

## Preamble

This purpose of this policy is to contribute to a safe supporting environment through education and by promoting awareness of concussion signs, symptoms, and advocate for safe and responsible return to play steps for those individuals who have suffered a concussion.

These guidelines are for general information purposes only. They are not intended to, and do not constitute medical advice. This information also does not contain any medical diagnoses, symptom assessments, or medical opinions.

## Purpose and Application

Ontario Water Polo has developed the following concussion policy for water polo practices, games, tournaments and competitions in the province. This policy is not age dependent – all athletes, officials, and volunteers in the province must be treated in the same manner.

## Definition

A concussion:

- is a brain injury that causes changes in how the brain functions, leading to symptoms that can be physical (e.g., headache, dizziness), cognitive (e.g., difficulty concentrating or remembering), emotional/behavioural (e.g., depression, irritability) and/or related to sleep (e.g., drowsiness, difficulty falling asleep);
- may be caused either by a direct blow to the head, face or neck, or a blow to the body that transmits a force to the head that causes the brain to move rapidly within the skull;
- can occur even if there has been no loss of consciousness (in fact most concussions occur without a loss of consciousness); and,
- cannot normally be seen on X-rays, standard CT scans or MRIs<sup>i</sup>.

## Risk

Although concussions may be somewhat common sports injuries, without proper identification, treatment, and management, a concussion can result in permanent or severe brain damage, and in rare occasions even death. Athletes who have had a concussion, at any point in their lives, are at a greater risk of getting another concussion<sup>ii</sup>. Research has also indicated that experiencing a second concussion before being symptom free from the first concussion means that the athlete is susceptible to Second Impact Syndrome which is a rare condition that causes rapid and severe brain swelling and can further the harmful effects of concussions<sup>iii</sup>. This means that it is imperative to ensure that concussions are identified and the athlete's risk of exposure to a second concussion is reduced.

## Responsibility

Although a concussion is a clinical diagnosis made by a medical doctor, coaches, referees, volunteers, fellow athletes, and parents/caregivers have a responsibility to monitor, recognize, and respond to situations where a concussion is suspected.

Coaches are never to make the determination of whether the individual has suffered a concussion. If there is any doubt that an athlete might have suffered a concussion, it is to be assumed that the injury has occurred. The coach/supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the athlete ceases all activity and that parents/guardians are notified of the injury. Other parties, such as other coaches, administrators, or supervisors should also be notified so they are aware and able to monitor the athlete and watch out for

signs and symptoms as well. Parents/guardians or caregivers are then responsible for ensuring that a medical diagnosis is sought immediately.

If the athlete suspected of having a concussion is under the age of 18 and attending a publicly funded Ontario school, the school principal should also be contacted by the parent/guardian. The school staff can then be informed of the suspected injury and the individual can be removed from any physical or learning activities that might worsen their condition, until a doctor has done a concussion assessment and has cleared the individual to participate in their usual activities.

If symptoms do not present immediately after an injury that was significant enough to have potentially caused a concussion, coaches are responsible for informing the parents/guardians of the incident and conveying information about signs and symptoms that might present afterwards. Parents/guardians are then responsible for monitoring the athlete's condition to ensure that medical attention is sought should the signs and symptoms appear.

Should the athlete be diagnosed with a concussion, the athlete will not be permitted to participate in any further sporting events or practices until they have been cleared to do so by a physician. Additionally, the athlete should be reintroduced to physical activity in stages and their signs and symptoms monitored by coaches and parents/guardians. Ongoing monitoring of the athlete and communication between key individuals including the doctor, parents and coaches is essential to ensure that the athlete recovers and is reintegrated into practices, scrimmages, and competition in a safe and supervised manner.

### **Common Signs and Symptoms**

Signs and symptoms may become evident immediately after the injury, or they may evolve and persist over the following hours, days or even months. Signs and symptoms may also be different for everyone, and likely harder to spot in younger children (under 10 years of age). Therefore, it is imperative that coaches and parents are closely monitoring any athlete that has received an injury that may result in a concussion. If an athlete reports any symptoms of concussions, or if signs are recognized, medical attention should be sought immediately. Concussions cannot be seen, and most sports concussions occur after incidents that do not necessarily involve the athlete losing consciousness<sup>iv</sup>.

