### **3. What educational material should be distributed and how should this process be documented?**

- SEA 93 mandates at minimum that parents, coaches, and student athletes (including intramural student athletes) obtain information and education concerning the nature and risk of concussion and head injury, including the risks of continuing to play after concussion or head injury from the school.
  - They must be given an information sheet and sign and return a form acknowledging receipt of this information.
  - The Indiana Department of Education has provided “Heads Up – A Fact Sheet for Athletes” and “Heads Up – A Fact Sheet for Parents” to meet this requirement.
  - The Indiana Department of Education have also provided the “Concussion Acknowledgement and Signature Form for Student Athletes and Parents” to record receipt of this information.
  - The Indiana Department of Education has provided these forms as examples and templates.
    - It is acceptable for schools to develop their own forms in accordance with their own needs provided they meet the requirements of SEA 93.
    - These forms should be provided and completed annually.
  - SEA 93 states it is the coaches’ responsibility to collect and store all forms; however, school policy can designate a central location for storage.
  - Persons involved in this process can include athletic trainers, school nurses, PE teachers, intramural directors, administrators and others.
    - School policy should dictate how this is done and by whom

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**4. Who is covered by SEA 93? What are the differences between interscholastic athletes and athletes participating in intramural sports, club sports, or school sponsored activities?**

- SEA 93 applies to students in grades 9-12, participating in an interscholastic or intramural sport.
  - An interscholastic sport is defined as one that is sanctioned by the Indiana High School Athletic Association (IHSAA). These include the following for boys: baseball, basketball, cross country, football, golf, soccer, swimming, tennis, track and wrestling; and for girls: basketball, cross country, golf, gymnastics, soccer, softball, swimming, tennis, track and volleyball.
    - Athletes participating in IHSAA sanctioned sports are subject to the requirements of SEA 93 **AND** the IHSAA concussion protocol.
  - An intramural sport is one where “all participants on both teams are members of one school”. Furthermore, any team, comprised of student athletes in grades 9-12, that is considered a “school-sponsored” team or whose coach is paid, compensated or officially recognized by the school administrator would be considered as an intramural sport – this includes cheerleading and club sports if the coach meets the definition above.
    - Athletes participating in intramural or club sports are subject to the requirements of SEA 93 **ONLY**.
- All students with potential head injury or concussion should be treated to the highest standard of care even if they are not subject to the legal requirements of SEA 93 or the IHSAA concussion protocol.
  - In other words, just because the law does not specifically mention band, drama, etc., it may be in the best interest of the school to treat all students the same whether they have to fill out the education forms or not. The “Standard of Care” should be the same even if the legal forms to be filled out are not.
    - This student population might be evaluated and treated by the school nurse or by the athletic trainer depending on school policy.

**5. Who can sign the written release form to return an interscholastic athlete or intramural/club sport athlete return to play following a documented concussion?**

- For an interscholastic athlete competing in an IHSAA sanctioned sport, the IHSAA protocol acts as a more restrictive guideline than SEA 93. In this case, only a physician or osteopathic physician is allowed to sign a release form to return an athlete to play.
- For an intramural or club sport athlete, SEA 93 states the release must come from a licensed health care provider trained in the evaluation and management of concussions and head injuries. There are three distinct criteria a person must meet in order to qualify under this definition:
  - Must have a license given by a governmental agency that regulates a specific profession
  - Must be listed in Indiana Code as a health care provider
    - The providers that meet these requirements are:
      - Physician
      - Dentist
      - Registered or licensed practical nurse
      - Midwife
      - Optometrist

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- Pharmacist
  - Podiatrist
  - Chiropractor
  - Physical therapist
  - Respiratory care practitioner
  - Occupational therapist
  - Psychologist
- Additionally, providers must have training in the evaluation and management of concussions and head injuries
  - The providers listed above should determine if they meet the standard of being trained in the evaluation and management of concussions and head injuries.
  - If they feel they are competent, they are able to sign the release form.
- School policy can be established to be more restrictive than either SEA 93 or the IHSAA protocol.
  - For example, a school system can require that its interscholastic, intramural, and club sport athletes only see a physician with specialty training in concussion management (i.e. ImPACT or CogSport training)

