NAVIGATING CONCUSSION RECOVERY

CUSD & AIA RETURN TO SPORT (RTS) PROTOCOL

CUSD ATHLETICS SECOND TO NONE

Dignity Health. A member of CommonSpirit

WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

A brain injury caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body that causes the brain to move rapidly inside the skull.

You do NOT need to lose consciousness to have a concussion.

COMMON SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea/ Vomiting
- Balance Problems
- Sensitivity to Light/Noise
- Fatigue
- Irritability
- Sadness/ Mood Changes
- Difficulty Concentrating
- Memory Problems
- Feeling Slowed Down
- Blurred Vision

THE RETURN TO SPORT (RTS) PROTOCOL (AIA & CUSD'S 6-STEP PROGRESSIVE PROTOCOL)

This is a minimum 6-day, gradual, step-wise progression that begins only after the athlete is symptom-free for 24 hours AND medically cleared by an appropriate healthcare professional. If symptoms return at any step, the athlete must return to the previous symptom-free step and rest for 24 hours.

If athlete is symptom-free Monday after Friday concussion, Monday is Step 0. RTS may not be ready for the upcoming Friday game.

0 — RELATIVE REST (FIRST 24–48 HOURS)

- Activities of daily living
- Light walking as tolerated
- Reduce (do not eliminate) screen time if symptoms worsen
- Return to Learn begins as tolerated

1 — SYMPTOM-LIMITED ACTIVITY

Daily activities that do not significantly worsen symptoms.

2A — LIGHT AEROBIC EXERCISE

- Walking, bike
- <55% max heart rate
- No resistance training

2B — MODERATE AEROBIC EXERCISE

- Approximately 70% max heart rate
- Light jogging
- Continue aerobic progression

3 — INDIVIDUAL SPORT-SPECIFIC EXERCISE

- No risk of head impact
- Add movement specific to the sport

4 — NON-CONTACT TRAINING DRILLS

- More complex drills
- Resistance training may begin

5 — FULL CONTACT PRACTICE (IF APPLICABLE)

Following medical clearance.

6 — RETURN TO COMPETITION

Safely return to competitive sport.

IMMEDIATE ACTION & REMOVAL FROM PLAY

Any athlete suspected of a concussion MUST be removed from play immediately and cannot return to play on the same day.

Who can remove a player?

- Athlete (self-report)
- Coach
- Licensed Athletic Trainer (AT)
- Team Physician
- Official
- Parent/Guardian

WHO CAN CLEAR AN ATHLETE TO PLAY?

CUSD/AIA Mandate: ONLY a licensed healthcare professional trained in concussion management can clear an athlete to return to play.

This includes:

- Licensed Physician (MD/DO)
- Licensed Athletic Trainer (AT)
- Licensed Nurse Practitioner
- Physician's Assistant

NAVIGATING CONCUSSION RECOVERY

CUSD & AIA RETURN TO SPORT (RTS) PROTOCOL

CUSD ATHLETICS SECOND TO NONE

Dignity Health.
A member of CommonSpirit

RETURN TO LEARN (RTL)

Returning to school is an important part of recovery. A gradual return to learning helps support brain healing and reduces the risk of prolonged symptoms. Each student's plan should be individualized and adjusted as needed.

RTL 1	Daily activities at home
RTL 2A	**Light cognitive activity** Short periods of reading, homework, screens as tolerated
RTL 2B	**Partial school attendance** with academic supports
RTL 3	**Full school day** with minimal supports
RTL 4	**Full academic participation**

Full Return to Learn should occur BEFORE unrestricted Return to Sport whenever possible.

KEY UPDATE (AMSTERDAM 2022 CONSENSUS)

- Return to Learn starts early and is individualized.
- Reduce (not eliminate) screen time.
- Academic supports are encouraged as needed.
- Full academic participation should be achieved before unrestricted Return to Sport.

CUSD RECOMMENDATION

Utilize CUSD's certified athletic trainers or team doctors for best communication and policy familiarity.

Neurocognitive Testing (ImPACT):
CUSD high schools use ImPACT testing to help assess recovery by comparing post-concussion results to baseline data.

IMPORTANT REMINDERS: NO "TOUGHING IT OUT"

Playing through concussion symptoms is extremely dangerous and can lead to severe, long-term brain damage (Second Impact Syndrome).

Maintain open communication with the athletic trainer, coaches, school staff, and your healthcare provider.

NO TWO CONCUSSIONS ARE THE SAME

Every concussion is unique. Recovery time and symptoms vary from person to person.

2026 CONCUSSION RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

Relative rest (24–48 hours) followed by symptom-limited activity is recommended instead of prolonged strict rest.

Patricios et al. Br J Sports Med. 2023;57(11):695–711.

Early sub-symptom aerobic exercise can improve recovery and reduce persistent symptoms.

Patricios et al. Br J Sports Med. 2023;57(11):695–711.

Return to Learn begins within 24–48 hours using individualized academic supports as needed.

Patricios et al. Br J Sports Med. 2023;57(11):695–711.

Education and support from trusted adults improve recovery, mental health, and return to school/sport.

CDC HEADS UP (Updated 2025).

ALL COACHES (NFHS CONCUSSION COURSE) AND STUDENT-ATHLETES (BRAINBOOK ONLINE COURSE & ImPACT TESTING THROUGH ACTIVATE) ARE REQUIRED TO COMPLETE CONCUSSION EDUCATION. PARENTS MUST ALSO SIGN CONCUSSION INFORMATION FORM ANNUALLY.