Heads Up: Using Your Brain When Tackling Concussions

Charles Ashley
Matthew Davies
Shane Diamond
Lauren Gilligan
Alberto Gutierrez

See next page for additional authors

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Recommended Citation
Ashley, Charles; Davies, Matthew; Diamond, Shane; Gilligan, Lauren; Gutierrez, Alberto; Karr, Lindsay; Pedro, Christina; Perkins, Brenda; Wise, Colleen; and Carney, Jan, "Heads Up: Using Your Brain When Tackling Concussions" (2011). Public Health Projects, 2008-present. Book 52.
http://scholarworks.uvm.edu/comphp_gallery/52
Authors
Charles Ashley, Matthew Davies, Shane Diamond, Lauren Gilligan, Alberto Gutierrez, Lindsay Karr, Christina Pedro, Brenda Perkins, Colleen Wise, and Jan Carney

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Heads Up: Using Your Brain When Tackling Concussions
Ashley, C.1, Davies, M.1, Diamond, S.1, Gilligan, L.1, Gutierrez, A.1, Karr, L.1, Pedro, C.1, Perkins, B.2 Wise, C.2, Carney, J.1
1University of Vermont College of Medicine, Burlington, VT; 2Chittenden East Supervisory Union (CESU), Jericho, VT

Introduction:
A concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury (TBI) typically caused by biomechanical forces inflicted on the head that change the way the brain works. Concussions can also result from a blow elsewhere in the body causing an impulsive force transmitted to the head. These injuries of types often involve a sudden onset of neuropsychologic function impairment such as confusion, amnesia, or loss of consciousness that quickly dissipates and is generally not life-threatening. Unfortunately, these seemingly “mild” symptoms have led numerous primary care providers to underestimate its potential risks, often leading to inadequate evaluation, premature return to play, and poor psychological management. Complications of severe or repeated concussions include migraines, depression & mood changes, sleep disorders, convulsions, coma, and in some instances even death. The goals of our study were to evaluate public awareness and knowledge of concussion, identify common misconceptions, assess barriers to proper management, and propose uniform guidelines for education, prevention, diagnosis, and treatment to be used in the Vermont school system.

Methods:
Survey Design: A 14-question survey was designed in order to assess community member’s knowledge and attitudes about concussion and the treatment of concussions in Middle School and High School athletes. Our target population included parents, coaches, athletic trainers, teachers, school nurses, and health care providers who are associated with students in the Chittenden East Supervisory Union District. Data was collected using an online-based survey website called SurveyMonkey, and also administering a paper form of the survey to parents and coaches who attended a Concussion Meeting that took place at Mount Manfield Union High School. The online survey was sent to coaches and parents via an e-mail which contained a link to the survey. In order to include physicians and other health care practitioners in the survey, we called, emailed and invited 11 local pediatric and family medicine offices to encourage them to take part in our survey.

The paper surveys that were filled out at the Concussion Meeting and via fax by Physicians were entered into SurveyMonkey in order complete all of the results into one database.

**Discussion/Conclusion:**
There are many states within the US that have passed laws relating to concussions in high school athletics. The results of our survey highlight some very important points about sport-related concussions in the Chittenden East Supervisory Union:

- 67% of those surveyed strongly agreed, or agreed that there should be a uniform guideline for the management of sport-related concussions in the CESU.
- More education is needed about the use of helmets and the risk of concussions.
- There is a wide range of knowledge on how to detect a concussion based on the early and late symptoms.
- 68% would like more information on the detection/management of concussions.

From the results of our survey, nearly all respondents in the CESU support a standardized approach to the management of sport-related concussions. From our research, we recommended this guideline include specific instructions pertaining to:
1. Coach and Student Athlete (and possibly parent) education about concussion prior to the start of the sport season.
2. To what if a player is suspected of receiving a concussion.
3. When a player is allowed to return to play after being diagnosed with concussion.

With the implementation of such a protocol, there will be no ambiguity about when and how to action if a player receives a head injury. The hope is that this will prevent further head injuries to those already injured, and allow the injured player to get back into the game as soon as he/she is healthy and ready. We recommend using evidence based guidelines, such as the ones recommended by Fletcher Allen Health Care. It is important to remember the most crucial rule when managing concussions: "When in doubt, leave them out."

**References:**