#### **6. What is the correct procedure to follow when an athlete sustains a head injury?**

- This will ultimately be determined by individual school policy based on available personnel and resources.
  - This policy simply must follow SEA 93 and in the case of interscholastic athletes, the policy must also follow IHSAA guidelines.
- An appropriate communication plan between all individuals involved in the care of an injured athlete or individual should be developed (licensed athletic trainer, school nurse, PE teachers, athletic director, coaching staff, intramural director, classroom teachers, administrators, etc)
- For interscholastic athletes, if a concussion is suspected and a licensed athletic trainer is present, the athlete should be removed from competition until the licensed athletic trainer can complete an evaluation of the injury.
  - If at that time, the licensed athletic trainer evaluates the athlete and determines there has not been a concussion or head injury the athlete may return to the competition.
  - If at that time, the licensed athletic trainer evaluates the athlete and determines a concussion has occurred, the athlete should be removed from further participation in the competition.
    - The athlete may not return to play until they have obtained a signed release from a physician or osteopathic physician.
    - The athlete may not return to play the same day the concussion occurred.
    - The Indiana Department of Education provided form “Head Concussion Evaluation and Release to Play Form for Licensed Health Care Providers” may be used by the physician or osteopathic physician to document clearance for return to play. However, any form or other type of documentation is acceptable.

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- If no licensed athletic trainer is present and the athlete displays any symptoms of a concussion (even one), the athlete should be removed from the contest and referred to an appropriate health care provider.
  - All coaches (including intramural and club sports coaches) are required under SEA 93 to be educated on the symptoms of a concussion.
- If a game official removes an athlete from a contest due to suspicion of a concussion and a licensed athletic trainer is present, the licensed athletic trainer can complete an evaluation of the injury.
  - If the licensed athletic trainer evaluates the athlete and determines there has not been a concussion or head injury the athlete may return to the competition.
  - If at that time, the licensed athletic trainer evaluated the athlete and determines a concussion has occurred, the athlete should be removed from further participation in the competition.
    - The athlete may not return to play until they have obtained a signed release from a physician or osteopathic physician.
    - The athlete may not return to play the same day the concussion occurred.
- If a game official removes an athlete from a contest due to suspicion of a concussion and a licensed athletic trainer is not present to evaluate the injury, the athlete should be removed from the contest and referred to an appropriate health care provider if they display any symptoms of a concussion (even one).
- For intramural or club sports athletes, if a concussion is suspected and a licensed athletic trainer is present, the athlete should be removed from competition until the licensed athletic trainer can complete an evaluation of the injury.
  - If at that time, the licensed athletic trainer evaluates the athlete and determines there has not been a concussion or head injury the athlete may return to the competition.
  - If at that time, the licensed athletic trainer evaluates the athlete and determines a concussion has occurred, the athlete should be removed from further participation in the competition.
    - The athlete may not return to their activity until they have obtained a written release provided by a licensed health care provider trained in the evaluation and management of concussions and head injuries as defined by SEA 93.
  - If the individual is not able to be evaluated following the injury, the athlete should be removed from the contest and referred to an appropriate health care provider if they display any symptoms of a concussion (even one) in accordance with school policy.

### **CONCLUSION**

Ultimately, the management of concussions and head injuries as it relates to the implementation of SEA 93 will differ between school systems depending on local resources and availability and training of staff.

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Each school is urged to establish a concussion management plan. The plan should include, but is not limited to, the following:

1. Who specifically is responsible for distribution and collection of educational materials for parents and student athletes?
  - This includes interscholastic, intramural, and club sport athletes.
2. What type of training and how often will educational materials be given to coaching staff?
3. What forms will be developed and used for parent and student-athlete education (if not using forms provided by the Indiana Department of Education)?
4. What forms will be developed and used for a health care provider to provide written clearance for return to sports participation (if not using forms provided by the Indiana Department of Education)?
5. Establish a process that ensures a student-athlete who exhibits signs, symptoms or behaviors consistent with a concussion shall be removed from athletics activities (e.g., competition, practice, conditioning sessions) and evaluated by a medical staff member (e.g., sports medicine staff, team physician) with experience in the evaluation and management of concussions.
  - What are the specific roles and duties of school staff when an interscholastic athlete sustains a concussion or head injury?
  - What are the specific roles and duties of school staff when an intramural or club sport athlete sustains a concussion or head injury?
6. Establish a policy that precludes a student-athlete diagnosed with a concussion from returning to athletic activity (e.g., competition, practice, conditioning sessions) for at least the remainder of that calendar day.
7. Establish a policy that requires medical clearance for a student-athlete diagnosed with a concussion to return to athletics activity (for example, competition, practice, conditioning sessions).
  - Identify who, within the scope of law and IHSA protocol, your school will recognize as a health care provider qualified to sign a written release to participation for an athlete returning to play.
8. Establish a communication plan amongst all school officials (licensed athletic trainer, school nurse, athletic director, school administrators, coaches, etc) to help facilitate care for an injured athlete after an individual sustains a head injury.

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