



Football Safety Guidelines

There is an inherent risk of injury involved with any athletic activity. Football programs have risks that place participants in danger for physical harm. According to a study, published in The American Journal of Sports Medicine, four out of every 1,000 high school football exposures resulted in an injury. High school football players sustained a greater proportion of season-ending injuries, fractures and concussions compared to collegiate football players¹. The following guidelines are not inclusive and should be used only to supplement other safety procedures.

Facility & Equipment

- Field dimensions need to meet WIAA regulations for play/safety.
- Make sure athletes wear all the required safety gear every time he or she plays and practices including approved mouth guards.
- All players must wear an approved NOCSAE helmet. Inspect helmets for defects and proper fit on routine basis. Follow all regulations and standards for proper helmet certification and reconditioning.
- Shoes and padding must meet WIAA regulations.
- Provide appropriate safety equipment: including mat for cleaning footwear, extra towels, ball bags, ice packs, first aid kit.

Supervision & Instruction

- Teach players to pay attention to the game at all times.
- Reinforce consistently that players need to keep their "head up" when tackling. Remind them they should never lower or hit with their head. Have students and their parents watch the National Athletic Training Association "Heads Up" video (<http://www.nata.org/consumer/headsup.htm>).
- Ensure proper hydration of athletes. Make certain students get 10-minute water (or sports drink) breaks every 30 minutes regardless of the heat index, and shift practice indoors if the heat index exceeds 100.
- Football players are susceptible to heat related illnesses. During hot weather coaches need to have players weigh-in during morning and afternoon drills. If there's too much of a disparity (3%), a player should be held out of practice and encouraged to replenish lost water weight with more frequent hydration. Allow players to remove their helmets when they're not participating in a drill to help facilitate cooling down.
- Make sure all players warm up and cool down.
- Tendinitis, shin splints, stress fractures, and bursitis, are among common overuse injuries that occur from overload or repetitive micro trauma. Increase the volume and intensity of training by less than 10 percent per week to help minimize these conditions.
- Increased conditioning of ankles and knees can reduce the number and severity of football injuries through targeted intervention. Since the majority of the injuries to these regions were due to ligament sprains, targeted stretching exercises may also be beneficial.
- Enforce the rule to *never* remove an injured player's helmet unless directed to do so by a medical authority or to provide lifesaving care.
- Have all players who suffer head impact evaluated for concussion. Follow standards adopted by WIAA, NFHSA and CDC³ for concussion management.

- Monitor weather conditions.
- Use a whistle.

Football Helmet Reconditioning

How often should football helmets be reconditioned? The Washington Schools Risk Management Pool (WSRMP) strongly recommends districts follow the manufacturers and the National Federation of High Schools recommendation of **annual reconditioning** after every season. Each football helmet needs to be reconditioned by a certified helmet re-conditioner who is authorized by the football helmet manufacturer, in accordance with the **National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment (NOCSAE)** standard. It is important districts verify that the company is a certified member of National Athletic Equipment Re-conditioners Association (NAERA).

A complete helmet reconditioning includes sanitizing all of the equipment (including linings and accessories), removing decals with buffing wheels, removing loose and chipping paint, carefully examining the helmet for cracks and other defects, repainting it, removing the cage for inspection, reassembling with new hardware, reinstalling sanitized jaw pads and chin straps and replacing defective components. Helmets that are irreparable and/or do not merit the expense of repair (rejects) need to be destroyed, so they will not be used again by any student athlete.

Recommendations for helmet maintenance and use:

- Coordinate helmet recertification at the district level.
- Only purchase helmets which meet NOCSAE standards.
- Mark each helmet with a permanent serial number for record keeping.
- Keep a complete record of the history of each piece of equipment, including to whom each helmet was issued throughout its life, as well as inspections, recertification and final disposal.
- Have all helmets recertified annually according to NOCSAE standards.
- Use only NAERA-certified companies for recertification of helmets.
- Retire, and physically destroy, all helmets that were rejected by the re-conditioner.
- Destroy each helmet, that exceeds the manufacturer's stated life span.
- Do not alter equipment or helmets, in any manner, unless specified by the manufacturer or recommended by the re-conditioner.
- Never use a helmet with a cracked shell.
- Check helmet fitness as compared to the agreement information provided in the manufacturer's instructions and procedures.
- Do not allow students to fit the helmet themselves.
- Replace face guard if there is 1) bare metal showing, 2) a broken weld, and 3) a guard is grossly misshapen.
- Follow instructions provided by the manufacturer regarding care and maintenance procedures.
- Use only factory-approved parts for replacement.
- Never allow anyone to sit on helmets. This practice could crush or deform the helmet.
- If a helmet is loaned to a student prior to the start of the season (i.e., summer football camp), that helmet must be reconditioned again.

- 2005-06 NCAA Injury Surveillance System. Collected from this data were the injuries from 100 high school football teams and 55 NCAA football teams
- ²Verify newest standards for helmet certification and recertification at: <http://www.nocsae.org/standards/documents.html>
- ³ www.cdc.gov/ncipc/tbi/Coaches_Tool_Kit.htm