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GROUP

Expert care for spine and brain

**In-field
Head and
Spine Trauma
Assessment
Guide**

This guide is not meant to substitute for professional medical care. It is only intended to help guide coaches, trainers, parents and others in appropriate response to suspected head or spine injury in a student athlete.

In-field Head Trauma Assessment

The signs of head injury can occur immediately or develop slowly over several hours. The head may look fine, but complications could result from bleeding inside the skull. It's important that any athlete who sustains a blow to the head be monitored for the following symptoms.

Symptoms that warrant close monitoring:

- Dizziness, "seeing stars"
- Brief loss of consciousness
- Memory loss, confusion, difficulty concentrating
- Lethargy
- Severe headache, nausea or vomiting
- Blurred vision, sensitivity to light
- Irritability, personality changes or unusual behavior
- Head and/or neck pain
- Difficulty with coordination or balance

If player loses consciousness for any duration of time (including "blacking out") they should be benched for rest of game and watched closely.

Worsening of any of these symptoms over the hours following a head injury warrant a visit to a medical professional.

Symptoms that warrant ambulance/ prompt medical attention:

- Unconsciousness
- Abnormal breathing
- Obvious serious wound or fracture

- Bleeding or clear fluid from the nose, ear, or mouth
- Disturbance of speech, vision, hearing
- Pupils of unequal size
- Weakness or paralysis
- Seizure
- Severe vomiting (more than 2 times)
- Loss of bladder or bowel control

In-field Spine Trauma Assessment

If cervical spine injury is suspected, the athlete must remain immobile, ideally on a backboard and fitted with a cervical collar, until they can be safely transported to a medical facility for full assessment.

Symptoms to look for indicating possible spine injury:

- Inability to move part of the body, especially the legs
- Compromised motor strength
- Markedly weak or deep breathing
- Involuntary penile erection
- Low blood pressure with normal or slow pulse
- Neck or back pain/tenderness
- Lack of feeling and/or decreased pain perception in a body part
- Penetrating trauma to the neck
- Cut or bruise on the neck or back
- Loss of bladder and/or bowel control
- Head or back in an unusual position post injury

For complete brain and spine assessment and care,
call on the region's largest, most experienced group
of specialists – Sierra Neurosurgery Group.



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