



CONCUSSION AWARENESS AND SAFETY RECOGNITION POLICY

Objective

It is Special Olympics' intent to take steps to help 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.

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

Effective January 1, 2015, 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 whether or not a concussion is suspected. 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 (i) 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 (ii) 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. Written clearance in either of the scenarios above shall become a **permanent record**.

Required Training and Timeline

All Coaches are required to complete one of the following concussion awareness training courses:

- The Center for Disease Control’s Heads-Up Concussion in Youth Sports training course, which is available at http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/HeadsUp/online_training.html. Certificate of completion must be submitted to the state Program.
- National Federation of State High School Associations Concussion in Sports training course which is available at <https://nfhslearn.com/courses/38000>. (Many State Athletic Associations require their high school coaches to complete this course.)

Any concussion awareness training other than the above-referenced courses must be approved by SOI. For Coaches registering for the first time on or after January 1, 2015, confirmation of such training must be provided to the U.S. Program prior to the individual beginning volunteer duties. For Coaches registered prior to December 31, 2014, confirmation of such training must be provided to the U.S. Program no later than December 31, 2015.

U.S. Programs must implement a system for tracking completion of the concussion awareness training by Coaches.

Frequency of Training

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

Communication with Parents and Guardians

U.S. Programs are required to communicate in writing to all participants and/or parents/guardians, the concussion awareness and safety recognition program, as outlined in the Suspected or Confirmed Concussion and Return to Play sections of this policy.

The Centers for Disease Control website <http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/headsup/> provides additional resources relative to concussions that may be of interest to participants and their families.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Who is considered a “qualified” medical professional?
 - The definition of “qualified” medical professional varies by State. According to Pennsylvania’s concussion legislation a qualified medical professional is defined as a licensed physician or health care professional who is trained in the evaluation and management of concussions.
 - Medical Doctors, EMT personnel and Certified Athletic Trainers (ATC) all meet the qualified medical professional definition.
2. There are multiple CDC Head’s Up trainings. Which CDC Head’s Up training should Special Olympics coaches take?
 - The policy requires the Heads-Up Concussion in Youth Sports training course, which is available at http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/HeadsUp/online_training.html. The CDC website includes other resources/tools for parents, clinicians and school staff that can be used, as needed.
3. What is the procedure for tracking coach completion of concussion training?
 - Please type your name and county into the certificate (ex. John Smith, ABC County)
 - Save the certificate to your computer as: CCT_Your County_Your Last Name_Your First Name (ie. Jennifer would name her file: CCT_Centre_Tresp_Jennifer). You can also print a copy for your records.
 - Email a copy to sportstraining@specialolympicspa.org, subject line “Concussion Training”.
 - If using as **Continuing Education** you must also complete a Sports Training Application (STA) (Sections 1, 2, and 4) and submit the STA with your certificate.
4. How often is the Concussion Awareness training required?
 - All coaches must complete the training and provide certificate of confirmation at least once every three years. Frequency of training is consistent with the requirements for coach’s certification, volunteer screening and Protective Behaviors training.
 - Concussion Training in PA is allowed to be used as Continuing Education for ALL sports once every nine years.
5. 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.

6. What is the recommended approach for communicating in writing the concussion awareness and safety recognition program to participants/parents/guardians?
 - It is recommended that U.S. Programs 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.
 - Special Olympics Pennsylvania will provide an informational flier in the near future for programs to distribute to participants/parents/guardians with instructions on managing this process.
7. How should parents/guardians be notified of a suspected concussion?
 - This website <http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/> 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, as outlined in the policy.
8. 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 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, 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.
9. What if a coach does not complete the required training?
 - All current coaches must complete the training by December 31, 2015 and if not completed by 2016 will be ineligible to coach on any level.
 - It is our goal that all coaches attending State Events in 2015 will have completed the Concussion Training course. Coaches attending State Games who have not completed the training will be given the opportunity to do so with SOPA staff while at the event.
10. 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.