Should the athlete lose consciousness, the first aid emergency action plan should be initiated and 911 should be called. Remember to follow first aid protocol for an unconscious individual, taking care not to move the head unless breathing is impaired and it must be done to open the airway. The parent or guardian should be informed immediately, and the individual should be assessed for a concussion once they regain consciousness.

If conscious, the athlete should be monitored for any physical, cognitive, or emotional changes. The following chart has been taken from the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport's Concussion Guidelines information package.

<b>Possible Signs Observed</b> <i>A sign is something that will be observed by another person (e.g., parent/guardian, teacher, coach, supervisor, peer).</i>	<b>Possible Symptoms Reported</b> <i>A symptom is something the student will feel/report.</i>
<p><b>Physical</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• vomiting</li> <li>• slurred speech</li> <li>• slowed reaction time</li> <li>• poor coordination or balance</li> <li>• blank stare/glassy-eyed/dazed or vacant look</li> <li>• decreased playing ability</li> <li>• loss of consciousness or lack of responsiveness</li> <li>• lying motionless on the ground or slow to get up</li> <li>• amnesia</li> <li>• seizure or convulsion</li> <li>• grabbing or clutching of head</li> </ul> <p><b>Cognitive</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• difficulty concentrating</li> <li>• easily distracted</li> <li>• general confusion</li> <li>• cannot remember things that happened before and after the injury</li> <li>• does not know time, date, place, class, type of activity in which he/she was participating</li> <li>• slowed reaction time (e.g., answering questions or following directions)</li> </ul> <p><b>Emotional/Behavioural</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strange or inappropriate emotions (e.g., laughing, crying, getting angry easily)</li> </ul> <p><b>Sleep Disturbance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• drowsiness</li> <li>• insomnia</li> </ul>	<p><b>Physical</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• headache</li> <li>• pressure in head</li> <li>• neck pain</li> <li>• feeling off/not right</li> <li>• ringing in the ears</li> <li>• seeing double or blurry/loss of vision</li> <li>• seeing stars, flashing lights</li> <li>• pain at physical site of injury</li> <li>• nausea/stomach ache/pain</li> <li>• balance problems or dizziness</li> <li>• fatigue or feeling tired</li> <li>• sensitivity to light or noise</li> </ul> <p><b>Cognitive</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• difficulty concentrating or remembering</li> <li>• slowed down, fatigue or low energy</li> <li>• dazed or in a fog</li> </ul> <p><b>Emotional/Behavioural</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• irritable, sad, more emotional than usual</li> <li>• nervous, anxious, depressed</li> </ul> <p><b>Sleep Disturbance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• drowsy</li> <li>• sleeping more/less than usual</li> <li>• difficulty falling asleep</li> </ul>

If any of these signs or symptoms present themselves, the athlete should cease all physical activity immediately and seek medical attention.

### Concussion Action Plan

#### Initial Response:

*This response is designed for athletes who suffered a blow to the head or body that may result in a concussion, but did not lose consciousness. Again, for an individual who loses consciousness, the emergency response action plan should be followed.*

Immediately after suffering some form of injury where a concussion may have resulted, the athlete should be removed from the activity, and observed to determine whether they exhibit any signs or symptoms of a concussion.

If no signs or symptoms are evident, and the athlete wishes to resume physical activity, they may do so. The parent/guardian of the athlete should be informed of the incident and made aware of the signs and

symptoms to be aware of, and the need to be examined by a medical doctor should those symptoms present afterwards.

### **Medical Assessment**

If the athlete requires a medical assessment to determine whether signs and symptoms are indicative of a concussion, the athlete will not be allowed to return to practices or play until the doctor/nurse practitioner signs off on the athlete resuming physical activity. The coach must be informed of the decision and see the medical documentation before allowing the athlete to resume physical activity.

### **Graduated Return to Play**

In the case where after a medical assessment is conducted and the athlete is cleared by a physician or nurse practitioner to return to play having **not** been diagnosed with a concussion, the participant may return to practices and games.

Rest is one of the most important things for an athlete who has been diagnosed with a concussion. If diagnosed, the athlete must rest and continue to do so until they are symptom free. As stated above, the athlete is required to have medical documentation that clears them to begin participating in any physical activity related to water polo. This includes dryland activities, or even basic swimming activities. **If an athlete does not have medical documentation, they will not be allowed to participate in any provincial level practices, games, or competitions.**

Once the doctor has cleared the athlete to engage in physical activity, there is still the chance that symptoms may present themselves again. Therefore, it is required that in addition to any specific recommendations for reintegration that the doctor suggests, athletes must also adhere to the six stages of reintegration as outlined in the Return to play protocol Water polo that is Appendix B.

