

## **SPECIAL OLYMPICS NORTH DAKOTA (SOND) CONCUSSION AWARENESS/SAFETY RECOGNITION POLICY**

Per Special Olympics Incorporated (SOI), SOND must have a concussion awareness and safety recognition policy to ensure the health and safety of all Special Olympics participants. All Special Olympics participants should remember that safety comes first and should take reasonable steps to help minimize the risks for concussion or other serious brain injuries.

### **POLICY STATEMENT**

Any participant who is suspected of sustaining a concussion in a practice, game or competition, (1) shall be removed from practice, play or competition at that time; and (2) may not again participate in practice, game, or competition until a health care provider has evaluated the athlete and provided a written clearance for the athlete to return to practice and/or competition. If a qualified medical professional is available on-site to render an evaluation, that person shall have final authority as to the removal or return to play of the participant. If applicable, the participant's parent or guardian should be made aware that the participant is suspected of sustaining a concussion.

### **DEFINING A CONCUSSION**

A concussion is defined by the Centers for Disease Control as a type of traumatic brain injury caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head as well as serial, cumulative hits to the head. Concussions can also occur from a blow to the body that causes the head and brain to move quickly back and forth—causing the brain to bounce around or twist within the skull. Although concussions are usually not life-threatening, their effects can be serious and therefore proper attention must be paid to individuals suspected of sustaining a concussion.

### **SUSPECTED OR CONFIRMED CONCUSSION**

A participant who is suspected of sustaining a concussion in a practice, game or competition shall be removed from practice, play, or competition at that time. If a qualified medical professional is available on-site to render an evaluation, that person shall have final authority as to the removal or return to play of the participant. If applicable, the participant's parent or guardian should be made aware that the participant is suspected of sustaining a concussion.

### **RETURN TO PLAY**

A participant who has been removed from practice, play or competition due to a suspected concussion may not participate in Special Olympics sports activities until either of the following occurs (1) at least seven (7) consecutive days have passed since the participant was removed from play and a currently licensed, qualified medical professional provides written clearance for the participant to return to practice, play and competition or (2) a currently licensed, qualified medical professional determines that the participant did not suffer a concussion and provides written clearance for the participant to return to practice play immediately. Any health care provider who signs an authorization is acknowledging they are acting within their scope of practice and trained in the evaluation and management of concussion as determined by the provider's licensing board. Written clearance in either of the scenarios above shall become a **permanent record**.

### **REQUIRED TRAINING AND TIMELINE**

Prior to serving as a coach to any Special Olympics North Dakota Team, Athlete or Partner, all individuals must complete concussion awareness training which is available at <https://nfhslearn.com/courses/38000> and submit

the certificate of completion to the SOND Program headquarters. Any concussion training other than the NFHS (or CDC) Heads Up training must be approved by SOND and/or SOI. Approved training can also be found at the Center for Disease Control at <http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/HeadsUp/youthsports/training/index.html> and submit a certificate of completion to SOND.

#### FREQUENCY OF TRAINING

Concussion awareness training must be completed by all Coaches at least once every three years.

#### COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

SOND when possible, provide the concussion awareness and safety recognition program with the athlete medical at least once every three years and also periodically distribute via newsletters, website, etc.

The Centers for Disease Control website [www.cdc.gov/concussion](http://www.cdc.gov/concussion) and the NDHSAA website [www.ndsaa.com/concession\\_management](http://www.ndsaa.com/concession_management) provides additional resources relative to concussions that may be of interest to participants and their families.

## Protocols for Dealing with Potential Concussions

Special Olympics registered coaches and individuals directly responsible for the Special Olympics athletes and partners during practice, training and competition are required to review and know the signs and symptoms of a concussion. They are to immediately remove any athlete who displays the following signs or symptoms (via ND State Law and the NDHSAA):

- |                            |                             |   |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| * Headache                 | * Difficulty with memory    | * Sensitivity to light and sounds               |
| * Fogginess                | * Nausea                    | * Mood changes-irritable,<br>anxious or tearful |
| * Difficulty concentrating | * Lack of energy, tiredness |   |
| * Easily confused          | * Dizziness, poor balance   |   |
| * Slowed thought process   | * Blurred vision            |   |

Anytime that an athlete takes a blow to the head which causes the stoppage of play, a coach or official needs to make an assessment. If the athlete does not immediately recover from a blow, that is, if they lay on the ground or seem to be having difficulties getting their bearings, the coach or official should **immediately remove from play any athlete suspected of sustaining a concussion or head injury. It is far more important that the athlete be sheltered from further injury than to risk further damage by continuing to play.**

Any coach, volunteer, or Special Olympics Official who observes or is made aware of an incident involving a potential concussion or head injury shall **immediately remove** from physical participation the athlete who is suspected of sustaining a concussion or head injury during the athletic activity (practice or competition).

