

# Model High School Concussion Protocol

*Stephen Hrabec*

The concussion protocol will benefit students, parents, coaches, teachers, schools and school divisions, and society in general. Concussions are an increasing concern, and educators must take initiative to educate about the seriousness of concussions, and they must prevent, manage, and help students recover from concussions. Students will benefit because they are the individuals the rest are looking out for. A concussion protocol will guide those taking care of students through a safe process to avoid concussions or to achieve the best possible result if a concussion occurs.

Parents will benefit from this document because it is their children that the document is trying to help keep safe. Sometimes, parents get caught up in the glory of sports and forget that safety should be placed ahead of winning. A clear set of rules should eliminate such a problem. Parents will be forced to follow the school division's rules. This applies to coaches as well. For the most part, coaches are on board with ensuring their athletes' safety. However, I have experienced one occasion when a coach could not handle losing one of his best players in an important game because of a possible concussion. I am certain that a concussion protocol would eliminate such a risk.

The document will also serve as a guideline for teachers also. Determining if a student has a concussion or if the student should be sent to a health care center to be diagnosed is a difficult decision, especially if the caregiver does not have experience with concussions.

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The concussion protocol procedures will help coaches and teachers in the decision-making process. The school and school division will benefit because first and foremost a concussion protocol looks out for the safety of its students. Second, a concussion protocol reduces the risk of liability. If correct protocol is followed, a duty of care will be established, making a lawsuit less likely.

The protocol will benefit society in general because it is designed to create awareness about concussions, reduce the risk of concussions, and help parents, coaches, teachers, and others manage concussions and assist students in the recovery from a concussion. A concussion is a serious injury that if not taken care of can negatively affect an individual for the rest of his or her life. Post-concussion syndrome and chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) are serious conditions that can alter the mental state of an individual. CTE has been linked to suicides conducted by former National Football League players. By helping caregivers to manage concussions and creating awareness about concussions, this protocol will reduce the risk of these disorders. Therefore, people or society will not have to deal with as many problems associated with concussions.

The concussion protocol has been designed to be implemented into a Battle River School Division administrative procedure. If the division does not pass the protocol, I am hoping the Viking School will at least adopt the procedure. The protocol establishes a duty of care for students by creating awareness about concussions, reducing the risk of concussions, outlining a procedure about managing concussions, and providing information for caregivers to assist with the recovery of a concussion. The protocol will serve as a guide for all stakeholders involved in activities in which a concussion may occur.

The concussion protocol is an important piece for the athletic program. To maintain a safe and healthy environment, the athletic program needs clear guidelines for preventing, managing, and assisting in the recovery of concussions. As of now, neither Viking School nor the school division has such a document. Disagreements between school personnel, coaches, and parents have occurred because of the lack clarity, and the school's athletes' safety was at risk, causing the school's liability to be a concern. A concussion protocol should eliminate this problem. All parties must follow the protocol. If protocol is not followed, the principal will deliver the consequences.

The concussion protocol aims to create awareness about concussions, prevent concussions from occurring at the school, help caregivers manage a concussion when it occurs, and help caregivers assist in the concussion recovery process. The document should serve as a guideline for all stakeholders involved with athletics and any activity in which a concussion may occur. The goal is to provide a safe and healthy environment for the students while ensuring that the risk of school liability is kept to a minimum.

## **Concussion Protocol**

### **Background**

Battle River School Division is committed to creating and maintaining a safe and healthy environment for students. Students and staff must feel comfortable in a positive learning environment to achieve the outcomes of education. A safe and healthy environment can be achieved with cooperation from the school board and division staff, along with medical experts, regional health authorities, students, and parents. These efforts combined will keep risk at a minimum and encourage student health and safety in a safe and healthy environment in which students can focus on learning.

A concussion is a traumatic brain injury that occurs as a result of a sudden blow to the head, face, or neck. The blow causes the brain to shift within the skull. A concussion can occur with minor or major trauma to the head and most do not result in a loss of consciousness (Mayo Clinic, 2014). A concussion can significantly harm the well-being of a student—cognitively, physically, emotionally, and socially—and should not be taken lightly. To avoid further impact, such as post-concussion syndrome, schools must be responsible for recognizing the seriousness of a concussion. Schools are required to work with staff, parents and guardians, coaches, and health care professionals to promote awareness, prevent or manage suspected concussions, and assist students' return to school and activity following a concussion.

