

New Study Ranks Sports for Concussion Risk

A recent study [published in the journal Pediatrics](#) has unveiled the sports that statistically result in the most concussions in student athletes.

High school football is ranked number one, followed by girls soccer in the second spot. Ice hockey rounds out the top three.

The study included data on more than 9,500 concussions across 20 high school sports, According to Jenna Ford, APN, a concussion specialist at OSF HealthCare Illinois Neurological Institute, the study results are in line with what she sees every day.

Concussion is a traumatic brain injury caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or by a hit to the body that causes the head and brain to move rapidly back and forth.

“What we think happens is the neurons that control all of our daily functions are stretched and torn and releases chemicals that then induce the symptoms that have unfortunately a wide range, so it can be headaches and mood, trouble sleeping, dizziness, balance problems, difficulty with memory, problems with school, problems getting back into activity,” explained Ford.

All 50 states have some form of concussion legislation, with minimum [return-to-play guidelines](#) for students who have had concussions. In Illinois, each school district must have a concussion oversight team, and athletes are only allowed to return to play after being cleared by a physician, athletic trainer, advanced practice nurse, or physician's assistant.

According to Ford, the point when a concussed athlete can return to play has changed over the last decade, and researchers are learning more every day.

“With concussion rest is best, but what we used to do 10 years ago of resting until you’re completely better, we now know is not the best standards,” said Ford. “So it’s initial rest for the first 24-48 hours, then gradually getting back into activities after, as you can tolerate, still staying away from contact or repeat head injury.”

A recent push for concussion education and awareness has led to major improvements in equipment, and in many cases, it has changed how student athletes practice and compete.

Going back into the game too early – even when no additional injury occurs – can severely impact the athlete’s recovery.

“Continuing to play at a high level intensity even if injury does not occur will prolong their recovery, because it’s taking away that essential energy right at the time of injury that the body needs to heal,” Ford warned.

Ford does say that there is no risk free activity, and concussions can happen at any time. She gets plenty of patients who have been injured from day-to-day falls or car accidents, for example. She advises parents to not forbid sports simply for the sake of avoiding concussion.

“Sports offer a lot of benefits: social engagement, physical activity and learning great leadership skills and teamwork,” she said. Ford continued, “So it’s really about creating a culture and safety and how to play the game safe and still maintain the fun and integrity of the game. So making sure players are evaluated, rules are enforced, and then everyone’s educated about the importance of being evaluated but not returning too soon.”

If you have any questions about concussion or about what treatment resources are available through OSF HealthCare Illinois Neurological Institute, click [here](#) or call (309) 624-4000.