School Sports: Tips to Identify and Treat Concussions

(ARA) - The crunch of pads followed by a tweet of a whistle, the thump of a basketball with a staccato of footfalls to accompany it, and even the thwack of a hockey puck against Plexiglass means one thing: school sports are in season.

Coaches, parents and players are all getting ready for the game and practices are hard and grueling. But many sports involve contact and potential injuries, so coaches and parents need to educate themselves about serious injuries like concussions.

At the professional level, more and more attention is being paid to the hard hits players are taking. The NFL is changing rules on helmet-to-helmet contact in hopes of reducing the number and severity of concussions suffered by players. But, head injuries also happen at much lower levels of play, and can be very serious.

"Coaches and parents need to understand the extreme care that is needed when returning younger athletes to a game or practice who may have experienced a sports concussion," says Dr. Jeffrey Kutcher, chair of the American Academy of Neurology's Sports Neurology Section and also director of the University of Michigan's Neurosport program.

**Signs of a concussion that can be observed during a game or practice are:**
- Behavior or personality change
- False or imagined memories
- Loss of consciousness
- Empty stare
- Disorientation

**Athletes may also report the following when suffering a concussion:**
- Blurry vision
- Confusion
- Dizziness
- Feeling hazy, foggy or groggy
- Headache

The American Academy of Neurology's website at [www.aan.com/concussion](http://www.aan.com/concussion) offers two online safety courses created by the University of Michigan Neurosport program and endorsed by the Academy to help high school and youth coaches recognize the signs of concussion and what to do if a player gets a head injury during a game. Each 20-minute safety course is free and a printable certificate is available after passing the online quiz.

Coaches Cards are also downloadable from the Academy's website providing easy-to-access information on how to spot a concussion and what to do if a player experiences one. Coaches and players are encouraged to keep these cards with their athletic gear for easy access.

Some states have passed laws on managing concussions. If you are a coach or parent of a younger athlete, make sure you educate yourself on the laws and concussion signs to keep the athlete safe.

"If for any reason you suspect an athlete has a concussion, remove the athlete from play and be sure the athlete is carefully evaluated by a person trained in concussion management, such as a neurologist," Kutcher says. "Rushing this part of the process may lead to a serious setback, or worsen the injury."

High school and youth sporting events are meant to get athletes playing the games they love. But, a head injury needs to be addressed very carefully in order to ensure the athlete returns to the field safely for many more games to be played, both now and well into the future.