### **Procedures**

The following are the procedures to be followed regarding concussions:

1. The Division will take a proactive approach informing the seriousness of concussions to employees, students, parents/guardians, and other stakeholders.
2. Prevention will be the focal point of concussion awareness.
  - 2.1 Students participating in any physical activity will follow safety guidelines.
  - 2.2 Teachers, coaches, and any individuals involved with students participating in physical activity must follow safety guidelines and work with students to eliminate, or at least reduce, the risk of injury, and therefore concussions.
  - 2.3 A teacher or an agent of the board must provide adequate supervision for any physical activity in which a concussion may occur.
3. Schools should use the *Safety Guidelines for Physical Activities in Alberta Schools* (Alberta Center for Injury Control and Research, 2013) and the *Safety Guidelines for Secondary Interschool Athletics in Alberta* (Alberta Center for Injury Control and Research, 2012) as references for ensuring that safe activities occur.
4. The school, athletic director, coaches, officials, parents/guardians, and student athletes bear the responsibility of ensuring that equipment fulfills the minimum required standards for safety.
5. If a student is showing signs or symptoms of a concussion, a teacher or an agent of the board will remove the student from the activity and conduct concussion protocol (see Figure 1). They must report the incident to the principal by completing an injury report form.
  - 5.1 An ambulance should be requested by the teacher, supervisor, coach, or principal if the student appears to be seriously injured and cannot be moved.
  - 5.2 A concussion can only be diagnosed by a medical doctor.
  - 5.3 A student must be re-examined by a medical doctor in order to return to activity following a concussion.
  - 5.4 A student must supply the school with written medical clearance to return to activity.
  - 5.5 The Return to Play guidelines (see Figure 2) must be enacted before a student can return to activity.
6. Coaches and agents of the board associated with students participating in activities where a concussion is possible will be provided with necessary training to respond to a concussion.

- (Alberta Schools' Athletic Association requires coaches, assistants, managers, and others directly associated with school sports to complete the course Concussion in Sports from the National Federation of State High School Associations and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.<sup>1</sup>)
7. Student safety is the responsibility of teachers and coaches. They must continue to educate students about the severity of concussions.
  8. The school must follow concussion protocol. This includes an action plan for a student with a medically confirmed concussion.
    - 8.1 If a concussion has been medically confirmed, the principal will inform the student's teachers.
  9. Students are responsible to participate in fair and safe play in accordance to the rules and regulations of the activity they are participating in.
    - 9.1 Students must notify their teacher and/or coach about any incident involving contact to their head, face, or neck, along with any symptoms that they might be experiencing.
    - 9.2 Students must notify their teacher and/or coach if they have witnessed any incident involving contact to a peer's head, face, or neck, along with any symptoms associated with a concussion that they might be observing.
  10. If a student has been diagnosed with a concussion, an individualized Return to Learn plan (see Figure 3) will be developed and followed by the student, parents/guardians, and the school team.
    - 10.1 The Return to Learn plan may be differentiated depending on the diagnosis and the nature of the recovery process.
    - 10.2 Teachers should use their discretion to appropriately accommodate a concussed student in their class.
  11. Parents must place their child's health and safety first.
    - 11.1 Parents/guardians must read and sign a Battle River Regional Division #31 Form for Team Sports (see Figure 4) and an Informed Consent/Permission Form for Education Trips (see Figure 5) before their child participates in a tryout, practice, or game.

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<sup>1</sup>Course available at <https://nfhslslearn.com/courses/61064/concussion-in-sports> and <https://www.schoolcoach.ca/courses.aspx>Road to Healthy Living

- 11.2 Parents/guardians must cooperate with concussion protocol.
- 11.3 Parents/guardians are responsible for following instruction provided by the teacher supervisor and/or coach if a concussion is suspected.
- 11.4 If parents/guardians are present, they are responsible for monitoring their child after a suspected or diagnosed concussion.

