

New York State School Safety Group 491

Safe Schools Agenda

Route to:

- Superintendent
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- Athletic Director
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A monthly service provided to help you with your efforts to make your school safe for students, staff and the public

Are Your Coaches Concussion Savvy?

Two recent articles on the sports pages rekindled my awareness of the danger of concussions sustained in high school sports. The first featured a champion high school golf star. Asked how he chose golf as a sport, he replied, “By the time I reached ninth grade, I had had eight concussions from playing hockey. Someone said I should pick a safer sport.” The second article, in the New York Times on September 15, was titled “High School Players Stay Silent on Concussions, Raising Risk.”

According to the assertions of the interviewed football players, they know that their coaches will take them out of the game and keep them out if they complain of the symptoms of a concussion. So they don’t tell the coaches, or their trainer, if they have one. They don’t understand their own vulnerability and the possibility of tragic consequences of ignoring the brain damage that often results.

Teenagers are susceptible because their brain tissue is less developed than adults and more easily damaged. **Concussions are frequently ignored because children and adults mistakenly believe that a concussion requires the player to have been knocked unconscious.** A concussion is caused by a blow to the head that causes the brain to crash into the skull, typically followed by dizziness, headache, nausea, lethargy, impaired vision or other disruptions in brain function.

Nearly fifty percent of high school football players who responded to a questionnaire listing the symptoms of (rather than the word “concussion”) reported that they had had a concussion. Thirty-five percent reported 3 or more. (The study was reported in the Clinical Journal of Sports Medicine.) Sixty-six percent did not think the concussion was serious enough to report, 41% did not want to leave the

game, 36% did not realize a concussion was sustained, and 22% did not want to let down their teammates.

Ignoring the symptoms of concussions can lead to what is called “second-impact syndrome” if the injured player sustains a second concussion before the first has completely healed. Blood flow to the brain increases, arteries swell past capacity, and pressure builds, often leading to coma and death.

“At least 50 high school or younger football players in more than 20 states since 1997 have been killed or have sustained serious head injuries on the field, according to research conducted by the New York Times.”

Preventive Measures:

1. Require coaches and volunteers working with the team to receive annual instruction on how to detect the symptoms of a concussion.
2. If possible, hire a trainer, either full-time, or for all practices and games. Practices can be even more dangerous than regular games. Trainers can relieve the coach of competing priorities. They are very popular with parents, too.
3. Educate players and parents about the danger of untreated concussions. Be graphic. Parents can make bad judgments, too. Some parents shop for a physician who will disagree with the team physician. Make it clear that the team physician’s decision is final. (This came up frequently during my 16 years as a superintendent.) *See nytimes.com/sports for video reports on the effects of concussions on teenagers.*
4. If you are lucky enough to have a physician at the games, make sure he/she takes an active role in checking every player every time he comes off

the field, and is confident of backing if there is a challenge to his decision to take a player out of the game.

5. Consider pre-testing players at the beginning of the season to establish levels of awareness and short-term memory. Re-test them after injury to see if there is any change.
6. Investigate reports that a new football helmet with better protection features is available. Budget for replacement if available. Buy the best protection for your players that you can get.

P.S. Local area high school football semi-finals are in progress as this is written. Only one player with a concussion has been taken to the hospital so far.

From the Courts...

Thirty-Two NY Business Owners Charged with Workers' Comp Fraud. They were found to have lied about their employees to avoid paying premium. While their 84 employees were still covered if there was a work-related accident, each owner was charged with fraud, offering a false instrument and failing to secure workers' comp benefits. They were fined a total of \$550,000.

Trucker's Heart Attack Occurred on the Job. The trucker was robbed by a stranger who knocked on his truck cab while he slept and then sold him cigarettes at \$5 a carton. The stranger also picked the trucker's pocket. The next day the trucker was treated for a heart attack. The appeals panel confirmed the trial court's finding that the trucker was in the course of his employment when the incident occurred, even though the cigarette purchase was "suspicious."

Safety-Rule Violator Entitled to W.C. A former fast-food worker broke safety rules, causing his own injury. (He was badly injured while cleaning a pressure cooker.) His attorney successfully argued that an adverse decision would wrongfully inject fault into the W.C. system. "A basic premise of the W.C. system is that losses will be charged, without regard to fault or wrongdoing, to the industry rather than to the individual or the society as a whole." Even though the worker was fired for his wrongdoing, he was not precluded from eligibility for temporary total disability compensation.

Alert: Printers Emit Particles A study conducted by the Queensland University of Technology concludes that the average office printer could be posing as much of a threat to your lungs as cigarette smoke. Almost 30% of the 62 printers they tested emitted potentially dangerous levels of microscopic, toner-like particles into the air. Indoor air particle levels increased five times during work hours, due to increased printer use. The ultra-tiny particles of toner-like material are so small that they can infiltrate the lungs and cause a range of health problems from respiratory irritation to more chronic illnesses.

The researchers are advising office managers to make sure to keep rooms with printers well ventilated, allowing the particles to disperse easier, and be aware that the amount of airborne dust increases with heavier load print jobs.

Health Threats Abound

MRSA - Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus. You are no doubt aware that MRSA has escaped from the healthcare setting, and has been contracted by a number of school children, some of whom have died. MRSA is usually transmitted by direct skin-to-skin contact or contact with shared items or surfaces that have come in contact with someone else's infection (towels, used bandages, etc.) MRSA is transmitted in conditions which are crowded, like schools, by frequent skin-to-skin contact, compromised skin, contaminated items or surfaces and lack of cleanliness. Practicing good hygiene, especially washing of hands, covering skin trauma, avoiding sharing personal items, and maintaining a clean environment are the rule of the day. Your school has no doubt taken precautions and changed its cleaning and disinfecting protocol.

Teachers should note a recent study conducted by the U. of Arizona which found that teacher's phones, keyboards and computer mice were the "germiest" of nine office jobs.

