

Rugby study probes concussion impact on brain

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The study was commissioned by World Rugby in 2012 amid growing fears about the potential for long-term brain injuries in high-impact sports

A major study of rugby union players points to a potential link between frequent concussion and brain function, the project's lead researcher said Tuesday.

Releasing preliminary findings from the long-term study in New

Zealand—the largest of its type to ever focus on rugby union—researcher Patria Hume said players needed to be aware of the risks.

"If you have a [concussion](#) you need to report it and get it medically assessed," Professor Hume told AFP.

"You also need to consider that potentially there may be some long-term health effects. Ninety four percent of elite level [rugby players](#) experienced one or more concussions, that's a lot."

The Auckland University of Technology study was commissioned by World Rugby in 2012 amid growing fears about the potential for long-term brain injuries in high-impact sports.

It examined the health of 485 men—131 of them former professional rugby players, 281 amateur rugby players and 73 who had played non-contact sports such as cricket and hockey.

Hume said the study, which is in the process of being peer reviewed for publication, showed a statistically significant link between repeated concussion and brain damage.

"We've got to go through that scientific process, but what I'm saying is that, as a scientist, it's irresponsible for people to say there are no long-term brain health issues," she said.



Rugby players who has suffered four or more concussions performed worse in tests measuring mental and physical coordination, motor speed and multi-tasking

"Because all indications so far from the analysis we have done indicates that there possibly are for the rugby players and for people who have been concussed more than four times."

She said rugby players who has suffered four or more concussions performed worse in tests measuring mental and physical coordination, motor speed and multi-tasking.

World Rugby chief executive Brett Gosper described player welfare as his number one priority, saying he wanted more research into preventing and managing concussion.

"While the study does not provide any definitive conclusions, we are alive to all potential risks and, as such, we will continue to prioritise research in this very important area," he said.

In April, US courts approved a potential billion-dollar settlement in a class action brought by thousands of former American football players against the National Football League, which accused it of covering up the dangers of brain injury. The settlement is currently under appeal.



World Rugby chief executive Brett Gosper said the study did not provide "definitive conclusions" but pledged to continue to prioritise research on the issue

Hume said there had been a cultural change in rugby in recent years recognising the dangers of concussion.

High-profile players such as All Blacks Richie McCaw, Kieran Read and Brodie Retallick have all sat out matches in the past 12 months after suffering concussion.

However, problems still exist, with an outcry in Britain in February when Wales wing George North was twice knocked unconscious during a Six Nations defeat to England.

Similarly, French rugby bosses tightened concussion rules last year after Toulouse centre Florian Fritz was sent back out to play even though he was bleeding and clearly disorientated after a head knock.

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