



Concussions at School: Q & A

Q. Doctor claims no concussion. Can a student resume normal physical activity if their own doctor writes they did not have a concussion, even though school personnel witnessed signs of possible concussion after an injury (e.g., appeared dazed or felt nauseated)?

A. No, do not allow student to resume normal physical activities even if the student feels fine. No competition for at least 7 days. Follow district's gradual introduction to physical activity outlined on "Return to Play" form.

Q. When is Day 1 for "Return to Play"? Is it the day the student sees their doctor (to get "Return to Play" form signed)? Or is the day that concussion occurred?

A. It is the day of the concussion that starts the countdown. 'Day 1' is the day after the concussion (although doctors may delay the start further, if they specify it on the form). Remember: the first 2 days on the "Return to Play" protocol we recommend no activity more vigorous than regular walking, before you can move successfully to 'Day 3' activities on the protocol.

Q. Can a student with headache or other post-concussion symptoms return to play (e.g. P.E. or Athletics)?

A. Yes, but only 48 hours after the concussion occurred and if it is specifically cleared by the child's doctor to do so, despite symptoms. Even then, that level of physical activity (starting with stage 2) must not worsen symptoms or cause any additional symptoms, or that activity must be ceased. The latest evidence shows that youth do better if they engage in some physical activity early in the process, even before all post-concussive symptoms have resolved. Students with post-concussive symptoms, even symptoms that do not worsen when active, *cannot* progress to any contact activity (Step 5 on CDC and school district "Return to Play" form; Step III on CIF's Return to Play form) and these students cannot compete.

Q. Why are there two "Return to Play" forms (a District form and a C.I.F. form)?

A. The district's form reflects CDC's (Centers for Disease Control) and American Academy of Pediatrics' latest recommendations: allowance of non-contact physical activity, even when there are symptoms -- but only in certain circumstances (see above question/answer). The C.I.F. form is different in that regard. Either form is acceptable to distribute. And either form is acceptable to receive from doctors. Medical specialists who run our local concussion specialty clinics agree with the CDC version, so distribution of that form to students with a concussion is preferable. However, athletic trainers and district athletic staff who prefer to stay with the C.I.F. form may do so.

Q. Symptoms with Activity. If symptoms worsen or new symptoms appear during a stage of the "Return to Play", when does activity/play resume?

A. The student must return to the previously successful (no new symptoms or no worsening of symptoms) stage again, before trying the unsuccessful stage again. (e.g. if failed Step 3, then back to Step 2 the next day, and to Step 3 following day)

Q. Progressing on "Return to Play" on weekends. *Do these days count?* When stages of the "Return to Play" protocol are on weekends (e.g., day 3 and day 4 are Saturday and Sunday), do I resume where I left off (i.e., start day 3 activities on Monday)? Or are weekends valid days of progression (e.g., Monday would be day 5)?

A. If student and parent/guardian verify student's participation in stepped-up physical activities over weekend days resulted in no new or worsening symptoms, then accept their reports and move forward by two days (i.e., Monday would be day 5). Move forward by only one day on Monday if student's weekend activity level only progressed one day.

Q. Progressing on "Return to Play" on school days. *Who performs the assessment, and when is it done?*

A. Whenever possible, it is best to assess students soon after their stepped-up activity. For example, a nurse asking questions immediately after observing a student at PE; or an athletic trainer asking questions soon after observing a student in sport are both preferable to asking the student how they felt several hours after the stepped-up activity occurred. School staff who are trained to perform the assessment may do so.

Q. Students from other schools. Should we report concussions of student registered at other schools and districts?

A. Yes, you are responsible for completing all forms related to witnessing a concussion for *any* student. Try to get one copy of that form to student's own school on the next possible school day.

Q. Students who don't see a doctor. Can a student with signs/symptoms of concussion return to school and play in competition, even if he/she has never seen a doctor?

A(i). Yes. But for these students, follow the district's "Return to Learn" and "Return to Play" guidelines. If the student comes to school the first day instead of staying home and no parent picks him/her up, encourage rest in the health office rather than class.

A(ii) If an athlete progresses through the "Return to Play" and is ready for competition, but there is no doctor signature, the student should not return to competition. It is against California state law. Reach your school Athletic Trainer, Athletic Director, or the Nursing and Wellness Office for guidance if student never sees a doctor for many weeks.


Howard Taras, MD

April 4, 2019
Date