When a teacher, coach, or agent of the board suspects that a student may be displaying signs and symptoms of a concussion, concussion protocol must be enacted. Parents should be notified, and a teacher, coach, or agent of the board who has completed the Concussion in Sports course must conduct a concussion assessment.

Signs and symptoms of a concussion:

- Loss of consciousness
- Nausea
- Sensitivity to light
- Confusion
- Irritability
- Personality changes
- Changes in the way the child plays
- Does not know date, opposing team, score of game, etc.
- Headache
- Dizziness
- Ringing in ears
- Poor balance/coordination
- Blank stare
- Emotional change
- Does not know whereabouts
- Nausea
- Seeing stars
- Tiredness/sleep problems
- Poor concentration
- Slow response
- Inappropriate behavior
- Does not know what happened before or after the incident

If a student is involved in a possible concussion and exhibits any of the above signs and symptoms, the student’s parents will be contacted and a recommendation to consult a doctor must be made. Written medical clearance must be provided by the student and approved by the principal before he or she can return to play. The following guidelines must be followed once a student has been approved to return to play. Each step must take a minimum of one day.

**Figure 1.** Signs and symptoms of a concussion. Signs and symptoms from *Concussion: Not Just a Bump on the Head*, by Alberta Health Services, 2009 (<http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/Infofor/hp/if-hp-tr-en-concussion.pdf>).

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1. No physical/sporting activity (Complete the Return to Learn protocol)
  2. Light aerobic exercise (walking, stationary biking)
  3. Sport-specific activities (Running, or throwing for an extended period time)
  4. Drills without body contact
  5. Drills with body contact (Monitored closely)
  6. Game play

If concussion symptoms return, the student should stop activity immediately and receive further rest. Written medical clearance must be provided in order to return to activity.

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**Figure 2.** Return to Play guidelines. From *After Concussion Guidelines for Return to Play*, by Parachute, n.d. (<http://www.parachutecanada.org/downloads/resources/return-to-play-guidelines.pdf>).

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When a student has been diagnosed with a concussion, the school must implement the Return to Learn protocol. This protocol is designed to enhance the recovery process and reduce the possibility of post-concussion symptoms. Teachers can reduce cognitive stress and recovery time by providing academic accommodations. Accommodations are at the discretion of each teacher and may vary depending on the student and course. The following are recommendations of the Return to Learn protocol:

1. All cognitive activity should be restricted for at least 2–3 days, depending on the severity of the concussion.
2. Light cognitive activity can be introduced if the student can tolerate the work (5–15 minutes at a time, 60 minutes maximum).
3. Student can attempt schoolwork from home (20-minute sessions, up to 4 hours maximum).
4. Student may attend school part time, gradually increasing to full day attendance, if tolerable.
5. Student may attempt to attend a full day of school, building up to a week, if tolerable.
6. Full-time school. Student can attempt to catch up on missed work.

\*A student recovering from concussion should receive breaks in order to alleviate symptoms. A quiet room should be made available.

\*\*Teachers should reduce the student's workload, give extra time for assignments and tests, and allow time for rest. Depending on the student, tests should be avoided until the student has reached full recovery.

\*\*\*Students should avoid all physical activity.

\*\*\*\*Depending on the individual's needs, additional requirements may be necessary.

\*\*\*\*\*If symptoms return or become worse, the student should see a doctor and return to Step 1.

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**Figure 3.** Return to Learn protocol. Adapted from *Concussion Management: Return to Learn Guidelines*, by Alberta Concussion Alliance, n.d. (<http://www.sportmedab.ca/uploads/files/Documents/ACA/RTL.pdf>).

**Viking School  
Battle River Regional Division No. 31  
Form for Team Sports**

The Viking School \_\_\_\_\_ team will be competing at the following schools/sites as per the following schedule:

DATE	TIME	LOCATION

Coach(es):

Cash or Cheque payable to Viking School of \_\_\_\_\_.

Students will be required to follow all applicable school rules for the duration of the trip.

