

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Concussion testing set for high-impact sports in the Puyallup School District

All junior high and high school athletes participating in football, soccer, basketball, and wrestling must undergo a concussion baseline screening before they can participate in those sports, effective with the start of this fall's athletic season.

This month, the district will team with Sound Family Medicine and Apple Physical Therapy staff members to offer student athletes free concussion baseline screenings.

The screenings will be held on August 16, 19, 22, and 26 at Sparks Stadium, 601 Seventh Ave. S.W. in Puyallup.

Tenth graders will be screened between 8 and 11 a.m., eleventh graders between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m., and twelfth graders between 2 and 5 p.m. on all four days. Junior high students may arrive for testing anytime between 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. on all four screening days.

The new concussion baseline screening requirement "is designed to help ensure our students' health and safety," said Rick Wells, director of athletics, health, and fitness.

Wells has worked this past year with district leadership and medical care providers trained in concussion management to revise a policy regulation that addresses athletic concussions and head injuries.

The revised regulation states in part that prior to participation, all athletes involved in high-impact sports shall receive concussion baseline testing by a licensed health care provider trained in concussion management.

The regulation specifically lists basketball, football, soccer, and wrestling as high-impact athletic programs that now require the concussion baseline screening. Athletes involved in low-impact sports may choose to voluntarily receive the baseline screening, Wells said.

It also specifically identifies who classifies as a licensed health care provider trained in concussion management. The list includes a medical doctor, a doctor of osteopathy, an advanced registered nurse practitioner, a physician's assistant, and a certified athletic trainer.

In the event of a suspected head injury or concussion, the regulation states:

- A youth athlete who is suspected of sustaining a concussion or head injury in a practice or game shall be immediately removed from play.
- A student who has been removed from play may not return to any district activity, including athletics, P.E., open gym, swimming, etc. until the athlete is evaluated by a licensed health care provider trained in the evaluation and management of concussions. The student must have written clearance from that provider to return to play.
- All athletes diagnosed with a concussion must receive exertional testing clearance before returning to play and must be without concussion symptoms for at least 48 hours before that testing takes place.

The revised policy regulation also requires that all school district coaches be trained at least once every two years in head injury and concussion management.

The new concussion baseline screening requirement comes nearly one year after more than 150 Puyallup High football and girls soccer players participated in a free voluntary concussion screening at Sparks Stadium.

Sound Family Medicine and Apple Physical Therapy staff provided that free screening last August.

Athletes unable to attend the free baseline screenings offered by the district this month will need to arrange the testing through a qualified medical care provider of their choice and at their own expense, Wells said.

Concussion screening

Like the testing done last August, this year's baseline testing will ask students for a concussion history, including whether they have ever suffered from symptoms ranging from a headache to blurred vision as a result of a head injury.

Students will also be asked a series of questions that test their ability to recite facts (such as the date, day of the week, and year), their ability to recall information (such as repeating a series of numbers or words), and their ability to balance (such as standing on one foot with eyes closed).

By doing the tests before the start of the fall sports season, a team trainer or other medical personnel will have a baseline of what each athlete is able to do without a head injury, Wells said. Those same recall and balance tests can then be performed after a head injury to see if there are different results.

Each screening is estimated to take approximately 10 to 15 minutes.

Increasing awareness

Awareness about concussions and the potential for health complications — including prolonged brain damage and even death if the injury is not recognized and managed properly — is increasing nationwide.

The Puyallup School District includes concussion information in its annual Student Interscholastic Athletic Handbook. All forms in the handbook, including one about concussions, must be signed by students and their parents or guardians for a student to be eligible to participate in district athletic programs.

The two-page concussion information form, which is also posted on the district website, alerts athletes to the potential dangers of a brain injury and outlines some of the signs and symptoms of a concussion.