The athlete suspected of suffering a concussion or head injury is not allowed to return to any Special Olympics North Dakota activity until a health care provider has evaluated the athlete and provided a written clearance for the athlete to return to competition and/or practice. Written clearance signed by a licensed health care provider who is acting within the provider's scope of practice and trained in the evaluation and management of concussion as determined by the provider's licensing board and must be forwarded to Special Olympics North Dakota Headquarters office to be maintained by the organization in the athletes' permanent file.

Should an athlete suffer a second diagnosed concussion in SOND, Special Olympics North Dakota recommends that the athlete not participate in physical competition for one year after the date of the second concussion. Athletes with rights to self-determination or their legal guardian shall sign a waiver that releases Special Olympics North Dakota from any legal obligation and/or liability related to the athlete's prior concussion(s) prior to the athlete being allowed to return.

Athletes who have suffered more than two diagnosed concussions will be encouraged to seriously consider refraining from future competitions. Those wishing to return shall be evaluated and cleared by an appropriate health care professional no sooner than the one-year anniversary of the most recent diagnosed concussion.

**WHEN IN DOUBT...SIT THEM OUT**

## **SPECIAL OLYMPICS CONCUSSION MANAGEMENT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

1. Who is considered a “qualified” medical professional?
  - According to North Dakota Century Code relating to concussion management a qualified medical professional is a “licensed, registered, or certified health care provider” whose “scope of practice includes the recognition of concussion signs and symptoms,” the “diagnosis and treatment of concussion.”
  
2. How often is the Concussion training required?
  - After the initial training is completed (as outlined in the policy), all coaches must complete the training and provide confirmation of such training to Special Olympics North Dakota (SOND) at least once every three years. Best practice is that this training be completed before the regular season of the coach’s sport starts.
  
3. How should parents/guardians be notified of a suspected concussion?
  - The athlete’s head coach is responsible for notifying the parent/guardian within 24 hours of removal from play. The Center for disease Control’s website includes several tools that can be provided to parents/guardians of a participant with a suspected concussion. It will also be important to share with the parent/guardian next steps relative to the participant’s return to play.
  
4. Why are coaches for non-contact sports required to complete concussion awareness training?
  - Although concussions may be more likely to occur in contact sports, concussions can occur as a result of any organized or unorganized recreational activity, and therefore it is important that all coaches participate in concussion awareness training.
  
5. Why do Special Olympics’ Return to Play requirements as outlined in the Concussion Awareness and Safety Recognition Policy differ from the guidelines provided via the concussion safety training courses?
  - The return to play guidelines described in some of the concussion training courses require gradually re-introducing strenuous physical activity over the course of several training sessions for those who have suffered concussions. Because Special Olympics’ practices/activities do not occur on a daily basis as is often the case for interscholastic sports training, a similar type of return to play could be difficult to administer and could require a long period of time before an athlete is able to fully participate in Special Olympics activities.
  
6. What if a coach does not complete the required training?
  - A coach who has not completed the required Concussion Awareness Training will not be able to come to State Sporting Events as a coach.

7. Does the Concussion Awareness and Safety Recognition Policy apply to Unified Partners?
  - Yes, Unified Partners who are suspected of having a concussion are subject to the Return to Play guidelines as outlined in the policy.
  
8. What is the procedure if a concussion is suspected?
  - An incident report should be filled out and sent to SOND.
  
9. Where can I refer parents/guardians to find more information about concussion management?
  - The Centers for Disease Control website [www.cdc.gov/concussion](http://www.cdc.gov/concussion) and the NDHSAA website [www.ndsaa.com/concussion management](http://www.ndsaa.com/concussion_management) provide additional resources relative to concussions that may be of interest to participants and their families.