Information about my child that the coach needs to know for these activities: (Medical or other)

\_\_\_\_\_

**Alberta Health Care #:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date of Birth:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Emergency contact person:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Emergency telephone number:** \_\_\_\_\_

If my child requires medical attention, I authorize the coach to seek necessary medical treatment.

The Battle River Regional Division #31 **does not** provide extensive accidental death, disability, or dismemberment or medical expense insurance on behalf of the students participating in this activity. The Board only provides a **basic** coverage with limited coverage for Battle River Regional Division #31 students in attendance at or participating in any school activity approved and supervised by proper school authority.

**Principal's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**PARENTAL PERMISSION**

I am aware of the schedule, commitment and travel required for my child to participate on this team and I give \_\_\_\_\_ my permission to attend the above noted scheduled games. I understand that the schedule may change and alternate dates and times may occur. I understand that my child will travel by vehicle/bus and I consent to this.

Signature of Parent/Guardian \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Mother's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Home Ph #:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Cell Ph #:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Father's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Home Ph #:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Cell Ph #:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Student Cell Ph #:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Figure 4.** Emergency medical treatment form. Form from Battle River School Division, 2006a.

**BATTLE RIVER REGIONAL DIVISION #31**

**INFORMED CONSENT/PERMISSION FORM FOR EDUCATION TRIPS**

(Students Under 18 Years)

The Viking School \_\_\_\_\_ team is arranging practices and competitions from \_\_\_\_\_.

DATE	APPROXIMATE TIME TO LEAVE THE SCHOOL	LOCATION
TBA	TBA	TBA

**THIS FORM MUST BE READ AND SIGNED BY EVERY STUDENT WHO WISHES TO PARTICIPATE AND BY A PARENT OR GUARDIAN OF A PARTICIPATING STUDENT.**

**ELEMENTS OF RISK:**

Educational activity programs, such as \_\_\_\_\_ involve certain elements of risk. Injuries may occur while participating in these activities. The following list includes, but is not limited to, examples of the types of injury which may result from participating in \_\_\_\_\_ competitions and practices:

(Describe activity)

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Strains, sprains and bruises \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Broken bones \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Concussions \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Muscle and joint soreness \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

The risk of sustaining these types of injuries result from the nature of the activity and can occur without fault of either the student or the school board, its employees/agents or the facility where the activity is taking place. By choosing to take part in this activity, you are accepting the risk that you/your child may be injured.

The chance of an injury occurring can be reduced by carefully following instructions at all times while engaged in the activity.

If you choose to participate in \_\_\_\_\_ during this time period, you must understand that you bear the responsibility for any injury that may occur.

Information about my child that field trip personnel need to know for this excursion: (Medical or other)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(cont.)

**Figure 5.** Informed consent form. Form from Battle River School Division, 2006b.

The Battle River Regional Division #31 does not provide extensive accidental death, disability, or dismemberment or medical expense insurance on behalf of the students participating in this activity. The Board only provides a basic coverage with limited coverage for Battle River Regional Division #31 students in attendance at or participating in any school activity approved and supervised by proper school authority.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

WE HAVE READ THE ABOVE. WE UNDERSTAND THAT BY PARTICIPATING IN THE ACTIVITY DESCRIBED ABOVE, WE ARE ASSUMING THE RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH DOING SO.

Signature of Student \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parent/Guardian \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**PERMISSION**

I give \_\_\_\_\_ permission to participate in the \_\_\_\_\_  
(name of student)

\_\_\_\_\_ to be held on or about \_\_\_\_\_  
(description of activity) (date)

Signature of Parent/Guardian \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\*\*\*

This form may not be amended or modified in any way. If this form is amended or modified in any way, it is understood that the child named herein will not participate in the above-noted activity.

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*Principal's Signature:* \_\_\_\_\_ *Date:* \_\_\_\_\_

**Figure 5 (cont.)**

## References

- Alberta Center for Injury Control and Research. (2012, February). *Safety guidelines for secondary interschool athletics in Alberta*. Retrieved from [http://injurypreventioncentre.ca/documents/policies/SG\\_IA\\_Final\\_2012.pdf](http://injurypreventioncentre.ca/documents/policies/SG_IA_Final_2012.pdf)
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