

CONCUSSIONS IN SPORT

USA Water Ski is committed to providing education and training to all athletes, safety directors, coaches and participants concerning the recognition and management of sports-related concussion injuries. Head injuries should all be taken seriously, and early recognition and treatment are important to the health of our athletes.

All safety directors, officials, coaches, athletes and parents should be familiar with USA Water Ski's Concussion Awareness program guidelines, which are outlined below.

1. Concussion Education. Concussions may be caused either by a direct blow to the head, face, or neck, or elsewhere on the body with an "impulsive" force transmitted to the head. The Centers for Disease Control defines a concussion as a type of traumatic brain injury caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head. This sudden movement of the brain can cause stretching and tearing of brain cells, damaging the cells and creating chemical changes in the brain. Although concussions typically result in the rapid onset of short-lived neurological impairment, concussions do not always involve a loss of consciousness. Symptoms may be short-term, or may be prolonged. Recognizing when a concussion may have occurred, and obtaining prompt treatment, are vitally important to avoid increased injury risks (including a second injury) and maximize the athlete's recovery. **Many concussions go unrecognized and untreated simply because the participants don't know what to look for.**

Information about concussions and their treatment is available from many sources, including the Centers for Disease Control website:

<http://www.cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury/basics.html>

Many states have also adopted statutes relating to youth concussion awareness and training requirements, and you should check your state's laws so you are aware and comply with any state law requirements.

Concussion education and first responder treatment are also included as a mandatory part of USA Water Ski's Safety Director programs.

2. Symptoms. According to the CDC, symptoms of concussion usually fall into four categories¹:

 Thinking/ Memory	 Physical	 Emotional/ Mood	 Sleep
Difficulty thinking clearly	Headache Fuzzy or blurry vision	Irritability	Sleeping more than usual

¹ This information chart is from the CDC website for Mild Traumatic Brain Injury/Concussions.

Feeling slowed down	Nausea or vomiting (early on), Dizziness	Sadness	Sleep less than usual
Difficulty concentrating	Sensitivity to noise or light Balance problems	More emotional	Trouble falling asleep
Difficulty remembering new information	Feeling tired, having no energy	Nervousness or anxiety	

Although these symptoms often appear right away, that is not always the case. Symptoms may not appear for hours or days, both because of the nature of concussion injuries and the inability (or unwillingness) of the athlete and others to recognize and acknowledge that a concussion may have occurred. It is therefore important to continue to check for signs of concussion right after the injury and for the next few days. If there is doubt, the athlete should be checked by a qualified physician. If the symptoms get worse, the athlete should be taken immediately to the local hospital emergency department.

3. Dealing With Injured Athletes. If an athlete sustains a head injury which may involve a concussion:

- The athlete should not be allowed to continue participating in the event
- Make sure the event’s safety director or chief official is made aware of the situation
- Steps should be taken to make sure the athlete is evaluated by a health care professional with experience and training in evaluating concussions
- Make sure the athlete’s parents, coach or caretaker is made aware of the situation, and of the importance for getting the athlete promptly diagnosed and treated
- Keep the athlete “out of play” until a qualified and experienced health care professional okays her/his return to competition. **This “out of play” requirement is mandatory, and cannot be waived by the athlete.**

Concussions are potentially serious injuries, and should be dealt with as such. **We can help athletes stay active and healthy by knowing the facts about concussion and when it is safe for athletes to return to play.**