Physical activity can cause concussion symptoms to reappear, so again, should symptoms present themselves again at any stage, the athlete should return to the rest stage until they are once again symptom free and advise their doctor about the symptoms they experienced.

As stated throughout, there should be a minimum of 24 hours between progression from one stage to the next. Since the severity of concussions will vary, this is a minimum timeframe and the actual length of time it will take an athlete to progress from one stage to the next will vary based on their injury, the advice and recommendations of their doctor, as well as their ability to remain symptom free.

### **Concussion Awareness/Information**

To ensure that coaches are informed and prepared to recognize when an athlete might have suffered a concussion, all members of Ontario Water Polo who act in a coaching, or supervisory position (i.e. chaperones, officials etc.) are required to be familiar with this concussion policy, the signs and symptoms to be aware of, as well as the Concussion Guidelines for Coaches document provided by the Coaching Association of Canada

[http://www.coach.ca/files/Concussion\\_Guidelines\\_for\\_the\\_Coach\\_Trainer.pdf](http://www.coach.ca/files/Concussion_Guidelines_for_the_Coach_Trainer.pdf)).

Additional information for parents and athletes can also be found through the Coaching Association of Canada's website.

[http://www.coach.ca/files/Concussion\\_Guidelines\\_for\\_the\\_Parents\\_Caregivers.pdf](http://www.coach.ca/files/Concussion_Guidelines_for_the_Parents_Caregivers.pdf)

<http://www.coach.ca/files/Commoionalintentiondelathlete.pdf>

### **Reporting Procedure**

If an athlete suffers a concussion at any provincial level sporting event, while competing on a provincial level team, or in any other provincial context, the coaches/supervisors are responsible for informing Ontario Water Polo of the injury, the steps taken to access the athlete, as well as any medical documentation that was provided by the athlete or their parents/guardians. Ontario Water Polo must

also be notified when the athlete is medically cleared to return to full participation in physical activity, and whether or not they experience any concussion symptoms after stage six and returning to competition.

### **Waivers/Registration Forms**

Any athlete participating in a provincial level competition, or on a provincial level team are responsible for having read this Concussion Policy and for following the steps outlined within. This is to ensure the overall safety and well-being of Ontario athletes.

Parents of athletes under the age of 18 are also to have read this Concussion Policy and for ensuring that the steps outlined within are followed, and medical consultation is sought for any athlete suspected of having suffered a concussion.

To ensure this policy has been read and understood, athletes and/or their parents must sign the Concussion Policy Waiver form (See Appendix A) before competing in any provincial level competition, or prior to participating in any provincial level event or team.

### **Review and Approval**

This policy was approved by the Ontario Water Polo Board of Directors on February 4 2017.

This policy is effective as of February 4 2017.

This policy is to be reviewed, updated, and approved to ensure accurate information on a bi-annual basis.

Appendix A – Concussion Policy Waiver

Appendix B – Return to Play

Appendix C – Safety equipment

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<sup>i</sup> Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. (N.D.). *Concussion Guidelines*. Retrieved from [http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/concussions/docs/mtns\\_concussion\\_guide\\_en.pdf](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/concussions/docs/mtns_concussion_guide_en.pdf).

<sup>ii</sup> Play Safe Initiative. (2014). *Play Safe Resources: Developing a Concussion Policy Information for Recreation and Sport Leaders & Organizations*. Retrieved from [http://www.playsafeinitiative.ca/uploads/3/0/6/4/3064403/play\\_safe\\_concussion\\_policy\\_guide\\_1014.pdf](http://www.playsafeinitiative.ca/uploads/3/0/6/4/3064403/play_safe_concussion_policy_guide_1014.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. (N.D.). *Concussion Guidelines*. Retrieved from [http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/concussions/docs/mtns\\_concussion\\_guide\\_en.pdf](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/concussions/docs/mtns_concussion_guide_en.pdf).

<sup>iv</sup> Biathlon Ontario. (2015). *Biathlon Ontario – Concussion Management Policy*. Retrieved from [http://www.biathlonontario.ca/public\\_docs/documents/Concussion%20Management%20Policy%20r0.pdf](http://www.biathlonontario.ca/public_docs/documents/Concussion%20Management%20Policy%20r0.pdf)