

Study raises concerns that teen athletes continue to play with concussion symptoms

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Despite knowing the risk of serious injury from playing football with a concussion, half of high school football players would continue to play if they had a headache stemming from an injury sustained on the field.

In a new study, physicians from Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center also report that approximately half of athletes wouldn't report concussion symptoms to a coach.

The study will be presented May 6 at the annual meeting of the Pediatric Academic Societies in Washington, DC.

"We aren't yet at the point where we can make specific [policy recommendations](#) for [sports teams](#), but this study raises concerns that [young athletes](#) may not report symptoms of concussions," says Brit Anderson, MD, an [emergency medicine](#) fellow at Cincinnati Children's and the study's lead author. "Other approaches, such as an increased use of sideline screening by coaches or [athletic trainers](#), might be needed to identify injured athletes."

Dr. Anderson and colleagues at Cincinnati Children's surveyed 120 [high school football](#) players. Thirty reported having suffered a concussion, and 82 reported receiving prior concussion education. The vast majority of athletes recognized headaches, dizziness, difficulty with memory, difficulty concentrating, and sensitivity to light and sound as concussion symptoms. More than 90 percent recognized the risk of serious injury if they returned to play too quickly.

Despite these high levels of awareness, 53 percent responded that they would "always or sometimes continue to play with a headache sustained from an injury," and only 54 percent indicated they would "always or sometimes report symptoms of a concussion to their coach."

"Further study on concussion education in adolescent athletes and on ways to identify high [school athletes](#) who have sustained a concussion would be useful," says Dr. Anderson.

It is estimated that up to 3.8 million recreation- and sport-related concussions occur in the United States annually. Concussions represent an estimated 8.9 percent of all high school athletic injuries.

In 2009, the state of Washington passed the first comprehensive law regarding concussion management in young athletes. This law requires school boards, in conjunction with the state interscholastic activity association, to develop educational materials and guidelines for athletes, coaches, and parents. The law also requires that parents and athletes sign an informed-consent form acknowledging the dangers of concussions before participation in sports. Under the law, an athlete must be removed from any game if suspected of having a concussion and may not return until evaluated and given clearance to return to play from a licensed health care professional. Many other states have subsequently either passed or are considering similar legislation.

Provided by Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center

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