



QUICK FACTS FOR PARENTS

Learning about **Concussions**

Concussion: A brain injury caused by a blow to the head or upper body that causes the brain to move rapidly within the skull.



A concussion, which is caused by a blow to the head or upper body, changes the way the brain normally functions. The effects are usually short term, lasting for a few weeks, but a second concussion before the first has healed can cause serious brain damage and even death. Repeated concussions may increase the risk of Parkinson's disease, dementia, and depression in later life.

Physical activity always involves some risk. Concussion is one of those risks. But physical activity also brings great benefits that can last for a lifetime, and the risk involved can be kept very low. The intent of the curriculum is to encourage children to pursue these benefits, while at the same time equipping them with the knowledge and skills to do so safely and prevent injury.

LEARNING AT SCHOOL

The curriculum places great emphasis on both personal safety and injury prevention. Students in all grades learn how to participate safely in physical activity and create a safe environment for themselves and others. By learning how to manage risks, students develop personal responsibility for their own safety and acquire knowledge and skills that will allow them to enjoy the rewards of healthy, active living in the years to come.

Students learn about:

- Actions they can take to keep themselves and others safe
- Ways they can communicate with others to encourage safe behaviour
- Things they can do to anticipate and avoid hazards they might encounter in their environment
- Appropriate responses and reactions to accidents or injuries that might happen
- Real-world situations and issues related to injury prevention

WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT CONCUSSIONS:

- A concussion can occur even if there has been no loss of consciousness (in fact, most concussions occur without a loss of consciousness).
- If a concussion is suspected, it is important to seek a diagnosis from a medical doctor or nurse practitioner – only a medical doctor or nurse practitioner can diagnose a concussion.

All school boards in Ontario are required to have a policy on concussion. The policy is to include awareness, prevention, identification and staff training strategies. As well, the policy is also expected to include procedures to follow when a student has been diagnosed with a concussion, including information on individualized and gradual “return to learning and/or return to physical activity” plans.

Developing and maintaining a culture of safety within the school is an important step not only in preventing concussion but in reducing injuries of all kinds. It also creates safety habits that students will carry with them into their adult lives.

WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT CONCUSSIONS (continued):

- Be aware of the signs and symptoms of a concussion. A concussion causes changes in how the brain functions and can lead to symptoms that may be:
 - physical (such as a headache, dizziness, and/or nausea);
 - cognitive (such as difficulty in concentrating or remembering);
 - emotional/behavioural (such as feeling sad or anxious); and/or,
 - related to sleep (such as drowsiness or difficulty falling asleep).
- Signs in younger children may not be as obvious as those in older children or youth.
- Signs and symptoms can appear immediately after an injury or may take hours or days to emerge and may be different for everyone.
- If symptoms or signs are getting worse, contact a medical doctor or nurse practitioner as soon as possible or visit your local emergency department.
- Activities that require concentration can cause a child's concussion symptoms to reappear or worsen.

TALKING TO YOUR CHILDREN

About preventing concussions:

- Discuss the risks associated with participating in a particular sport or physical activity, and make sure your child knows how to minimize them.
- Remind them to always wear an approved protective helmet that is designed for their activity, and make sure they are wearing it correctly. Helmets and other safety equipment are designed to reduce injuries, but cannot guarantee complete protection.
- Encourage your child to be aware of their environment so that they can anticipate dangerous situations and make decisions that will help themselves and others avoid injury.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT CONCUSSIONS:

- » Ontario Government Concussion Web Portal www.ontario.ca/concussions
- » Ontario Government: School Board Policies on Concussion www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/158.pdf

About what to do if they think they have a concussion:

- Make sure your child knows the symptoms of concussion. If they think they or someone they know might have a concussion, the symptoms should be reported to a responsible adult (such as a parent, teacher, or coach) who should remove them from any further physical activity until the possibility of a concussion has been eliminated. If someone they know (e.g., a friend, a teammate or family member) complains of symptoms that sound like they could be a concussion, they should encourage that person to seek help.

About what they should know if they are recovering from a concussion:

- There are no visible signs of a concussion, unlike a scraped knee or a bruise. That does not mean their brain has not been injured.
- Taking care of their brain after a concussion by resting it is smart; it is not a sign of weakness or failure.
- Anything that keeps their brain busy prevents it from recovering from a concussion. Screen time, school work, and physical activity will all prevent their brain from resting. Sleep is important; it helps their brain recover.

IF YOUR CHILD HAS BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH A CONCUSSION:

- Inform your child's school about the concussion and pass on any relevant information received from the medical doctor or nurse practitioner.
- Work with the school staff to develop and implement a medically supervised, individualized plan to guide your child's return to learning and physical activity. It takes a team approach to help a child recover from a concussion.
- Help your child to prioritize activities and plan their day to reduce the demands placed on the injured brain. Make sure they pace themselves and work in a calm and restful environment.
- Regularly communicate with your child about how they are feeling, and pay attention to any signs and symptoms so that the recovery plan can be changed to a pace that is right for your child.
- Respond to any sudden change in signs or symptoms; if this happens, your child should be reassessed by a medical doctor or nurse practitioner.